

**THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE ON ROAD SAFETY MET
IN CONFERENCE ROOM, DIPLOMAT HOTEL, CANBERRA AVENUE AND
HELY STREET, MANUKA, ACT ON WEDNESDAY 4 FEBRUARY 2009.**

DISCUSSION WITH Mr RICK FREETH, DIRECTOR, AND Mr SIMON ABBOTT,
DIRECTOR, FREEBOTT, CANBERRA.

CHAIR (Mr Wing) - Simon and Rick, welcome and thank you both very much for coming to meet us at such short notice.

Mr ABBOTT - I am one of the directors of Freebott.

Mr FREETH - I am also a director of Freebott.

CHAIR - We know something of the general outline of what you do from Eddie Wheeler in the previous session, so please give us a full idea of what you are doing and your programs.

Mr ABBOTT - Freebott are involved particularly in driver education.

CHAIR - For the record, is Freebott an acronym?

Mr ABBOTT - No, that is the name of the company.

We are involved in road safety education and our current focus is on behaviour change and attitude, looking at attitudes of drivers. We have been working for the last nine years in the ACT on the Road Ready program, which starts with the prelearner and goes on to work with the provisional driver.

Ms FORREST - How pre are we talking?

Mr ABBOTT - The actual Road Ready program in the ACT looks at the relationship between the parent and the young person in the car before the young person does the learner test. The Road Ready program, which is the program we run, is aimed at every young person in the ACT before they get a learner licence when they must do a 10-hour road safety course.

CHAIR - Excellent.

Mr ABBOTT - That is prior to getting the learner licence. For a young person in the ACT to get a learner licence they need two certificates, one to say they have done that 10-hour road safety program and the other to say they have passed the Road Rules test. Once they have those two certificates they can get their learner licence. This is all part of the Road Ready program. On the learner licence they are encouraged to get a minimum of 50 hours' practice. We are not as mandated at this stage as New South Wales is in that phase. To get their provisional licence in the ACT they can choose one of two methods; they can either do the traditional one-off test or they can do what is called the CBA, competency-based assessment. They can go to an accredited driving school and over a

series of lessons, usually about 10, the driving instructors sign them off as having completed all 22 competencies.

Those are the two ways of getting the provisional licence. The next time that they come to us is for an optional course, which we call the 'P off' course, but the correct name is the Road Ready Plus course. This is for anybody who has been on their P-plates for six months. They can do an in-class check-up, a check-up from the neck up. Once they have had six months' driving experience they come back in and have a facilitated discussion group looking at how their experiences have been so far and sharing with their peers how it has been going for them.

The carrot for that is that if they complete that three-hour course they will no longer have to display their P-plates and they will be issued an additional allowance of four demerit points. The way that came about was almost smoke and mirrors in that traditionally P-plate holders in the ACT used to have an eight-point demerit allowance. With the new Road Ready program they only receive a four demerit point allowance, but if they come to do the program they get their eight. It is really that we are giving them more demerit points, but for them to get where they used to be they have to earn them.

CHAIR - What are the length and cost of the program?

Mr ABBOTT - There are two ways of doing the initial learner course, the 10-hour Road Ready program. You either do that in year 10 at your school, and for many people that is free, or you do that with a private provider if you cannot do that at school or you are no longer at school and the cost is \$155.

Ms FORREST - Is that subsidised in some way?

Mr ABBOTT - Most schools do it for free, but through a private provider it is not subsidised at all.

Ms FORREST - That fee of \$155 is still quite cheap compared to some of the other courses that are around.

Mr ABBOTT - Yes. There are other costs that need to be taken into account. A young person going for their licence may have to pay the \$155 plus their licence application fee which is \$40 and then they have to go for their Ps. We also think it is cheap, compared with similar courses run overseas. The second program, the provisional course, costs \$75.

CHAIR - How many hours?

Mr ABBOTT - It is a three-hour course in class.

CHAIR - That is very reasonable.

Mr ABBOTT - With an hour of pre-course activities.

CHAIR - Is that three hours plus one hour pre-course?

Mr ABBOTT - That is right.

Ms FORREST - What do they do in the one-hour pre-course?

Mr ABBOTT - It does not really matter to be honest. The reason for that is to get the young people starting to think about road safety before they come along, how their driving is going. For example, one of the activities they can choose is a three-day driver log - that is logging down other driver behaviour and their own driving behaviour.

Ms FORREST - Do they do this in their own time?

Mr ABBOTT - Yes, in their own time, an hour before they come. The good thing about that is they are thinking about road safety beforehand. It is a good icebreaker, making them think about who did what, have a chat about it and then report to the group. It is a nice way of starting it.

Ms FORREST - When they book in do they get the information and make a choice?

