

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

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

Shepparton—Wednesday 13 September 2023

#### **MEMBERS**

Alison Marchant—Chair

Kim O’Keeffe—Deputy Chair

Anthony Cianflone

Wayne Farnham

John Mullahy

Dylan Wight

Jess Wilson

#### **WITNESSES**

Ben Gannon, Manager, Engineering and Assets, and

Sam German, Team Leader, Engineering Services, Greater Shepparton City Council.

**The CHAIR:** I will start by acknowledging today the Yorta Yorta people of the lands on which we are now, comprising Greater Shepparton, and I pay my respects to their Elders past, present and future and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today.

Thank you, and welcome to the public hearing for the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's Inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users. All mobile telephones should now 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 this hearing, including on social media, may not be protected by this privilege.

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Thank you, both of you, for presenting and coming today. We really appreciate it. I thought we would quickly do some introductions, and then I will get you to introduce yourselves. If you have an opening statement as well, that would be wonderful. I am Alison. I am the Member for Bellarine.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** I am Kim. You know who I am: the local Member for Shepparton. It is really great to have you here today, and thank you so much for coming along.

**John MULLAHY:** John Mullahy, Member for Glen Waverley.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Dylan Wight, Member for Tarneit.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Anthony Cianflone, Member for Pascoe Vale.

**Jess WILSON:** And Jess Wilson, Member for Kew.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I might hand over to you if you have got some opening statements, and then we can maybe ask you some questions.

**Ben GANNON:** Thank you for the opportunity. I am Ben Gannon, the Manager of Engineering and Assets at Greater Shepparton City Council.

**Sam GERMAN:** I am Sam German, Team Leader of Engineering Services at Shepparton council.

**Ben GANNON:** Again, thanks for the opportunity for us to come along today. The number of fatalities and serious road accidents is increasing in Victoria and in our region. The Victorian Road Safety Strategy 2021 aims at halving the road trauma by 2030, and to do this we need to have a major shift in the way we design and upgrade our roads. In the past we have designed roads for vehicles rather than prioritising the safety of pedestrians and bike riders. There is a requirement for widespread implementation of safe road design to again prioritise these vulnerable users on the roads—for example, more formal crossing points, separate bike lanes to ensure safe offsets from vehicles and regular speed limit reviews, to name just a few. There needs to be a change in culture, and over time, changes in the infrastructure and physical environment will result in changes in driver behaviour. Drivers will start to change their expectations and think first about safety of pedestrians and bike riders. Vulnerable users will have a defined space on the road, and they will be protected. Countries in Europe already do this quite well, such as the Netherlands and Belgium. They have implemented safe road infrastructure, and pedestrians and cyclists there have priority on the roads in certain areas.

Some key road safety improvement opportunities for us are using safe system approaches for all our road infrastructure to ensure safety is the highest priority, prioritising funding for safe cycling and pedestrian infrastructure, identifying opportunities to divert heavy vehicles away from our CBD areas and providing more education for drivers on vulnerable users. This year our council are developing and implementing a Mobility and Road Safety strategy to prioritise these improvements, to align with the Victorian Road Safety strategy 2021 and to aim to halve the road trauma by 2030. Thanks again for this opportunity. It is a great topic to discuss.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you so much, Ben, for that. It is really great to be in the regions now. We have had a couple of hearings in metro Melbourne and some online hearings, but to have a regional voice and a regional forum is really important for this Committee. Thank you for that. I might go to our Deputy Chair, and being the local member, I am happy for you to kick us off, Kim.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** Thank you. Thank you again for being here. You did allude to the statistics of regional Victoria, and it is one of the issues obviously that we are all really concerned about. As you know, we have had some serious fatalities and road accidents within our region, and we have had recently, in the last few weeks, a fatality with a pedestrian. My question is really around what council can do to respond to incidents in regard to the road infrastructure perhaps not being safe at the time or safety measures that need to be improved. Working with VicRoads, and Regional Roads working with VicRoads and council, I just know that there can be a time delay. When there have been incidents where we know that the road is seriously unsafe—and we have Bunbartha at the moment; we have got an intersection there, and I know you have had letters coming into council in regard to how we can get slower speed limits there or what needs to be done—what concerns me is the time frame and the delays. How can council work better, or what can be done? Whether it be us supporting you—how can that work better, where we are not waiting so long to respond when we know that there are dangerous roads that are around us right now? Does that make sense?

