

# TRANSCRIPT

## ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

### Inquiry into serious injury

Melbourne — 22 July 2013

#### Members

Mr A. Elsbury

Mr T. Languiller

Mr J. Perera

Mr M. Thompson

Mr B. Tilley

Chair: Mr M. Thompson

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#### Witness

Ms J. Bolitho, president, Road Safety Action Group Inner Melbourne.

**The CHAIR** — I am pleased to welcome you, Ms Bolitho, to the Victorian parliamentary Road Safety Committee inquiry into serious injury. By way of general background, evidence given to our committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. Comments made outside the hearing are not afforded such privilege. The transcript will become a matter of public record. We do have the opportunity to go into a closed session in camera, should there be any issue that you wish to comment on for our benefit. To assist the work of Hansard, I invite you to state your name and position and whether you are representing the organisation RSAGIM here today.

**Ms BOLITHO** — My name is Janet Bolitho. I am the president of the Road Safety Action Group Inner Melbourne, and I am representing that organisation today.

**The CHAIR** — I commend the members of your organisation on the substantial report that they have submitted to the inquiry. We have a series of questions with a couple of supplementary questions, and we have had the opportunity to peruse your material.

**Ms BOLITHO** — Being aware that the committee had already been provided with the submission, I have taken the opportunity to bring forward some key points that are different or that build on what is in the presentation.

**The CHAIR** — Excellent. I invite you to speak on your submission. Feel free to take us through that fairly swiftly. With your local government background, you are as aware as we are about dealing with papers. We can then cut to the questions that we would like to work through.

**Ms BOLITHO** — On behalf of the road safety action group I would really like to thank the committee for giving us this opportunity. To tell you just a little bit about our group, we are a road safety group. Our focus is inner Melbourne, and that includes the municipalities of Melbourne, Port Phillip, Stonnington and Yarra. Our particular interest and focus is on vulnerable road users: pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists and public transport users, insofar as they walk to those modes of transport.

We also come from municipalities that have very strong commitments to active and sustainable transport. One of the things that people often say is that there are perceived as well as real barriers to taking up those modes. I suppose our councils and our members feel that they have a moral responsibility to an extent — that is, if we are encouraging people to walk and cycle, those should be safe choices that they make. Absolutely fundamental to the approach of our group is respect between all road users. We cannot imagine a way forward where that is not the case. That is at the heart of everything we do and our approach.

We are also trying to develop a coordinated approach in inner Melbourne, because people do not think, ‘Now I’m in Port Phillip; now I’m in Yarra’; they just recognise something about the inner city. Insofar as our small group is able, we are trying to promote a coordinated approach.

In addition — I will come to this more in my presentation — we are just advocating for a safe speed environment for vulnerable road users. You only have to come into town today to see that in inner Melbourne we have a very high proportion of vulnerable road users. With the entertainment precincts, educational precincts and employment precincts, we have a very high percentage of those road users. Our group, recognising that road safety is a discipline, wants to respond to the particular needs of our community.

Turning to the next slide, our group is a registered group of the Victorian Community Road Safety Partnership, so it is a community group. Members are the four councils that I mentioned before, but we also have community groups, and we work alongside other stakeholders with an interest in the safety of vulnerable road users.

I would like to mention just a few of the programs that we deliver. Bike riders nominate car dooring — the opening of car doors into the paths of cyclists — as their no. 1 issue of concern. In the sense that the partnership wants registered groups to respond to the particular needs of their communities, we have commissioned this research report, *Bicycle Rider Collisions with Car Doors*, to really establish an evidence base for where this type of crash occurs, how often, what time of day, who is affected, the level of injuries and so on. We are now using this research report as the basis for further work on the topic of car dooring. This is responsible for a number of serious injuries in the inner Melbourne region.

A second area of concern is another cohort of vulnerable road users — that is, intoxicated pedestrians. VicRoads has done a lot of research about the vulnerability of intoxicated pedestrians in the night environment. Responding to the needs of our sort of constituency, we are trying to find novel means of interacting with those particular types of road users who may be intoxicated at the time, so we are actually working to develop a pedestrian app that would make finding the way around the city and access to transport more easy. That is something we are working on at the moment.