Mr ABBOTT - Exactly right. That is what we are doing in the ACT with the Road Ready program.

Ms FORREST - When did you first start doing it?

Mr ABBOTT - Nine years ago, in 2000.

Ms FORREST - Has it been evaluated?

Mr ABBOTT - Yes, it has. There is a full evaluation, which I am sure you will be able to gain access to. There was a problem with the Road Ready Plus or the 'P off' evaluation in that there was never any thought given to privacy. The evaluators were not able to get crash infringement data. While there is an evaluation, it concludes that it is a good, positive, fun environment -

Mr FREETH - But it could only go on self-reported data.

Mr ABBOTT - The data is not great but there is a report.

Ms FORREST - The data is not robust enough to rely on, as far as that goes.

Mr ABBOTT - Exactly right.

Mr FREETH - However, in the national trial they have taken big steps.

Mr ABBOTT - Rick and I now are at a point where we are working on the national program. The program consists of the three government groups: the ATSB, the Federals; the RTA from New South Wales and VicRoads from Victoria. What that does, in our opinion, is draw on the 'P off' program and makes it even better. One of the big criticisms we have had from the 'P off' program is that it is great theoretically and it is great looking at attitudes and behaviours, but you don't do anything for the practical side of things. If

young people have had bad practice throughout their early stages of driving, who is picking that up?

Mr FREETH - Part of the reason for that is that research in the past has said that if you take people, and particularly young people, and give them any sort of practical off-road skills training that can increase their risk and crash rates. People have tended to steer away from the practical side of things, whereas this acknowledges that there is a very real need for it but not off-road, more a real-world-environment and using a totally different method of coaching.

Ms FORREST - Do you put someone in a car with the driver and say, 'You drive and I'll watch you'?

Mr FREETH - We have had to move away from the sense of being assessed or instructed so the whole environment has moved to a coach/facilitator-type thing with a peer passenger in the car. We get to the back seat of the car as soon as we can and let the two young people sit in the front and drive.

Ms FORREST - To get them to assess each other?

Mr ABBOTT - We're guiding that discussion from the back seat.

Mr FREETH - I think this is the big thing when we look at the overarching risk. There is intentional risk and unintentional risk. You can deal with unintentional risk through new knowledge and presenting that, which needs to come into the course as well. A lot of the intentional stuff which requires behaviour change is the real challenge in this and that is where the exciting stuff is happening at the moment - applying the psychology, personal development, self-awareness and these sorts of skills that people haven't really thought about - which are life skills - to the sacrosanct area of driving is the innovative line we are going down.

Ms FORREST - Do you have like a public health approach, which is about risk? All of us when we were young took risks - boys perhaps a bit more than girls, but certainly girls like to take risks as well as boys. It is not just risks in driving, it is risks in their sexual activity, diet, jumping out of aeroplanes and all sorts of things. Do we need to have a broader focus on that?

Mr FREETH - Absolutely. We can't separate it from life, and we have tended to. I guess we have just said, 'Let's just put it in the hands of enforcement' and hope that works. If you have massive budgets to work on enforcement or you want to go down the line of cars with GPS and monitoring people to that level, you could do it that way but you wouldn't change attitudes, you would just change behaviour. On a broader scale, if you are going to change people's behaviour, you have to get a shift from within and that is where we are tackling that. Also, from the point of view that we all have to understand that driving a motor vehicle has inherent risk attached to it, so we are never going to have no risk. We have to acknowledge that it is there and focus on how we manage it and get it to an acceptable level. I think that is the skill of teaching people an awareness of what the risks are or getting them to discover for themselves, and then they can ask 'How do I go about reducing the likelihood or consequences if I am involved in a crash?' It is a totally different mindset that we are working on. From that perspective, it is not

just a focus on young drivers. This is applicable right across the board. It is just a different area that you are talking about, how you approach the risk.

Mr ABBOTT - Touching on that risk aspect, one of the big things we are looking at moment in all phases of learning to drive and provisional drivers is what we call low-risk driving. It is driving with a different mindset, it is 'How can I protect myself in any in any situation?' and that is what we are really working on. New South Wales are now starting to embrace that in their learner phase. They have retrained all their driving testing officers to emphasise that the test is now about low risk. It is not about driving skill. Whether you have one hand or two hands on the driving wheel, whether you have your thumbs inside the driving wheel or whatever, the consequence is you might get a broken thumb or whatever. If you are looking at the bigger picture they are not the big things. The big things are hazard recognition, hazard response, speeding, gap selection, making sure that there is suitable distance you and the cars in front. These are the sorts of things that are going to save lives rather than whether you have your thumb inside the driving wheel.

CHAIR - We have had evidence about the importance of not wrapping your thumb.

Mr ABBOTT - It is important so that you do not get a broken thumb.

