

# 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

#### **WITNESSES**

John Englart, Member, Climate Action Merri-bek and Sustainable Fawkner; and

Maggie Cowling, Member, Climate Action Merri-bek.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome to the public hearings for the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee Inquiry into the Impacts 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 this 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 quick introduction, and then we will hand over to you. I am Alison Marchant, the Member for Bellarine.

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

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

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

**Wayne FARNHAM:** Wayne Farnham, Member for Narracan.

**The CHAIR:** We have got a few minutes for you to introduce yourselves and maybe talk to your submission or anything extra you would like to add.

**John ENGLART:** No worries. I am John Englart. I have lived in the suburbs of Merri-bek for over 30 years now. I came down from Sydney. I got involved in Climate Action Merri-bek in about 2012, but the organisation actually started in 2008. I have attended four United Nations climate change conferences as an NGO observer, so I bring a climate focus to this. I think that is a very important lens to have because I think that is partly what is driving the need to change our ways of mobility to reduce transport emissions.

I live in Fawkner. I have a daughter who went to Pascoe Vale Girls school during her year 7. She cycled from Fawkner to Pascoe Vale Girls. She found it difficult because there was a lack of cycling infrastructure and there was a lack of cycling culture at the school. There were more teachers cycling than students. The bike storage at that school was right at the back of the school, so it was not easy to get to. So after her first year, she actually stopped cycling, mostly—occasionally she cycled, but she then had to use public transport, which involved two buses, or get me to drive her. Of course if I drove her, that meant I would need to drive to my work at Melbourne Polytechnic Preston campus rather than cycle, so it basically added further drop-off and pick-up congestion to the roads, because there was not proper cycling infrastructure for her to feel safe cycling to school. Maggie.

**Maggie COWLING:** Thanks, John. I am Maggie Cowling. I am a member of Climate Action Merri-bek too and have been for a few years, and also a couple of other community groups, particularly around climate and environment. I am a local bike user and street user—a walker, pedestrian and also a driver. So, yes, I cross all things. I found myself having to ride on the footpath to get here to avoid being on a major road where there is no bike lane. And I found that just yesterday trying to get to a meeting, I ended up driving because, in checking it on Google first, I saw, again within Merri-bek, there was actually just no safe way. If I am on the footpath, I am then endangering pedestrians. I slow down to sort of a scoot, but it is just compounding the problem. I would sooner be fined for riding on the footpath than actually killing myself or having a serious accident, because I have experienced that rage on the roads when there is no dedicated path. Particularly I am thinking of roads like Murray Road, Bell Street and Reynard Street.

**John ENGLART:** Living in Fawkner, I have come to realise there is a big issue about Sydney Road, because it is a 70-kilometre-per-hour zoned road from Boundary Road further north. Of course a lot of people need to cross over Sydney Road as pedestrians. There is a Federation retirement village in Box Forest Road, but just to access the Upfield bike path, you need to cross Sydney Road. The pedestrian lights at Box Forest Road, Major Road and Lynch Road have all got very limited timing for pedestrians, so the only way you can get across is to run across, as a pedestrian. If you walk, you will get to the middle and you will have to press the button and wait. Now, there was one time when there was a woman in one of those chairs; she would have had

trouble crossing even to the middle with that light cycle. I have also noticed that there have been a lot more cars running the red lights. It has always been a problem. We have requested red-light cameras on Sydney Road, and it has always been knocked back—and yet we know it is a problem. Probably one in four times I am crossing that road, a car will go through on the red light, so I always look—I have to look, for my own safety. It is even worse at night, though.

There is another issue further north with Sydney Road. My closest shopping centre is Campbellfield Plaza. I can use the back routes through Fawkner and a pedestrian crossing over the M80 to get there, but if I want to go further north, I have to go on Sydney Road or go on the footpath—the cracked footpaths with a lot of driveways. So most people do not cycle to that shopping centre simply because there is no safe way to get there, especially from the north. From all of the Campbellfield suburb north of that shopping centre, they have to go out onto Sydney Road to access it, and yet there are still a few people who cycle on the footpaths to get to that shopping centre. I know because I actually requested the shopping centre management to install extra bike hoops—this was in 2018—and it took them three months and they actually installed them, and they are now regularly used.

I know there are people that do cycle, but I also know people who work in Ford Design up in Broadmeadows who live in Brunswick and they cycle commute, but it is a very circuitous route because there is no direct path up to the Broadmeadows factory site. And yet the Upfield rail line is a strategic cycling corridor which could go all the way up to Upfield station. One of the things, when the level crossing removal removed the Camp Road level crossing, on the plans there was a cycle path from the M80 trail up to Camp Road. It was never done, and instead they installed the new cabling for the rail line on the portion of the bridge which would be allocated to pedestrians and cyclists. There are problems in the way that major infrastructure projects are not necessarily looking at supporting the cycling infrastructure.

**The CHAIR:** John, we might ask some questions, but I might start with a question about that sustainability and getting active transport and the climate perspective. Have you seen a really good model in other countries or other jurisdictions that could help this Committee understand who does it best or who does it better than we do?

