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

Organisation: Walk on Merri-bek
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Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this Inquiry. We are residents of the municipality of Merri-bek in Melbourne’s north who have come together to lobby governments at all levels to improve the safety of walking, particularly in our municipality.

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1. The problem in a nutshell: urban areas hostile to pedestrians

Over the past century, much of our urban areas have been given over to motor vehicles, typically travelling at speeds deadly to anyone they collide with. People on foot are expected to confine themselves to narrow paths, and often to share these with smaller mobility devices. People on foot are expected to take much longer than they used to because they are expected to cross these busy roads only at designated crossing points at designated times. These designated crossing points are often few and far between, due to insufficient expenditure on pedestrian infrastructure and the road authorities’ fear of slowing down the motor vehicles. Moreover, crossing safely depends on drivers giving way, but there is rarely any enforcement of this, and not much education either. Many people who want to walk are time poor, so either they give up trying to walk or they take risks. And if they are hit, they are often blamed.
The Victorian Government has committed to increasing the share of people walking and cycling from 18% to 25% by 2030. Indeed, this proportion needs to increase significantly beyond that if we are to have any hope of addressing the environmental crisis.

There are lots of policies on encouraging active transport. But the funding for this is miniscule.

a) **Recommendation: Walk the Talk. Slow down motor vehicles. Fund pedestrian infrastructure.**

   Enforce the road rules intended to safeguard pedestrians.

   2. “Pedestrians are the most vulnerable road user”

This was Finding 10 from the 2021 Legislative Council *Inquiry into the increase in Victoria’s road toll*.

In 2022, nearly one third of road deaths in Metropolitan Melbourne was a pedestrian. In the 12 months to June 2022, 28% of serious hospitalisations (>14 days) were pedestrians. Given that pedestrians spend so little time actually on the road, this is a staggering statistic. Making it safe accessible and convenient to cross roads must be a priority. Note that half of pedestrians killed on Victorian road are people aged 60 and over. Furthermore, older pedestrians tend not to take risks and have been found to be rarely at fault when hit by a motor vehicle.

In our municipality of Merri-bek, 60% of road deaths over the past decade have been pedestrians. Nearly all pedestrian deaths occurred on arterial roads.

b) **Recommendation: State government roads need a lot more pedestrian safety infrastructure.**

3. Has the situation worsened during the pandemic?

We only have access to published findings on this. We have seen more anecdotal evidence of drivers failing to give way to pedestrians at intersections, tram stops and pedestrian crossings, and even behaving threateningly towards pedestrians. We have seen the backlash from some motorists when Councils have tried to carve out space in the road reserve for walking and cycling, and reduced motor vehicle speeds.

We note the following:

- Overseas research has found that the pandemic has led to declining social capital, which has led drivers to be less courteous to and cooperative with others.
- In Victoria, TAC research has found that drivers have become more accepting of speeding.
- The TAC Road Safety Monitor (2021) found increases in risky driver behaviour including speeding, driving while fatigued and feeling stressed.
- SUV sales have increased significantly, and they now comprise the majority of vehicle sales. SUVs are particularly hazardous to pedestrians, not only due to their size, but also because the visibility of pedestrians is compromised.
- The increased use of satellite navigation is leading to more rat-running in local residential streets.
- Changing shopping practices during the pandemic has led to a large increase in deliveries, and hence delivery vehicles. This is likely to be permanent, with the government predicting a 15%

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3 https://360info.org/one-devastating-way-lockdowns-changed-driver-behaviour/
increase in delivery driver employment (over 5 years). Larger delivery vehicles are more hazardous to vulnerable road users. Delivery riders using small mobility devices (who are themselves vulnerable) tend to engage in shortcuts (not giving way, riding on footpaths, etc), which can be hazardous to pedestrians.

4. Safe Systems approach is not being applied to pedestrian safety

The 2021 Legislative Council Inquiry into the increase in Victoria’s road toll noted: “The Committee heard that while Safe System implementation has mostly been done well for vehicles, in particular cars, much more needs to be done for pedestrians and cyclists on Victoria’s roads”. Contrary to the safe systems approach, the safety of pedestrians depends on drivers not making a mistake. We have to rely on drivers stopping at a pedestrian crossing. We have to ensure that turning drivers are going to give way to us at an intersection, when the drivers’ attention is generally focused on avoiding motor vehicles. Half of pedestrian crashes occur at intersections.

For many vehicles on the road (SUVs, vans etc), drivers can’t even see pedestrians properly when turning.

We have to ensure that drivers exiting from blind driveways are going to drive slowly. We have to be cautious because some drivers suffer from “pedal confusion”. So we can’t even feel safe on the footpath. Note that one in six older pedestrian crashes occur on the footpath.