Mr FREETH - We do the reverse parking as a mandatory aspect of the driving test, but how many people have been killed reverse parking? Yet there has been a massive emphasis on it for years and years.

Ms FORREST - The insurance companies probably like you to be doing that.

Mr ABBOTT - Let us not go there.

Laughter.

Mr FREETH - It is looking at the two factors of likelihood and consequences. Does that increase likelihood?

Ms FORREST - It is that risk matrix, isn't it?

Mr FREETH - Yes, absolutely.

Mr FREETH - The point is that people can fail their learner test because they cannot do a reverse park. We have placed a disproportionate emphasis on a skill whereas it would have been better putting it into more hours of practice or developing the ability to recognise and respond to hazards earlier.

Ms FORREST - That is not really tested in a driving test. They test things like doing a three-point turn, a hill start, reverse park but my understanding is they don't get you to go out on the road and watch the gap between you and the car in front of you.

Mr FREETH - That has now been incorporated into the New South Wales test.

Ms FORREST - How long does the test last? It would have to last about an hour.

Mr FREETH - It lasts 40 minutes.

Mr ABBOTT - In the ACT it is 45 minutes.

Mr FREETH - Since they bought this in, their fail rate has increased by 20-30 per cent on those factors which is fantastic.

Ms FORREST - On the things that matter.

CHAIR - You might be interested to know that we have heard the suggestion that in Hobart some of the testing officers require students to do things of a minor technical nature that cause them to fail. They think up ways of tricking them, such as if they taking them down a street where there is no visible sign indicating a reduction of the speed limit because it is in another street, if the learner driver goes at a higher speed they fail.

Mr ABBOTT - Because they should be driving to the default limit.

CHAIR - That is right, but there is nothing to indicate to them that the speed is reduced.

Mr FREETH - The problem with that is that driving instructors learn to go and coach courses just to teach them to pass.

CHAIR - Yes, that is right. They learn how to pass the test rather than how to drive. You mentioned earlier that in the process of these programs the driving instructors give a certificate or some recognition. Do all learner drivers in the ACT have to engage a driving instructor? What about those who are taught by family members?

Mr ABBOTT - In the ACT there are two ways of getting your P-licence. One is going to a driving instructor. The other is going to do the traditional driving test, which I assume is similar to what you have in Tasmania. If you choose that method there is no obligation at all to go to a driving school or driving instructor.

CHAIR - If you go to a driving instructor you do not have to do the test and the driving instructor gives the all clear.

Mr ABBOTT - So long as they are an accredited driving instructor and they you sign you off on all 22 competencies, which are the same 22 competencies that you get in a test.

CHAIR - I see.

Mr FREETH - They are audited by the ACT Government periodically.

Mr ABBOTT - It usually takes about 10 lessons, so for some people that is a financial decision. They are averaging \$60 to \$65 a lesson so if you are doing 10 lessons, straight off the bat that is \$600 to \$650.

CHAIR - Is there any suggestion it is easier to get your licence through a driving instructor who may be less inclined to fail clients?

Mr ABBOTT - No. What we are finding is that people who suffer under the stress of exam conditions and that sort of thing are hedging all their bets on a 40-minute test and that going to the driving school is a better way. The problem is that some driving schools are saying 'guaranteed pass' and these sorts of things but they don't say in how many lessons. If someone has no driving ability at all they can't say we will do it for you in 10 lessons.

CHAIR - No.

Mr FREETH - But anecdotally and practically if you have had a person for 10 lessons often there is a bit of emotional pressure to perhaps be a little more lenient than the testing officer who does not know you and basically goes by the book.

Ms FORREST - Is there a requirement to do supervised hours as well or not?

Mr FREETH - No.

Ms FORREST - They could get their licence in 10 hours; that is what you are telling me?

Mr FREETH - And that is a hole in the ACT system because we know the value of practice; it's inversely proportional to crashes.

Mr ABBOTT - But effectively anywhere else you could get it in one hour.

Ms FORREST - Not in Tasmania where you have to have -

Mr ABBOTT - A mandatory number of hours, yes. We have suggested 50 hours.

Mr FREETH - We can see that in 20 years time we will look back and ask, 'Do you remember how you could teach young kids how to drive?'.

Mr ABBOTT - We believe that will go and we think at minimum parents will only be able to be the instructor or coach if they have gone through some sort of training.

CHAIR - Parents or friends?

Mr ABBOTT - Whoever is the coach or the instructor.

Ms FORREST - That will make it very difficult for some people, low-income earners and those sorts of people.

Mr ABBOTT - Not if it is as simple as a one-day program, just upskilling them to talk about low risk driving -

Mr FREETH - Not to become instructors.

Mr ABBOTT - Not an instructor.