One of our community members, in collaboration with local governments, has also done an audit of all motorcycle routes in the inner city and identified particular things that need fixing — potholes and so on — and she believes that has made a quite significant difference to motorcycle safety.

Turning to the next slide, under ‘The context’, I suppose we recognise that in road safety we are operating within a global context of practitioners and people who are concerned about road safety, so we just want to anchor what we are doing in that. We find support in this statement from the World Health Organisation, that vulnerable road users have been relatively neglected in the road safety debate to date.

When we turn to the safe system, which is universally subscribed to, what does it actually mean in practice, and what does it mean for us in the inner Melbourne region? We subscribe to the safe system, but we still have a disproportionate number of pedestrians and cyclists seriously injured or killed in inner Melbourne. Looking at the evidence from inner Melbourne, one of the changes that we found as a group is that when you look at the fatalities in inner Melbourne you see that we perform really well; we are right at the bottom of the municipalities as far as fatalities are concerned. But when you look at this table of serious injuries you get a quite different picture. Over a five-year period, we have a very high number of serious injuries: pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists — 1159; and just pedestrians and cyclists — 816. We consider that an unacceptable burden of serious injury.

What I want to turn to next is that, if we are going to address the serious injury burden, it requires us to have a different way of thinking about it. In inner Melbourne, recognising the high volume of vulnerable road users, we are wanting to put human life first. When you put human life first, then you know what you have to do; you have no hesitation.

I am now going to turn to just a few examples from inner Melbourne. These are examples; they are not comprehensive but give just an idea of the thinking that is taking place in our member councils. The City of Melbourne recently published their road safety strategy — in July, rather than June. I want to draw the committee’s attention to the language that is used in its goal — that is, where pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists are welcomed and supported. This is different from the language that we normally hear about pedestrians and cyclists, so it just creates a different context.

Within the city of Melbourne, over 66 per cent — that is, two-thirds — of trips are done by walking, so that gives you the reason why they have such a focus on this particular group of road users. I have highlighted just two of the strategic objectives from their plan. They are to ‘reduce ... speeds in areas of high pedestrian movement’; and to ‘recognise the needs of pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists in street design’. There is a picture of an example from Princes Bridge. The recently separated bus lane on Latrobe Street is another example. Pertinent to the terms of reference, the City of Melbourne also has a detailed section on monitoring, evaluation and review. I believe that they have already conducted a formal evaluation of Swanston Street, so that is built into their strategy.

Turning next to the City of Port Phillip, for I think nearly a decade now, the City of Port Phillip has adopted a road user hierarchy. It goes in this order: pedestrians, bikes, public transport, freight, multi-occupancy vehicles, and single-occupancy vehicles. When they come to allocate resources in their council budget and so on, this is what drives their decision making. In recognition that pedestrians are the most vulnerable road users, they have made a lot of interventions in favour of pedestrians. I have chosen just one example here — this is only one — of the roundabout near the South Melbourne Market. This had been a high-accident zone. Now they have put in these raised pedestrian crossings, and over the five-year period since they have been in there have been zero pedestrian crashes. You will note this impressive result from the City of Port Phillip, that between 2007 and 2011 they have reduced their serious injuries by 57 per cent.

I turn now to our member, the City of Yarra. They have had a longstanding commitment to reducing speed in local streets. They have just gone precinct by precinct. They have not done it as a global thing, but they work with their communities on the introduction of these lowered speed zones. We see here that 90 per cent of Yarra's local roads are now covered by a 40-kilometres-per-hour speed limit. The road safety principle there is the well-established one in the road safety literature, that:

A pedestrian or cyclist hit by a vehicle travelling at 50 kilometres per hour is four times more likely to be killed or seriously injured than if hit at 40 kilometres per hour.

I have not taken this from some way-out advocacy organisation but from Victoria's recently published road safety strategy. The City of Yarra go further to say that once they have gone through the whole municipality they intend to progress lowered speeds again.