All of these mistakes that drivers frequently make can and do cause serious injury or death to pedestrians.

We don’t have safe speeds for pedestrians. Most arterial roads have a speed limit of 60 km/h. A pedestrian hit at that speed is very unlikely to survive. Vehicles are getting safer for vehicle occupants and more dangerous for pedestrians. The growth in SUVs is particularly concerning.

5. What would a Safe Systems approach to pedestrian safety look like?

The TAC has spelled this out some suggestions in its booklet “Zero is possible”.

- Safer Roads – Metropolitan Melbourne: Pedestrian crossings - Wider, raised crossings provide greater visibility of pedestrians to drivers and riders, encourage vehicles to slow down and allow space for large numbers of people to cross the road safely in busy areas.
- Safer Speeds: A pedestrian hit by a car can withstand 30 km/h “before the risk of losing your life or being seriously injured escalates rapidly.”

In regard to speeds, the Victorian Speed Zoning Policy under “Safe Systems Approach” notes: “Vulnerable road users are much more likely to suffer death or serious injuries at impact speeds above 30 km/h and fatal injuries at speed exceeding 40 km/h due to a lack of protection in the event of a collision. Ideally, facilities should be provided to separate vulnerable road users from traffic, particularly on arterial roads where...
vehicle volumes and speeds are higher. However, this is not always practical or possible. It is therefore essential that sufficient consideration is given to vulnerable road users when setting speed limits.”  

c) Recommendation: Implement the Safe Systems Approach for pedestrians.

6. Speed Limits in urban areas

In Australia, the default speed limit in built up areas is 50 km/h. On arterial roads, it is generally 60 km/h or higher, even in built up areas.

In allowing 60 km/h or more on arterial roads, Australia is out of step with most OECD countries. The International Transport Forum Road Safety Annual Report 2022 Table 7 shows that the National speed limit on urban roads is a maximum of 50 km/h in most countries.  

We note (see above) that 30 km/h is the speed that would avoid most pedestrian road trauma. Around the world there is a push to reduce vehicle speeds to 30 km/h or 40 km/h in built up areas.

d) Recommendation: in urban areas, speed limit should not exceed 50 km/h on arterial roads.

e) Recommendation: Amend Victoria’s Speed Zoning Technical Guidelines to include 30 km/h.

7. Speed limits in shopping strips

In shopping strips, a speed limit of 40 km/h may apply if there is “Continuous and directly abutting retail development and/or other types of land uses, for not less than 400 m”. So there are still many shopping areas (including in our LGA of Merri-bek) with lots of pedestrians where the speed limit is 60 km/h.

In some shopping strips, the time period for 40 km/h is far too short, and does not reflect the times that people shop, or dine. Note that most shopping strips have restaurants, meaning that people are also walking during the evenings. For example, in the Glenroy shopping strip on Pascoe Vale Road, the 40 km/h applies on weekdays 9am to 7pm, and Saturdays 9am to 3pm. Meanwhile, Sundays have a 60 km/h limit. This is an area with Sunday shopping and many restaurants.

f) Recommendation: the requirement of a 400 metres length of “continuous and directly abutting retail development” for the 40 km/h in shopping zone should be relaxed to include shorter shopping strips.

g) Recommendation: in shopping/dining strips, the time of the 40 km/h zone should be at least from 7am to midnight, seven days a week.

8. Vision Zero and pedestrian priority, not “balancing” safety with vehicle movement

Various policies have words about people walking being the highest priority and people in motor vehicles being the lower priority. For example, the new Clause 18.01-3s of the Victorian Planning Provisions Sustainable and safe transport states “Design development to promote walking, cycling and the use of public transport, in that order, and minimise car dependency”.

In reality people walking are treated as the lowest priority.

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For example, in an article on pedestrian safety, Department of Transport’s acting head of road safety, Marcelo Vidales was recently quoted as saying: "When setting speed limits we need to carefully balance keeping everyone safe on our roads and keeping people moving around their communities".\(^{16}\)

The use of this term “balance” suggests that some pedestrian road trauma is inevitable because we have to keep people moving. Note also that the main concern is people who are moving about in motor vehicles and public transport. They appear not concerned with keeping people moving around on foot or bike.

This type of thinking is incompatible with “Vision Zero” – the commitment by Australian governments to a vision of zero road deaths and serious injuries by 2050.

h) **Recommendation: Road authorities should adopt the Vision Zero approach and pedestrian priority instead of the approach of “balancing traffic flow and people’s safety”**

9. Road Authorities treat pedestrians’ time as low value, encouraging risk-taking

Road authorities value the time of people in motor vehicles and try to optimise vehicle flows to reduce their travel time. But if you are moving on foot, your time is worth very little.

