INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT OF ROAD SAFETY BEHAVIOURS ON VULNERABLE ROAD USERS

Organisation: Brunswick Residents Network
Date Received: 19 May 2023
Submiision into Inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users.

Nancy Atkin

For Brunswick Residents Network
19 May 2023

Brunswick Residents Network (BRN) was formed partly to address concerns about traffic and transport issues, particularly in relation to vulnerable road users. We have carried out a number of surveys which document resident concerns about road safety, in particular in relation to active transport. These reports are available to download at https://brunswickresidents.wordpress.com/traffic/brn-traffic-and-walking-surveys/

In 2021 we conducted a major survey on walking in Brunswick, with a high level of participation. The report, Walking in Brunswick: How to make walking in Brunswick safer and more enjoyable, is attached as part of our submission. This report highlights residents’ concerns, pinpoints key issues, and contains a number of recommendations (pp 6–7) which we submit to this inquiry. Most of these apply to all vulnerable road users.

Road safety is crucial for the health of the community by preventing road deaths and injuries. However health must also be defined positively, as well-being. In this sense, walking and bike-riding must be encouraged to increase both physical and mental health and well-being.

Increasing the safety of vulnerable users therefore involves provision of adequate and separate infrastructure for walking and cycling (both inadequate in our locality). It also includes making walking and cycling pleasant; and addressing fears of personal safety while walking, in particular for women.

Brunswick is an inner suburb, densely populated and becoming more so. But there are still too many pedestrian and cyclist deaths; and too many people who avoid walking and cycling due to safety concerns.

In addition to more specific recommendations in Walking in Brunswick, we wish to highlight these five bigger-picture recommendations:

1. **Planning and development.** State government should regulate to include planning for safe and pleasant walking and cycling in new housing developments, including where re-development is taking place as in Brunswick. For major developments, for example, this would include separate bike and walking paths; “permeability”, with routes through larger developments to encourage active transport; and safe bike storage.
2. **Speed.** Government should facilitate the adoption of 30kph as the standard for residential streets. There is now substantial evidence that this reduces death and injury while having only minimal impact on travel time. The state government should also reduce the speed on arterial roads in urban areas like Brunswick, in shopping and neighbourhood areas. In Brunswick, a high proportion of serious injuries and deaths occur in 60kph zones, and governments have been unwilling to lower speeds until faced with either a death or a major community campaign.

3. **Regulation of satellite navigation.** Government must regulate to control the operation of satellite navigation systems, which are over-riding our elected government’s regulation of road safety and road behaviours. The submission to this inquiry by Walk on Moreland gives the example of Google maps directing illegal right-hand turns in Brunswick. More broadly, satellite navigation regularly over-rides state and local government decisions on which roads should carry major traffic, and which should be quiet local streets; as algorithms show the apparent fastest way to reach a destination. Often this may be a more dangerous route. For example, traffic is directed along Barkly or Albert streets in Brunswick to a dangerous uncontrolled intersection at Lygon Street. (A recent fatal accident in country Victoria was blamed by locals on Google sending traffic via a dangerous crossing with a busy road). As well as the risk of crashes, the increased traffic in local streets reduces the amenity of that area. Overseas experience appears to show that legal regulation may be the only way of bringing these technology companies under control.

4. **Technology and enforcement.** We understand that local police do not prioritise monitoring speed limits and driver behaviour in lower-speed and lower-volume streets. Camera technology is now cheaper and easier to use. For example every tram should have a camera dedicated to recording vehicles passing at trams stops. Gridlock (dangerous to crossing pedestrians who have to walk around cars) could be enforced by cameras.

5. **Disincentives for over-sized vehicles.** Recent media reports have highlighted the proliferation of large SUVs. These are a safety issue in our suburb as well as being documented more dangerous for vulnerable road users. For example, a large SUV driving down “two-way” Evans Street Brunswick yesterday had maybe 30cm clearance between parked cars on each side. When parked, they extend into any bike lanes (showing also the need for bike lanes to be physically separated). These inappropriate vehicles could be discouraged (and small cars encouraged) as in Japan, by taxation.