With Stonnington, our other member, I thought the example that was instructive here was the level of budget commitment that the city has made to road safety over a number of years. It is the aggregation of dozens of small road safety measures that is making the difference — the kerb outstand here, the road crossing there, the redesign of an intersection — so that road safety is not just about one grand big intervention but is about this series of smaller interventions, and you see the results there in this graph from their road safety strategy, which shows that they are well on track with their targets.

In a way the slides that I have just presented on address terms of reference 4 and 5. We are not academics; we are a community road safety group. One of the things about the partnership is that they want our groups to proceed on the basis of evidence. We would like, as a community road safety group, to be readily able to lay our hands on the information we need to make informed decisions to develop programs that address the road safety problem, so that is why, for us, this issue of access to data becomes fundamentally important.

It would be extremely helpful, both immediately and in the longer term, to have access on a convenient, accessible database that could be relied upon to provide the information we need, because a community road safety group is not always in the position to be able to access the expertise to relate this dataset to that dataset and make the comparisons and assess the continuities and discontinuities. Not only from the perspective of a community road safety group but from the community as a whole, to be able to understand the serious injury burden in the same way as we understand the road toll — we all have a pretty clear picture on what the road toll is, but much less understanding of both the figures and the personal cost and impact of serious injury on our community.

That, in a way, also relates to the evaluation and monitoring of road safety interventions. Local governments are doing a reasonable job at evaluating some of these interventions, but I suppose they in turn need to be aggregated in some way, accessible and informative so that we are actually learning from them. In the inner city some new interventions have been tried which have not necessarily been tried elsewhere, and their learning can be shared across the road safety community.

In closing, I very much welcome being able to spend the time considering these matters about serious injury, because in some respects we are talking about this in quite an academic way, but any personal story of a person — we have recently done a piece of work on car dooring where we have been interviewing people who have been the subject of one of these crash types, and the ongoing impact on a person's life through sustaining a serious injury can hardly be told. Those are the things I would like to share with the committee, and now, so far as I am able, I would be happy to answer any questions.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much, Janet.

**Mr ELSBURY** — In the RSAGIM's view, what are the first steps required of the Victorian government to work towards reducing the rate of crash-related serious injuries in Victoria?

**Ms BOLITHO** — Bearing in mind that I am representing that perspective of inner Melbourne, I think safe speed is a critical thing for us; secondly, having access to the data, as previously mentioned, in an accessible form that is reliable, and I think another thing would be to encourage — make it clear that it is everybody's absolute right to properly report injuries to address the question of underreporting of serious injury.

**Mr ELSBURY** — What are some of the common crash characteristics associated with serious injuries among pedestrians and those associated with serious injuries among cyclists? I think you have car dooring as one of the main ones.

**Ms BOLITHO** — Yes. Right through it is the second most common crash type for site tests, and that is all addressed in this report, but I think in terms of nominated concerns, car dooring would be the first. We are doing some research at the current time, and what appears is that very few motorists have an awareness that it is an offence under the road rules to open a car door onto the path of oncoming cyclists. There is a very low recognition that it is an issue.

**Mr PERERA** — The road safety action group, your group, proposes in its submission that the willingness-to-pay model should replace the current human capital approach as the ‘primary method to calculate the value of a statistical life component of the total cost of road crashes’. It has been noted in both your submissions and published research that the WTP approach is the most appropriate costing model conceptually. However, there are a number of methodological issues that need to be overcome before it should be adopted. Associated issues include the significant cost involved in undertaking a WTP survey, the time it would take to complete the study and issues associated with the ability of survey participants to assess risk. What are your views on the methodological issues associated with the WTP model? Do you believe they can or have been overcome so far?

**Ms BOLITHO** — Thanks for your question, Mr Perera. As I said before, we are not academics in the road safety area. Taking on board all those issues you highlighted, I suppose the former method, if we take this in quite a personal sense, does not take into account the fullness of a person’s life lived not just in the productive sense but in the sense of their role in their family, their community and so on. Recognising that there are extreme challenges in this approach, perhaps a suggestion would be that this is a topic that is worthy of further research and investigation in order to come up with a more accessible methodology.