**Ben GANNON:** Yes, very good question. We think our safety strategy will bring us closer to aligning with what VicRoads is doing and put in place more forums and regular discussion at time frames to talk about issues on the roads. With regard to fatalities and the response time, our teams go out and assess every fatal incident and major incidents. We should probably align with VicRoads better on that and agree to meet onsite at the same time to discuss those topics right there on the ground. We are looking to improve the actual discussion topics we have on our agendas for these regular meetings we have to really get down to the details of what are the key issues here. We think some of our local area traffic management programs are a key topic to be discussing. They will focus down onto the real prioritising of pedestrian and bike safety, for example. That is one area where we really want to start working with VicRoads a little closer.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Sam, do you have anything you want to add? No. John, thank you.

**John MULLAHY:** Just driving around here and walking around the Shepparton town last night and today I noticed you have got nice open, big roads with nice widths there. You have got the ability to have cycling lanes and things like that. What measures and infrastructure should the Victorian Government invest in to make pedestrians and cyclists safer?

**Ben GANNON:** That is a very good point about the wide roads. That can be a good thing and a bad thing, because some drivers see it as an area where they can go and just drive faster. Really getting some speed-reduction treatments on those wide roads to narrow the lane widths in certain areas and bringing in things like speed cushions or ramps, which force vehicles to slow—they bring an immediate impact on traffic speeds. Traffic speeds is one of the key factors that is contributing to the number of incidents and accidents. We have got a local area traffic management program, as I mentioned, focusing on some key CBD areas around the region, which will be targeting a lot of those raised platform speed-reduction treatments. Another couple, to name a few, would be splitter islands to bring more focus on where intersections are approaching. That would be another key one we are focusing on.

**Sam GERMAN:** We have also got the strategic cycling corridor, where we are trying to get more pedestrians and cyclists off the road. So where we can we are looking to have shared paths where cyclists can use off-road facilities rather than on road, to obviously reduce road trauma.

**Ben GANNON:** Just to add to that, prioritising funding for things like that is very key to our region. The strategic cycling corridor has been one of the top agenda items for a while, and we really want to secure some funding to deliver that for sure.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks, John. Dylan.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Thank you. Thank you for your evidence. We have heard throughout this Inquiry the need to get people out of their cars and using either active transport or public transport. Often public transport

connections in regional Victoria can most certainly not be as good as metropolitan Melbourne or some of the bigger regional centres, so what sort of public transport improvements do we need to see in Shepparton to help get people out of their cars and using more public transport?

**Ben GANNON:** Yes, a very good question. It is difficult in the regional areas with the satellite towns having minimal bus routes, for example. That definitely could bring a great improvement if there was an increase in the number of bus journeys between the small towns and the Shepparton CBD, and it is fantastic we are seeing the rail improvements in the region over the past few years and the coming years as well. Those things will definitely allow more people to commute and use that transport. I think we work closely with PTV to try and ensure the safety of things like bus stops and the locations and that we are getting the most efficient transport network, if you like, for the region, but it comes back also to the accidents we are seeing. Certainly on sections and, for example, school bus routes as well, some of the pick-up spots are on dangerous intersections. Some of them are on roads where it is not quite the safest place for kids to be dropped off or picked up, so those need to probably be reviewed and looked at as well.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Thank you.

**Sam GERMAN:** I think also in new developments we need PTV to contribute to those and place bus stops initially. It is more reactive with new developments and new subdivisions. They will wait until it is filled up and then they will say, 'We'll put a bus stop here,' so it is not thought of in advance. It used to be, but it has changed recently.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Makes me feel like Tarnet.