**John ENGLART:** Well, I know that European countries are doing it very well. I think there was an announcement earlier this year from the French Government. I do not know whether it was €2 billion or €4 billion for regional dedicated cycling infrastructure, basically not for Paris itself but for linking a lot of the regional cities and towns. That is where Australia is falling down. We have got some brilliant rail trails in the country, and I have actually ridden them, but getting to them is a real problem. Some of them you can get to by train, but often you need to have a car to access the start of them, so that is problematic. We should be looking at linking up those rail trails to a regional cycling network. It might be just parallel to the main road, but it needs to be separate from the road. It is no good putting a cyclist on a 100- or 110-kilometre road.

**The CHAIR:** Okay. Thank you. Dylan, we missed you before so I might go to you next.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Sure, thank you. Thank you for your submission and your evidence. I am just going through some of the recommendations in your submission, and one goes to driver education focusing on sharing the roads. Can you just perhaps elaborate on what form that education might take? I think I spoke about earlier: is it practical or is it sort of theory? And how often, I guess—every time you renew your licence, or is it just awareness campaigns?

**John ENGLART:** I think it would be good if it was every time someone renewed their licence that they had to sit an online test, and some of that would be about the rules regarding pedestrians and cyclists and sharing the road in respect to other road users. That is what I have seen particularly since we have come out of the pandemic, that there seems to be less respect from at least some car drivers to pedestrians and cyclists, and that is a problem.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Yes. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. This is the first time I think we have heard the word ‘respect’ actually on our roads in our hearings. I thought it would come up a lot quicker, but thank you, John. Wayne.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** I think I know the answer to this, but I am going to ask this question anyway because it has been probably a pretty common thread throughout the last couple of days. What do you think the Victorian Government can do to really encourage active transport?

**John ENGLART:** It has to be putting in more separated, protected bike lanes along the strategic cycling corridors in particular—that is where you would start—and connecting up all the cycling network. Once you have got that network I think you will see a boom in people using that, not only cyclists but you have got e-scooters and monowheels. We have got people in the northern suburbs who ride a battery electric single wheel—they cost about \$4,000. If they ride them appropriately to where they are, I think it is fine, but I am told they can get up to 90, 100 kilometres an hour.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** That actually sounds like a disaster.

**John ENGLART:** It could very well be. But we have had deaths from people riding e-scooters—they ride them over speed humps at high speed and fall off—so there is certainly an issue of safety when riding those micromobility forms.

**Wayne FARNHAM:** Yes, sure. Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Anthony.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Thank you. Thanks again for your submission and for appearing, much appreciated. I just want to go to page 8 of your submission where you extrapolate and you basically go in to further interrogate the TAC stats in relation to local road deaths and road trauma. Over a 10-year period—2013 to 2022—Merri-bek LGA revealed 27 fatalities. Pedestrians made up nearly 60% of those; cyclists, 7.4%; drivers, 22%; and motorcyclists, 11%. I think those stats just highlight how much of an issue road safety for vulnerable users is right here in this community, which this Committee can really look to. You touched on some of those infrastructure projects earlier that potentially could be improved to improve road safety, but with those stats in mind, what is your overarching message to the Committee and to government around improving road user safety to address those stats and put them in the reverse direction?

**John ENGLART:** Well, I think there is a whole range of things that need to be implemented, like for local streets to be 30 kilometres per hour and I think separated bike lanes. I think there needs to be much more cycling and pedestrian infrastructure in the outer suburbs—I am looking especially in the outer northern suburbs—but we also need the bus and rail infrastructure as well. We have not got that yet either. That makes it problematic, because those households are under mortgage stress—they need often two or more cars, so they are highly dependent on their vehicles, because there is not cycling infrastructure and there is not the public transport infrastructure. Providing cycling infrastructure provides some alternatives. If we can just move some of those people to cycling to the local railway station, that is a big benefit both for that local community and for transport emissions.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Thank you.

**Maggie COWLING:** It sounds like a bit of a cultural issue, because to date it has been ‘build a car park at the railway station’ that actually –

**John ENGLART:** But at the moment we have locked in that culture up in those northern suburbs, and that is problematic. One of the other issues I am involved with is the upgrade and extension of the Upfield line, which services those people north of Craigieburn—rapidly expanding suburbs. That urgently needs to be done. That is part of the solution here for the northern suburbs, and I know it is also tied up with the capacity issues with Craigieburn line as well. I am thinking about the whole transport for northern suburbs picture here.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. John.

**John MULLAHY:** Thank you both for being here and providing the evidence and also for your submission. Your submission goes into some issues around black spot biases and how that is represented. My question is about how VicRoads’ Black Spot methodology could be improved and also could take into account vulnerable road users.

**John ENGLART:** I identified this just from Sydney Road at Campbellfield. VicRoads did not identify it as a black spot, but I identified that cyclists avoid it because of that road. Most people living north of there will not cycle down to the closest shopping centre because there is no cycling infrastructure. They have to use the footpaths, which are cracked and there are driveways across them, so few do.

**John MULLAHY:** So the biases are about not looking for cycling; more so it is black spots for cars and so on, and so we have an inherent bias there.

**John ENGLART:** You know, there is an enormous amount of traffic on Sydney Road, and it is 70 kilometres. I think that is ridiculous. I think it is time to look at rezoning that perhaps down at least to 60 kilometres per hour up to perhaps Barry Road. I know there have been fatalities on that part of Sydney Road up there, and it is an enormous amount of traffic.

**The CHAIR:** I am sorry we have run out of time, but thank you so much for your submission and taking our questions today. We really appreciate it. Thank you so much.

**Witnesses withdrew.**