

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users

Coburg—Wednesday 9 August 2023

MEMBERS

Alison Marchant—Chair

Kim O’Keeffe—Deputy Chair

Anthony Cianflone

Wayne Farnham

John Mullahy

Dylan Wight

Jess Wilson

WITNESS

Marion Attwater, Member, Pascoe Vale Residents Action Group.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing of the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's Inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users. All mobile phones need to be turned to silent.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard. While all evidence taken by the Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, comments repeated outside of the hearing, including on social media, may not be protected by this privilege.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts and other documents provided to the Committee during the hearing will be published on the Committee's website.

We will do a very quick introduction of Committee Members and then we will hand over to you. I am Alison, the Member for Bellarine.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Anthony Cianflone, Member for Pascoe Vale.

Dylan WIGHT: Dylan Wight, Member for Tarneit.

Wayne FARNHAM: Wayne Farnham, Member for Narracan.

John MULLAHY: John Mullahy, Member for Glen Waverley.

The CHAIR: Marion, if you have an opening statement or maybe for a couple of minutes just talk to your submission, we might then go into questions.

Marion ATTWATER: Yes. Thank you very much for the opportunity and for holding this Inquiry, and I am sorry that my colleague sends her apologies today. Unfortunately, she is the one with all the statistics and the real data knowledge.

The CHAIR: She has left you in the lurch today, has she?

Marion ATTWATER: Well, yes. I know some general stuff. We are the Pascoe Vale Residents Action Group. We were formed by a group of local residents in probably June to July 2021 when the local council suddenly installed some pop-up bike lanes in streets in Pascoe Vale without much warning. A lot of residents were not even aware that it was going to happen. Now, my colleague lives on one of those streets. I do not live on those two affected streets, but I got involved with the group because I had a lot of background knowledge of the council's transport strategies and processes, and I did not want to leave them in the lurch of trying to figure out what is really a minefield by themselves. The group has done petitions and budget submissions to the council. My colleague did a survey, over a couple of days earlier this year, of Kent Road and collected the numbers and the data of the different types of road users that were using Kent Road. We mainly have a social media presence. I suppose one of the things about our group is that the local council, although it has a Transport Advisory Committee, has never invited any of the residents who live on those affected streets in Pascoe Vale to be on that Committee. We are sort of on the outer of the council's transport information processes.

The CHAIR: Okay. Thank you very much. John, I might go to you first.

John MULLAHY: Thanks, Marion, and thanks for the submission as well. What I wanted to get to first is, when these pop-up bike lanes popped up, what were the major drawbacks for the local users around the local use of the road in those areas?

Marion ATTWATER: Well, the major drawback for both of the streets was that it was narrowing the road, and in Kent Road in particular in that 300-metre stretch it has narrowed the road down to one lane for both directions of traffic. That was previously a very wide road which was good for all road users. Residents were reasonably happy. They would have liked maybe an extra speed hump, but it was a road that worked quite well. Then it got reduced down to a very narrow one-lane road, and Northumberland Road got narrowed down as well. That is the street that has got a secondary college where more than 60% of the students are not from the local area, because it is a girls-only government school—it is a secondary college—which is not a typical thing that you would find. There are very few of those girls-only secondary colleges. During the pandemic itself, when we were under lockdown and we had to stay home, those bike lanes were okay because maybe schools

were closed or the health centre was closed. But when you get back to normal conditions it is just not suitable. It creates a lot of hazards that were not previously there.

John MULLAHY: Just on that point, though, you found that they were okay during low-traffic lockdowns and that sort of thing, but when it came back to normal, that is when the issues were occurring with regard to traffic?

Marion ATTWATER: Yes. For example, on Kent Road there is a very big health centre, Pascoe Vale Health. You know, it is not just a two- or three-doctor thing, it is a really big medical centre, and it does not have much off-street parking. It has only got eight off-street car parks, because one of the practices of the local council is to give waivers to off-street car parking and to say, 'You can just use the on-street parking, there's plenty.' So Kent Road in particular has got on one side a big recreation reserve, a football ground—it is a massive area of open space, which you would think you could put a bicycle path there—and it has got a big healthcare centre. It was as if the council was not even aware of the existence of that healthcare centre and was not aware of how the land was currently being used. It is the same for Northumberland Road, where there is a girls-only secondary college. It was as if the Council did not realise that it was a girls-only secondary college which services a really massive area of the north of Melbourne. It is as though they are not familiar with their own local community.