I suppose, because I have a background in local government, there might be some way that that kind of methodology could be reformulated in an assessment approach that local governments could use when they are trying to make the case for their investment in road safety interventions, because in a range of contexts in local government it is very helpful when you get common approaches to common problems so you are able to make comparisons and so on. It may be that this is something that could be researched in such a way as to come up with a methodology that is usable and not as complicated as you outlined, so that it could actually be made use of to better reflect the cost of serious injury to the community.

It might make the argument as to why, because so often when we have these discussions about road safety interventions, people say, ‘Well, first of all, that’s very expensive and, secondly, it’s very inconvenient’. But if we were able to demonstrate the actual cost in terms of human life and the willingness to pay, then it could conceivably change the debate.

**Mr PERERA** — In defining ‘serious injury’, your action group proposes that the international classification of the disease-based injury severity score be adopted in the short to medium time frame. What ‘serious injury’ definition does your group propose be adopted in the longer term?

**Ms BOLITHO** — Here I would just defer to our submission. We have drawn on academic research as to what is considered to be good and leading practice, so I do not think I have anything further to add there.

**Mr LANGUILLER** — Thank you for coming and for your submission. In your view what are three effective countermeasures to reduce crash-related trauma amongst pedestrians and cyclists?

**Ms BOLITHO** — Three countermeasures?

**Mr LANGUILLER** — Or more, or less.

**Ms BOLITHO** — I think those were the three we spoke about earlier. Speed reduction in areas of high-volume pedestrian and cyclist activity would be one. The separation of cyclists from where traffic is going at 60 kilometres per hour would be another one that is very effective. With pedestrians, there is something I did not talk about earlier. All these interventions need to be appropriate to their locations. They may not be universally applicable, but where you have these high-mix areas of cyclists, pedestrians and cars the actual road

design may need to be altered to facilitate the slow, shared movement. But that is an application that is only relevant in certain contexts.

**Mr LANGUILLER** — It was pointed out to me by a cyclist yesterday — in fact, I am a cyclist myself, socially; I cycle a bit during the week — that there are fundamental cultural differences in Australia to that of Barcelona in Spain. You can read my report that was in yesterday's *Age*. There are cultural differences. Fundamentally my contention is that people here do not like cyclists. If you travel in France, Spain, Italy or Latin America, cyclists are liked in a cultural sense; they are far more accepted than they are even in places like Melbourne. Do you think there are any cultural differences? We talk about measures, and that is good, but ultimately it is about the desire of people to actually recognise that we need to share the world if not the space on the road.

**Ms BOLITHO** — Exactly. If you look at our logo, which we took some time to develop, about share and be aware, it is the responsibility of every road user to have respect. It is foundational for our group to develop respect among all road users. I suppose that comes back to something equally fundamental, and that is obeying the law. We are a registered road safety group, and we totally subscribe to operating within the framework of the law. That applies to all road users. We do not support cyclists who do not obey the law, such as stopping at red lights et cetera.

It is one thing in this forum to talk about respect among all road users, but how is that going to be achieved? That is why we often default to engineering, because in some respects when you design the road system, you have a bit more control. But when you are talking about respect among people, it is a more philosophical and difficult thing. This is something that our group wants to promote, because if you accept that there is this culture, as you say, in Melbourne, it needs to change if we are all going to share the world, as you put it.

I want to just say something that I did not say earlier. We do not say we are a cycling group; we are not a walking group and we are not a safe speed group. We are a group that is about all road users treating the road with respect, and that is why we have chosen all those icons in our logo. We are not standing up for any one particular type of road user; we are about everybody treating each other with respect.

The cultural change that you describe is something that is needed. Something that I thought about in preparing this submission was that when we consider the resources that are legitimately spent by the Transport Accident Commission around fatalities and the comparable resources around this cultural change thing — respect — it is going to take a massive effort by everybody across the community to get that message across. It is assisted and supported by us as individuals and is building up into the collective by treating other road users with respect.