For example, there are many stretches of road in built-up areas Merri-bek with 800 metres or more between safe crossing facilities. Residents who wish to cross the road may need to detour an additional 1.6 km for the return journey. That is an extra 20 minutes walking time just to go to the shops, park etc. At one such location on Moreland Road, where residents have been campaigning for a pedestrian crossing to reach a supermarket, the Minister has decreed that this is low priority.\(^{17}\)

It is not only discriminatory to disregards pedestrians’ time, it encourages people to cross midblock (to save say 20 minutes) thereby exposing them to a risky environment.

i) **Recommendation: The spacing of pedestrian crossings on roads in residential areas where people wish to cross the road should not exceed 400 metres.**

10. How are older people’s lives valued?

Half of pedestrian deaths are people aged 60+. The proportion of senior pedestrians being killed on the road is increasing.

The DTP is more willing to put pedestrian safety infrastructure at locations near schools, due to concerns about children’s safety (concerns which we share). However, at other locations, even where there have been causalities of older pedestrians, there seems a reluctance to fund pedestrian safety infrastructure.

We understand that the DTP evaluates suggested pedestrian safety programs for funding, and understand that the Value of statistical life (VSL) concept is used in economic appraisals. However, we do not know how the road authorities deal with pedestrian casualties of differing ages.

The issue seems to be that there are insufficient funds allocated for pedestrian safety (and pedestrians’ time is not valued), so the limited funding is directed towards safety around schools rather than at all places where people want to cross the roads.

j) **Recommendation: Increase funding for pedestrian infrastructure so older people can be safe.**

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11. Road Safety Rules and other messaging regarding vehicle speed around pedestrians

We are concerned that the Road Safety Road Rules 2017 do not discuss the need to drive slower than the speed limit when the conditions warrant it. There seems to be no mention of driving carefully around people walking or cycling.

We have seen this discussed on the Better Health Website (produced in consultation with VicRoads):

“The speed limit is the maximum speed at which you can drive in an area, so be sure you’re travelling below that limit. Go even slower if: there are lots of pedestrians or bike riders around, there is poor visibility or wet weather, or you’re unfamiliar with the road.”

The VicRoads website, has a similar quote, but fails to mention pedestrians or cyclists.

“Always obey speed limits and remember to be aware of school speed zones. The speed limit is the maximum speed you can drive. Depending on the traffic, weather and your familiarity with the road, you may need to drive at a slower speed that is safe for the conditions.”

k) Recommendation: Improve messaging and road rules regarding speed limit being the maximum, and being cautious around pedestrians and cyclists


All too often, vehicles do not stop at tram stops, endangering passengers. There is little enforcement of the requirement for motor vehicles to stop for passengers at a tram stop.

Brunswick MP Tim Read put the question to the Minister about this in February 23 2023. The reply was

When tram drivers witness a vehicle disobeying the road rules surrounding stationary trams at stops, they will record the vehicle’s details and report this immediately to the Yarra Trams Operations Centre. All data collected by the Operations Centre is passed onto Victoria Police for action. ... E-Class trams are fitted with CCTV, however the CCTV is not always positioned to focus on motorists, as the cameras predominantly focus on boarding/alighting door movements. ... Yarra Trams uses the data collected from incidents and near misses to identify hot spot locations. Yarra Trams then works with Victoria Police for targeted enforcement activities at these identified hotspot locations. Yarra Trams also use audio reminders that are announced automatically in the passenger cabin when arriving at a stop that may have been identified.

In other words, tram cameras are in the main not being used to detect vehicles on trams are not used for this purpose. Rather, tram drivers are expected to take note and report.

l) A question for the committee: How many drivers per year are fined for not stopping for tram passengers?

m) Recommendation: Use tram cameras, and issue automatic fines for drivers who do not stop

13. Police messaging does not reflect seriousness of hitting pedestrians

We understand that police are regularly called upon to deal with horrific scenes following vehicle crashes, and appreciate the work they do in this regard. We think, however, that police messaging could be improved regarding incidents or threats to vulnerable road users.

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For example, in March 2022, a driver failed to stop for tram passengers, hitting one who sustained life-threatening injuries. The driver then fled the scene. The driver was charged with several very serious offences. The police officer attending was reported as saying:

“That they didn’t stop to assist is an issue … We appreciate that people will panic in a situation where they’re involved in one of those collisions, but it’s always best to stop.”

This driver had committed very serious crimes, including critically injuring a tram passenger and then leaving the scene. When other crimes are committed, police do not employ such a conciliatory tone towards the criminals. The message that this police officer was sending is that pedestrian road trauma is of lesser importance than other types of traumas inflicted on people.

n) **Recommendation:** Crimes against pedestrians and other vulnerable road users need to be treated with more seriousness.