John MULLAHY: Thanks, Marion.

The CHAIR: Anthony.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Thanks, Chair, and thanks, Marion and the group, for making a submission and for appearing. Just taking a step back, I guess, outside of the local road issues within Pascoe Vale, what could you or the group tell the Committee around your experience in terms of being consulted by council through such a process, and what learnings could there potentially be as this Committee grapples with and looks at opportunities to protect vulnerable users across not just Pascoe Vale but Melbourne and the state? As infrastructure and the like is rolled out increasingly to protect vulnerable users across the state, what can local government and state government do better to engage with and consult communities as part of that process, do you think?

Marion ATTWATER: Firstly, we would like to say that Pascoe Vale—we are not speaking for all other suburbs of Melbourne –

Anthony CIANFLONE: No, no.

Marion ATTWATER: We recognise that other suburbs are much more appropriate and have much better locations. Pascoe Vale is difficult because we have got the Tulla freeway, which was widened to five lanes prior to the pandemic, so we have got the off-ramp onto Bell Street, and the volume of traffic onto Bell Street in Pascoe Vale South has just increased exponentially in the past five years. We have got a lot of trucks. Cumberland Road, which goes up to Kent Road—that is part of the freight network, so we have a lot of big trucks in the area. So we really cannot speak for other suburbs.

What councils could do better would be to genuinely engage with local communities and not exclude car drivers and trucks and motorbikes from advisory committees. There is too much focus on just active transport, so you will see the advisory committee is really focused on representatives who are interested in pedestrian and cycling infrastructure but there is no input from drivers, motorbikes, freight and all of the rest. So we think genuine engagement. Also, the council had developed a transport strategy in 2019, so not long before the pandemic started, and it is quite different to other councils' transport strategies or plans. It does not even identify a network for bicycles in the municipality. It does not identify a network for pedestrians or for trucks or for anything else, so it is just a very general, broad, open transport strategy. We would like to see more oversight of that area, because we think councils can just do whatever they want.

Anthony CIANFLONE: The mayor mentioned earlier today that they are consulting on a new transport strategy, so there may be an opportunity through that to possibly raise those issues.

Marion ATTWATER: Well, some councils might have a road safety strategy, a cycling strategy, a pedestrian strategy, a parking strategy which might include a narrow streets policy, they might support creating

indented parking, whereas Merri-bek council have tried to reduce it down to just one integrated transport strategy that is all things to all people, and I do not think it can be, because the different suburbs in the municipality are very, very different and have different needs here.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Thank you.

The CHAIR: I am mindful of time. Wayne and Dylan, is there a burning question that you have? Wayne, maybe we will go to you, and it may be our last one, Marion, just because of the time.

Marion ATTWATER: Thank you.

Wayne FARNHAM: Yes, sure. I will go. We have talked today about hierarchy and the case of the UK, where they have reversed the hierarchy and said pedestrians first and they work that way. I have noticed that sometimes it is a bit simplistic, but what is your view on the hierarchy of road users?

Marion ATTWATER: I have had a bit to say about that through various planning scheme amendments and stuff, because I believe that there should not be a one-size-fits-all road user hierarchy and that you can prioritise pedestrians and cyclists in appropriate locations. For example, the road user hierarchy in Merri-bek council only includes four road user groups. It does not mention trucks, and we have a significant number of trucks. It does not mention emergency vehicles. Now, in Pascoe Vale we have got a fire station right on Cumberland Road. It does not mention waste collection vehicles for local councils. We think that the road user hierarchy should be flexible, because when I am a pedestrian and I am walking on a footpath I want to know that that road has been designed for the biggest vehicles, which are the trucks. I want to know that they have got space to turn safely, especially down on Bell Street. It is terrifying crossing Bell Street as a pedestrian. So for me, when I am a pedestrian I am a vulnerable road user. I would like that road user hierarchy to have considered the trucks and the most dangerous vehicles. That would make me feel safer.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Marion. I am sorry we have to wrap it up there. Thank you for coming today and answering our questions and for your submission.

Marion ATTWATER: Thank you very much.

Witness withdrew.