



**Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours  
on Vulnerable Road Users**

**Submission**

**May 2023**

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## 1 Introduction

The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Victorian Parliament's Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee (the Committee) *Inquiry into the Impact of Road Safety Behaviours on Vulnerable Road Users* (the Inquiry).

The MAV is the peak representative and advocacy body for Victoria's 79 councils. The MAV was formed in 1879, with the Municipal Association Act 1907 appointing the MAV the official voice of local government in Victoria.

The MAV understands the Committee is interested in insights on the changes to road safety behaviours during and post the COVID-19 pandemic and how these changes have impacted vulnerable road users.

In particular, the Committee is interested in:

- what changes in road safety behaviours have been observed from 2020 onwards?
- if changes have been observed, what is shaping these changes?
- how these changes have impacted vulnerable road users, including pedestrians, cyclists, motorcycle riders, children, older people and mobility device users?
- how the above information can be used to improve road safety?

Please note that while this submission aims to broadly reflect the views of local government in Victoria, it does not purport to reflect the views of individual councils. Councils have been encouraged to make separate submissions in response to the Inquiry.

Councils play an important role in managing and maintaining safe, quality local road networks, as well as establishing appropriate localised speed limits in conjunction with the Victorian Government.

As road managers, it is councils rather than the MAV that are better placed to comment on the behavioural aspects of the Inquiry. This submission focuses on a range of sector priorities and challenges relating to road safety and the protection and support of vulnerable road users.

### **Road safety data**

The TAC website indicates a total of 241 people lost their lives on Victorian roads in the 12 months to December 2022. This is a 3% increase (seven more lives lost) from the same period in the previous 12-month period from January to December 2021 and fewer than the year before the pandemic in which there were 266 lives lost.

Of the lives lost in the 12 months to Dec 2022: 101 were drivers, 57 were motorcyclists, 44 were pedestrians, 27 were passengers and 12 were cyclists.

The MAV's reading of the data indicates that the most significant increases in deaths over the past five-year average is for motorcyclists and pedestrians, particularly compared to lower deaths reported in 2021.

We note the key statistics provided by the TAC ([pedestrian-statistics](#)) on pedestrian deaths. Just over one third (36%) are aged over 70. 30% are in rural Victoria. Almost half of the metropolitan deaths are in 60km/h zones. Two thirds are male.

Recent travel data generally show that road travel and congestion has returned more quickly to pre-pandemic levels than public transport travel, noting that there has been an enduring change to increased working from home in significant industry sectors.

## 2 Key issues

### 2.1 Local road maintenance and delivery challenges

Victorian councils are responsible for 87 per cent of the state's road network, spending around 10 per cent of their total revenue on road management.

The introduction of the rate cap seven years ago, a reduction in untied grants that can be used for roads maintenance and three wet La Niña years have contributed to a degradation of the local roads network.

Key findings from a recent [MAV survey](#) on infrastructure maintenance and delivery conditions within Victorian councils included:

- The cost of delivering infrastructure has increased rapidly over 2021-22
- Over 80 per cent of councils are experiencing weaker responses to tenders from industry
- Services, materials, and skill shortages are leading challenges
- Local government's asset-to-revenue ratio is substantially different to other levels of government. Councils have large assets to manage, yet significant constraints on revenue (including imposed limits on own-sourced revenue such as the rate-cap and statutory fees)

Given these constraints, councils are heavily reliant on funding from other levels of government to support the road management and maintenance task.

Untied grants and greater flexibility around how specific (tied) grant funding can be used are seen by councils as the most promising responses to these challenges.

National funding programs Financial Assistance Grants, Roads to Recovery, the Federal Blackspot Program, and road safety and infrastructure grants such as the Local Roads & Community Infrastructure Program are all critical in this regard.

Victorian funding streams have been more limited in recent years. However, the recent Victorian Government announcement of the \$210 million *Safe Local Roads and Streets Program* was welcomed by the MAV and councils. Over a four-year period, the program will allocate significant funding to councils to plan and deliver safe systems improvements to council-managed roads and streets. Importantly, the program will be phased and largely co-designed with input from a local government reference group.

## **2.2 Encourage local road safety decision-making and program delivery**

The MAV believes good road safety outcomes are more likely to be achieved when councils, as road managers and crucial road safety partners, have more autonomy to deliver better local outcomes.

Councils are arguably more responsive to local needs and can test and trial innovative road safety initiatives quickly.

The MAV notes speed management is identified as a significant factor in delivery of improved outcomes in both the State and Commonwealth road safety strategies.

In Victoria, the State Government sets speed limits and speed zones within statutory guidelines. Where a speed limit change on a local road has been considered by a council to be necessary, traditionally the council must seek authorisation from VicRoads (Department of Transport & Planning) to make that change.