If I could just say one last thing: the City of Port Phillip does not actually talk about its road safety strategy; it talks about its road user safety strategy. Sometimes in road safety we just talk about roads, as if by dealing with all the infrastructure everything will be all right. But there is that people dimension which is so much more intractable.

**Mr LANGUILLER** — Your submission proposes that designing streets in a way that prioritises people over motorised traffic is an effective way to reduce speed limits. In particular you refer to international initiatives of shared space, naked space, road diets and complete streets. How would these initiatives operate?

**Ms BOLITHO** — That was why I was keen to bring to light some examples from inner Melbourne, where this is beginning to happen. I will start with Port Phillip because I am more familiar with it. At the southern end of Fitzroy Street the tram stop has been enlarged, the road space has been significantly narrowed for through traffic and the pedestrian realm has been increased, so that would be one such example. It is marvellous that the City of Melbourne has this flexibility — which would not be available everywhere — where it can actually close off high-volume pedestrian streets at lunchtime and things like that. There are a range of ways it can be accomplished.

Something I consider to be important in the road safety discussion, just taking the Port Phillip example, is that the intervention in the public realm has improved the place for people. It has made a road traffic island into something more like a park. It has actually improved the visual, the amenity, the community experience, and incidentally has also had a road safety benefit.

**Mr LANGUILLER** — Have these measures been evaluated?

**Ms BOLITHO** — Yes.

**Mr LANGUILLER** — To your knowledge what level of effectiveness has this had in enhancing safety among road users?

**Ms BOLITHO** — I quoted one example from the City of Port Phillip in my presentation, which talked about the effectiveness of one particular roundabout. I understand that the City of Melbourne has evaluated Swanston Street and will be evaluating the Latrobe Street separated bike lanes. The City of Port Phillip has evaluated the Fitzroy Street Copenhagen lane, and the City of Yarra has evaluated the use of sharrows, which are those arrows on the road in Yarra. I do not have those at hand but could get access to them if required.

**Mr LANGUILLER** — Thank you.

**Mr ELSBURY** — I will just go a little bit off script here. Have you found that there has been any change in attitude over the bike lanes on Albert Street being on the left-hand side of vehicles? I know when they were first implemented there were some major issues.

**Ms BOLITHO** — Yes.

**Mr ELSBURY** — I have heard just on the grapevine that cyclists were not overly happy with them because instead of having to deal with drivers opening doors —

**Ms BOLITHO** — Also passengers.

**Mr ELSBURY** — they also had to deal with passengers opening doors. One evening I even observed a vehicle attempting to drive down the cycle lane to get out of its parking spot, which was interesting, to say the least. Have we seen an improvement in cyclist safety in that particular part of the world?

**Ms BOLITHO** — I am now just being more anecdotal. That evaluation has been done. I could get it for you.

**Mr ELSBURY** — That would be nice. Thank you.

**Ms BOLITHO** — I think there has been a growing acceptance of it. Regarding the point you mentioned about pedestrians, which I have heard as well, the logic behind the Albert Street treatment was that since the average car occupancy is so low, like 90 per cent of cars only have a —

**Mr ELSBURY** — Single occupant.

**Ms BOLITHO** — single occupant, that just means statistically lesser likelihood of a passenger opening them. But I believe in the Latrobe Street example they have actually accommodated that concern by now having sufficient width. I think that is the other thing — learning from every intervention how to improve the next one.

**Mr ELSBURY** — It is just very different from the Copenhagen style of actually having it on the footpath versus having it on the same level as the road, where confusion can occur.

**Ms BOLITHO** — Just in response to that, I suppose there are two kind of ways of thinking in the world. When I started out in local government I wanted everything to be neat and nice and everybody doing the same thing. In our road safety action group in an ideal world, to my mind we would not be using one treatment in Albert Street, a different treatment in Latrobe Street, something else again in St Kilda and something else in Yarra, because people just want to get around; they do not want to have to deal with different treatments. But every council area is unique. They are responding to what is possible in their communities and so on. To my mind it is probably not ideal that there are all these different kinds of treatments. If there were, in the same way as there are Australian standards around a range of things, what would the optimum standard be for bike lane design? At the moment perhaps we are just seeing what are essentially a range of innovations which need to be critically evaluated to see what the best practice is.