**The CHAIR:** Jess.

**Jess WILSON:** Thanks very much, Chair. And thank you both for appearing today. One of the themes we have heard a lot about throughout these public hearings is around school safety and safety particularly for school students. Is that something that is on your agenda here in Shepparton around school safety around schools and school zones, and what could be done to improve safety for students as they travel to and from school?

**Ben GANNON:** A very good question. Yes, we have been working with a number of the schools over the past few years. For example, at Greater Shepparton Secondary College we did a project out the front there for the bus bays, which has received really good feedback. We had to transition that quite significantly to accommodate all the new students coming in, so in our view that was a successful project. We are still looking to constantly and continually improve that. We are also working with some of the other schools about, similar to the previous question, aligning the best routes for pick-up and making sure that pick-up spots are safe areas. And we are regularly in contact with schools—I think Orrvale Primary School—about continually trying to improve the pick-up and drop-off area there. Can you bring in kiss-and-go areas to try and have a more efficient movement of traffic during those peak times? So, yes, it is something we are continually looking at.

**Sam GERMAN:** We are also looking at, like I said before, improving footpaths—shared paths—to and from schools, as well as improving bus areas, such as Skene Street in Shepparton, which is next to Notre Dame College. We are putting in centre, median and fence lines so children are not running across the road and directing them to the pedestrian crossings and the raised crossings as well.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. Anthony.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Thank you. Thanks for appearing as well. One of the other themes we have heard a lot about through the Inquiry is from culturally diverse communities and their experience with the transport network. Shepparton has one quarter of its population of 66,000 residents that were born overseas. It is quite significant in terms of regional Victoria and Melbourne too, as a municipality and greater community. My question goes to: what are the main road safety issues that newly arrived migrants face, what messaging or training is needed to help keep them safer on roads and what roles are there between the State Government, Victoria Police and council in that regard to assist?

**Ben GANNON:** It is another really good question. With our mobility and road safety strategy we are rolling out there this year, we are planning a widespread consultation with the communities, particularly going into

communities that may not understand the signage and might be new to the area. We can really target an improvement in education for vulnerable users on the road—that the road network is understood, and that if there are any key concerns, we can work on those. So, yes, it is definitely a key focus of ours.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I will just have to be mindful of time, but I am going to squeeze a question in here about the pandemic and what changes you might have seen through that. The Inquiry has heard some evidence about how our behaviour has changed through the pandemic in terms of we were not driving as much. But in a regional sense, what have you seen after the pandemic, and are we continuing to have risky behaviours on our roads? I would just like to get your perspective on what you are seeing.

**Ben GANNON:** Yes. Obviously during the pandemic there were less cars on the road. The statistics went down, and then they are jumping straight back up. So there is still risky behaviour from drivers on the roads and, possibly even more so, a bit of complacency coming in. People have not spent that much time on the roads over the last few years. That education piece—it comes back to that, about reinforcing safe driving behaviours on the roads to ensure we are bringing these statistics down for the number of accidents and fatalities.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you.

**Sam GERMAN:** Yes, I think statistically we have higher than pre-pandemic levels of pedestrian cycling accidents as well. That may be due to riskier behaviour from drivers not taking notice of cyclists and pedestrians, as well as people just not knowing the road rules. So there is education that we need in the area.

**The CHAIR:** You are a town that can be transient, in that visitors also come and might not know the local roads. Do you see anything in a tourism sense of behaviours?

**Ben GANNON:** We are definitely working with our tourism team on that, if there is improved signage and improved online and social media information about hazards on the roads—anything different that people might see in Shepparton or the surrounding towns compared to if they are used to being in Melbourne CBD areas. So yes, we are working with the council as a whole—the different departments—to ensure we are getting that broad education piece out there for any users of our roads.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you so much for coming today and answering some of our questions. If there is something that has been raised today that you think we have not covered that you would like to, we would be more than happy to receive anything further in writing if you would like to do that for the Committee. Thank you both for your time today. It is much appreciated.

**Witnesses withdrew.**