The MAV notes recent progress made through the Department to streamline approvals and encourages a further broadening and rollout of this approach.

Globally, 30km/h is being increasingly adopted as the default safe speed limit for urban areas due to the reduced risk of injury and death, particularly where there is an impact with an unprotected road user.

Councils need to be better supported to make independent, local decisions on speed limits in the best interests of their communities, without unnecessary external authorisations.

There is evidence that a small decrease from 40km/h to 30km/h makes a significant difference to the safety and liveability of local streets. Research shows 30km/h speed limits on local residential streets could reduce the Australian road death toll [by 13%](#).

The MAV recently hosted a presentation from road safety experts from the New Zealand Transport Agency who shared the process of transitioning to 30km/h as part of their road safety strategy. Significantly, they adopted the approach of working out what the appropriate safe speed should be for different road types and then embarked on implementing those speed limits across the country. The focus in Australia is typically on the degree of difficulty and resistance that might be encountered in moving from a current speed limit to an appropriate safe speed. The focus on the *change* inhibits the delivery of a safe speed *outcome*.

A focus on safety first is supported.

### **2.3 Further support for Safe Systems and Movement & Place implementation**

The MAV strongly urges the Committee to consider the important role of both the safe systems approach and the movement and place planning approach to meet the needs of all communities when it comes to the transport network.

The Safe System approach adopts a holistic view of the road transport system and the interactions between people, vehicles, and the road environment. It recognises that people will always make mistakes and may have road crashes – but those crashes should not result in death or serious injury.

Use of the safe systems approach also provides for the proactive identification of road safety risks, enabling treatments to be developed and implemented before a location develops as an accident “blackspot”.

Movement and Place recognises that the network performs two functions, (1) movement of people and goods and (2) often serving as a place, or destination in and of itself.

Considering movement, place, safety and environmental outcomes in a holistic manner is crucial when making decisions to better support road safety.

### **2.4 Support active transport**

Everyone should be able to safely walk and ride whether for leisure, completing errands or commuting. Many people do not have access to adequate footpaths and bike lanes that make walking and riding easy, safe and enjoyable.

Local government should be empowered through sustainable funding to deliver safer walking and bike riding infrastructure.

Benefits of updated policy settings and investment in locally implemented infrastructure improvements would result in:

- construction job creation - stronger employment outcomes than road or rail construction
- support for local economic development, including local shopping and regional tourism
- dispersed benefits across both metropolitan and regional areas – low cost and local
- reduced overcrowding on public transport in urban areas
- reduced car congestion on roads
- significant physical and mental health benefits
- strong community support - VicHealth research indicates 67 per cent support for increased walking funding.

The health and wellbeing benefits of walking and riding are well recognised, however, walking and riding are also relatively equitable modes of travel given their low cost.

Recent research by Monash University ([Barriers-and-enablers-of-bike-riding-for-transport-and-recreation](#)) identified that an increased provision of protected bike lanes would encourage more people and particularly more women to ride bikes. Safer bike infrastructure will not only save lives but increase access and mobility.

## **2.5 Active transport investment supports climate action**

Transport emissions are a major contributor to climate change in Victoria. The Victorian Government has adopted a climate change pledge of increasing active transport mode share from 18 per cent to 25 per cent by 2030.

The MAV and councils are keen to support this outcome, together with support for the 20-minute neighbourhood concept included within Plan Melbourne. This change in active transport mode share is likely to be delivered largely on local roads and will require a range of interventions to achieve, including ensuring safe paths and crossings. Local government will need financial and other support to assist the Victorian Government achieve these objectives.

## **2.6 Streets are for everyone**

The MAV supports initiatives that encourage more walking and bike riding for Victorians. A consensus statement was developed with a range of organisations during the pandemic with the Vision Statement of “Vibrant, active and connected communities where people can walk and ride bikes for leisure, running errands or commuting”. While this has a broader view than just a road safety lens, it acknowledges the benefits of increased walking and bike riding and that this must be done safely.

A copy of the consensus statement and a range of other materials that support walking and bike riding can be found on the MAV [Walking-and-bike-riding-resource-hub](#).

Further information specifically related to people walking is available on the Victoria Walks website, including this report on [pedestrian-crashes](#).

## **3 Conclusion**

The MAV strongly supports the work of the Committee as it considers and reports on measures that can be taken to reduce trauma and deaths on Victorian roads. There are significant opportunities to improve road safety for all road users, particularly at the municipal level.

The MAV remains committed to working with the Committee and other key stakeholders about council issues and concerns in relation to this critical policy area.