**Mr ELSBURY** — What are some of the existing constraints on determining appropriate road safety countermeasures to reduce crash-related trauma in Victoria? That is an easy one.

**Ms BOLITHO** — Once again I can only speak from the Melbourne perspective.

**Mr ELSBURY** — That is all we are asking.

**Ms BOLITHO** — Just coming back to the terms of reference of the inquiry and serious injury, I would like to make a few points. I think that the role of local governments in road safety is perhaps sometimes overlooked. They make such a huge investment in road safety, and that means the safety of the whole Victorian community. The way that funding and resources are allocated is always on the basis of fatalities, so it is really hard for local governments to put up a case that, 'Such and such needs to be done because we hardly have any fatalities', whereas, as you saw, the serious injury burden is really high. I think that is one thing.

There are some exceptional organisations in the road safety field, but I think having access to credible Australian-specific, sensitive data and information is really important. MUARC does an outstanding job, and, belatedly, I think the issues of cycling and pedestrians are now coming to the forefront of their attention. I believe MUARC has a huge new research project on foot in relation to cycling.

**Mr LANGUILLER** — Through the Chair, in relation to the issue of funding, you just said that it is based on fatalities. I think that is important. Can you elaborate any further on that? Is it simply because it is a lot cheaper to have a fatality — let me put it quite brutally — than it is to have a seriously injured person, in terms of costs to the community? I wonder whether that is a conversation that needs to be had.

**Ms BOLITHO** — I think that is a good point. If we could make more transparent what the cost of serious injury is to the community, I think that would be a very helpful thing to do. One of the examples that is frustrating to local governments is — and this is mainly on VicRoads-controlled roads — in order to get a safer pedestrian crossing you have to demonstrate these warrants that show how many people cross the road in a given period of time. On some of the roads where we desire to have a safer pedestrian crossing, people would never dream of crossing because it is just too unsafe, so you cannot even make the argument that you need it because the warrants are not satisfied. That is really frustrating.

**Mr ELSBURY** — It is interesting. We have that issue in my area, where there is clearly a road that people want to cross at a particular point. However, they decide to walk the kilometre and a half down the road to go across at a safe crossing rather than risk being hit, so you have no data to use to actually justify the cause that you are pushing.

**Ms BOLITHO** — You say that people walk down the road to the safe crossing, but then there are always those people who do not. We are a road safety group; that is our thing. For us, that comes first. Other decision-makers, other people with access to resources, will have to balance a range of considerations. But we are a community road safety group, and we are saying, 'People come first'.

**Mr ELSBURY** — What are some of the issues that arise when conducting a cost-benefit analysis of road safety measures that are specifically targeted to pedestrians and cyclists compared to cost-benefit analyses of measures that target motor vehicle occupants?

**Ms BOLITHO** — I will just have to defer to our submission for that and suggest once again, as I said to you, Mr Perera, that perhaps having some common tools that are used in local government could be a really helpful thing.

**The CHAIR** — Good. Thank you very much.

**Ms BOLITHO** — Thank you. I really appreciate you giving me such a generous amount of time.

**Mr LANGUILLER** — Do you mind if I just ask a very quick question? Could I leave you with the following thought for your consideration. In terms of road signage, give way signs versus stop signs, as a side list I would rather see more stop signs than give way signs. It is anecdotal.

**Ms BOLITHO** — Okay. Thank you very much.

**The CHAIR** — Ms Bolitho, I have one final comment. You will be sent a copy of the transcript in a fortnight. Please feel free to make any typographical or factual corrections to it and then send it back in so that we can proceed to place it on our website.



**Ms BOLITHO** — Okay. Once again thank you so much for your time today.

**The CHAIR** — Thank you very much.

**Witness withdrew.**