14. **Drivers are encouraged to make illegal turns by GPS navigation**

There has been much attention given to GPS navigation systems encouraging rat running, and we share these concerns. However, the systems are also encouraging vehicles to make illegal turns.

There are many right turn bans that are intended to make it safer for pedestrians. Yet GPS navigation systems direct drivers to make these turns. Consider this example. There is a no right turn sign from Sydney Road into Barkly Street during 4pm to 6pm. This ban was introduced during the pandemic. This intersection is one of Brunswick’s busiest for pedestrians. Google Maps directs vehicles to make an illegal turn. I reported this to Google Maps in March 2022. They fixed it for a while, but now the illegal turn has returned. There are other similar locations.

o) **Recommendation:** Road Authorities should liaise with these navigation companies to ensure illegal turns are not encouraged.

15. **Install red light and speed cameras to protect pedestrians**

In Victoria, red light cameras and speed cameras are installed on highways, etc or at intersections. There are no fixed red light cameras at pedestrian crossings. There are 18 fixed speed cameras to enforce 40 km/h zones, but there are NONE midblock. Victoria’s only red light / speed camera at a pedestrian crossing (on the Maroondah Hwy near Lilydale Station) was recently removed, as part of the level crossing removal. Note that South Australia has 31 red light cameras at pedestrian crossings and NSW has 45 fixed cameras in 40 km/h school zones.

Why does Victoria not have cameras to protect pedestrians? How do the authorities know the level of compliance with signalised crossings if they are not measuring it?

p) **Recommendation:** Install red light cameras at pedestrian crossings and speed cameras in 40 km/h zones where there are concerns about lack of compliance

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16. Older Drivers: Provide incentives to stop driving plus medical assessments

Some older drivers are more risky on the roads due to reduced ability to judge speed and distance, reduced capacity for divided attention, medications, etc. This may pose a risk to themselves, and others, including vulnerable road users.

Some states require regular medical assessments beyond a certain age (typically 75) in order to continue holding a driver’s licence. Victoria has no such mandatory requirement. Rather it relies on referrals from medical practitioners, family etc. Moreover, older drivers may continue to drive when they know they should give it up. This is because they don’t have viable alternatives to get around.

Currently the Multi Purpose Taxi Program provides half price taxi fares. It is only available to people with a severe and permanent disability who are “unable to use public transport safely and independently”. However, elderly people who have no (or inadequate) access to public transport, are not eligible.

Some shopping centres are not reachable by public transport. We recently raised with the PTV that a new large shopping centre in Warragul did not have a bus service. And received this reply: “Due to residential development and population growth, demands for public transport resources and services in Melbourne and regional Victoria are very high. As a result, funding is not currently available to increase the frequency or add additional stops to many bus services operating across the state of Victoria”.

Bus services are actually very cheap compared with say trams and trains. By not providing basic services, our authorities are not providing options for people who don’t drive.

q) Recommendation: implement regular medical assessments for older drivers.

r) Recommendation: extend the Multi Purpose Taxi Program to older people, improve funding for community buses, and ensure all shopping centres and facilities are reachable by public transport

17. Angled / Perpendicular parking and “pedal confusion”

Many shopping strips use angled perpendicular parking in front of shops. On too many occasions, people on footpaths, including those dining, and people in shops have been hit due to drivers confusing the brake and accelerator pedal. For example, in October 2022, a confused driver ran into a childcare centre, causing 4 people to be hospitalised.

Being in close proximity to drivers entering and exiting a car parking space can mean one’s safety is dependent on drivers not being confused. For example, in Warragul, recently two people were crushed (one severely) by a confused driver of a motor vehicle in the supermarket car park. A few years ago a woman was killed in similar circumstances.

These events occur regularly, but we don’t know whether data is collected.

A US organisation, The Storefront Safety Council, has been compiling statistics on such crashes. https://www.storefrontsafety.org/. They estimate that in the US, there are more than 100 storefront crashes per day of which 20% are caused by pedal confusion. 46% of these crashes result in an injury and 8% result in a fatality. (These would include the driver and those crashed into.)

The failure to protect people is contrary to the Safe Systems Approach.


Note that older drivers may be particularly susceptible to pedal confusion.

s) **Recommendation:** locations of perpendicular/ angle parking in shopping strips be surveyed, data be collected on such crashes, and a report prepared on possible solutions.

18. **Council Performance indicators**

Councils are currently required to report on various issues concerning roads: Sealed local road requests; Sealed local roads maintained to condition standards; Cost of sealed local road reconstruction; Cost of sealed local road resealing; Satisfaction with sealed local roads

**t) Recommendation:** Require Councils to also report on walking and cycling infrastructure

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