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Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee
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Inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users (2023)
Submission from Friends of the Earth, Melbourne

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this important inquiry.

Friends of the Earth Melbourne is campaigning on Sustainable Cities – public transport, active travel and no new major roads. We are currently focusing on campaigning for better bus services for Victorians.

For further information please contact our Elyse Cunningham, our Sustainable Cities Campaign organiser on elyse.cunningham@melbournefoe.org.au

Introduction

We note that inquiry is focusing on "changes to road safety behaviours during and post the COVID19 pandemic and impacts on vulnerable road users".

TAC Victorian fatality data records that over the past 10 years, deaths of vulnerable road users as a percentage of all road deaths have been trending upwards, perhaps as a result of motor vehicles becoming safer for the occupants.

In 2022, Victoria experienced a high jump in this percentage, with vulnerable road users comprising:

- 30% of road deaths in Rural and Regional Victoria.
- 68% of road deaths in Metropolitan Melbourne.

In Metropolitan Melbourne, **nearly one third of 2022 road deaths were pedestrians**.

We note that the Victorian Government wants to increase the proportion of people using public transport, particularly post pandemic. People will be more inclined to make the mode shift from motor vehicles if public transport is accessible, frequent and safe.

Our submission deals with road safety issue faced by public transport users, who typically walk at each end of their public transport journeys.

Improved public transport services reduces road trauma

The Australian BITRE National Road Trauma Review noted that a mode shift to public and active transport should reduce road trauma (assuming safe infrastructure for people walking and cycling).[1]

[1] https://www.bitre.gov.au/sites/default/files/2019-12/national_road_trauma_review.pdf

In a nutshell, if there are good public transport services, more people will be inclined to make the mode shift from driving to public transport. In particular, people who are impaired by alcohol or other substances, tiredness/fatigue, stress, or mobile phone addiction will be less inclined to drive if they have an accessible alternative. This will make our roads safer. Elderly drivers, who are over-represented in road trauma, would be more likely to give up driving if they had a viable alternative.

As McLeod and Curtis note: "Public transportation involves extremely low risk of passenger harm, and investment in safe public transport systems has been identified as a road trauma reduction strategy". They note also that for public transport trips, the "pedestrian first and last trip legs [are the] most risky".[2]

Whilst public transport infrastructure projects like trains and trams are high cost and take a long time to build, a transformation of the bus network into a simple grid of fast, frequent and connected buses that run every 10-minutes, serviced by clean, electric buses is a highly affordable solution that can be implemented in the immediate term.

Insufficient pedestrian crossings

A return journey in a bus or tram will typically entail crossing the road. Passengers need a safe way to cross the road, yet many bus and trams stops don't have pedestrian crossings.

Victoria Walks (2021) conducted a survey of bus users and audited bus stops.[3] They found:

- a safe and short journey to the bus stop was key factor in people using buses
- the biggest concerns with safety were 'Traffic' and 'road crossing'
- 60% of bus stops were located on roads with a limit of 60-80 km/h
- 55% of respondents used a bus stop with no crossing infrastructure.
- on roads with a speed limit of 60 km/h or more, only 5% had a pedestrian crossing within 20 metres
- bus passengers are unwilling to walk a long distance to the nearest signalised crossing.

There are many stretches of busy roads where there is no safe place to cross for 800 metres or more. This disadvantages not only public transport users, but also pedestrians who want to get across the road safely. Many people are not willing to walk for an additional ten minutes or more to cross at a signalised crossing. So, the places where people want to cross need to be made safe.

We recommend that on public transport routes there be frequent safe pedestrian crossing points, preferably at all bus and tram stops.

Speed limits on Arterial Roads

Many bus and tram routes are on arterial roads, usually with a 60 kph speed limit, even higher than the default speed limit of 50 kph. Higher traffic speeds make roads more hazardous for pedestrians to cross. Roads with higher traffic speeds are very unpleasant to walk along. We recommend that the speeds on these routes be reduced to improve safety and amenity for public transport users and other pedestrians.

Pedestrian Crossings: Long response time and insufficient time to cross

Pedestrian crossings can take a long time to respond. At some locations, there is insufficient time to cross, and people are required to wait for two signal cycles to safely cross. This may lead to public

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[2] McLeod, S., & Curtis, C. (2022). Integrating urban road safety and sustainable transportation policy through the hierarchy of hazard controls. International journal of sustainable transportation, 16(2), 166-180. http://mcleod.id.au/publications/RoadSafetyPaper20200809_Accepted_Final.pdf

[3] https://www.victoriawalks.org.au/Assets/Files/Getting_to_the_bus_stop_FINAL_with_graphics.pdf

transport users crossing the road on the red in order not to miss the bus or tram. Quicker response times and a longer crossing time would increase safety.

Pedestrian dangers at transport interchanges and terminuses

Transport interchanges and tram terminuses can be unsafe. We note for example that at the north terminus of Tram Route 19 at the Sydney Road / Bakers Road intersection, there have been two recent pedestrian deaths and several pedestrian injuries. These locations need to be upgraded to ensure they are safe.

Tram cameras

Too often, motor vehicles are not stopping for tram passengers to get on or off, endangering the safety of tram passengers. There appears to be little or no enforcement of this. We recommend that tram cameras be used all the time and drivers that fail to stop be automatically penalised. This would help improve compliance.

Accessible tram stops and traffic calming

Accessible tram stops are vital in ensuring that people with mobility restrictions can access trams. We understand that the Disability Standards for Accessible Public Transport required all of Melbourne's trams stops to be wheelchair accessible by 2022. Yet the majority of tram stops still do not comply.

Aside from improving the number of people who can use public transport, accessible tram stops make our roads safer.

Roads need to be designed to make it difficult for vehicles to speed. Wide, straight roads encourage speeding. One way that traffic can be calmed on roads with trams is through accessible tram stops.

For example, Nicholson Street Coburg (which forms the end part of East Coburg tram route) experiences frequent crashes due to speeding and other forms of dangerous driving. Many crashes have been documented on a community social media page,[4] showing that too many crashed vehicles end up on the footpath, endangering vulnerable road users as well as vehicle occupants. Other forms of traffic calming may be difficult to implement on such roads, but accessible tram stops would perform such a function.

Bus shelters and seats

Given that improved public transport usages can reduce road trauma, facilities need to be provided to improve the amenity for public transport users. Few bus stops have seats. We recommend that seats and shelters be provided for all bus stops. Regular seating also makes it easier for nearby residents to walk rather than drive.

[4] https://www.facebook.com/SafetyForNicholsonSt