Mr FREETH - We have seen massive improvements in the kids' driving in three hours and they have been gobsmacked. So we would take the supervising driver through a similar

sort of experience and add on a bit of how to coach or successfully supervise as an instructor.

Ms FORREST - So, as a parent, I could go along and do a one-day course, then I could undertake to drive for 50 hours or whatever it is and then, if I felt maybe there were things that might need polishing up, I could send them to one of the qualified people for two or three lessons and that is probably all they need.

Mr FREETH - Yes, because at the end of the day you can put the in the 50- or 100-hour mandatory practice but if it is poor practice then the bad things are repeated.

Ms FORREST - I accept that.

Mr ABBOTT - I think there are some States, it might be in Queensland, where a driving instructor is considered three hours to the parent's one. I am not sure but I think that is what it is. Whereas you need 50 hours from a parent every time you get a driving instructor that counts as three hours.

Mr FREETH - Two hours.

Ms FORREST - Right.

Mr ABBOTT - So then you would be getting good practice in those ways.

Ms FORREST - Yes. I was talking to Liz de Rome from the George Institute outside and she was reading some research that the 120-hour requirement was based on a Swedish study but it wasn't the 120 hours that was the issue at all. It was the amount of time and they reduced the age at which they could get their licence to 16 and so effectively they had to be driving a number of hours for two years before they could go and get their licence. The research states that 120 hours was an average of what these kids did rather than being a necessary requirement; it was the amount of time in the two years to gain the skills they needed. I guess at least it gives someone a target and an expectation. Obviously 120 hours is a lot of hours on the road for anyone to achieve in that period of time.

Mr ABBOTT - Particularly if you do not have parents or if you have twins in your family or something like that.

Ms FORREST - Yes, or if it was over a two-year period you could easily have two kids at different ages and then the pressure is on. It is interesting to see it is not necessarily just the hours but also the time and I guess that means increased exposure to events and risks.

Mr FREETH - And distributed learning, as opposed to mass learning, which is known to be effective.

Ms FORREST - Do you have a view on the number of hours? You say in the ACT there is a bit of deficiency but do you think there is an ideal situation?

Mr ABBOTT - To me, it has to be both. All the statistics say that the learner driver is the safest driver on the road. They are the safest. The P-plate driver is the most unsafe, so

in one day they go from the safest to the most unsafe. One of the main reasons the P-plate driver is the most unsafe is that they're taking risks and not being experienced when they take those risks. So if you are an inexperienced driver and you drive with three mates in the back late at night and it's raining and you've never experienced that in the learner phase, then of course it's going to be a bigger risk for you. So the more exposure you get as a learner driver, the most safe driver on the road, why wouldn't you get as much practice as you can there and spread it out over as many situations as possible?

CHAIR - There's no doubt that is probably one of the best ways of learning to drive, just experience on the roads.

Mr FREETH - Further to that, during the learner phase the focus of the instruction needs to be graduated towards the ability to self-monitor and self-assess, because if you're still basically being supervised all the way to the time you get your Ps then you're not being allowed to think for yourself and someone else is still the safety manager within your car. So that is why increasing the time and then graduating the person towards the ability to actually make those decisions safely on their own, and have a method and strategy to do that, is critical.

Ms FORREST - Do you think the learner drivers over that period, whatever that time is, should be able to drive at all posted speed limits or should it be restricted?

Mr ABBOTT - Absolutely. Rick lives on a property about 30 or 40 minutes outside of Canberra, so for his daughter it is 80 kph. So if he drives her to school and himself to work every day and it's 110 all the way, but they can only go 80 the whole way, then it's a disincentive for the parents to let their kids drive. When he is running late he will say, 'I'll drive'.

Mr FREETH - Also, the behaviour of other motorists with a learner driver is just atrocious.

Mr ABBOTT - But why would you teach someone in the safest possible time - the learner phase - to drive at 80, and then as soon as you are off in the unsafe period you can go faster? It just doesn't make sense to me.

Ms FORREST - It's a worry for the parents, really. With the Midland Highway from Burnie to Hobart, the majority of it has a 110 limit and it doesn't take long to get your 50 hours up with a learner driver going up and down the highway. But cars do intimidate from behind; they will sit right up behind you.

Mr FREETH - I don't know what clown came up with it or what research they drew on for that; they lost it.

Mr ABBOTT - I can't understand why for a P-plater, when we know they are at the most risky time, we are saying you can now drive faster on your own than you could before.

Ms FORREST - They can't for the first year in Tasmania; they've got one year when they can only go at 80 unsupervised.

Mr ABBOTT - That's different because, for example, in New South Wales it's 80 on your learners, 90 on the first phase of your Ps, then 100 on the next phase of your Ps. So straightaway next day you can drive faster.

Mr FREETH - One of the things that we've tossed around that we think would perhaps change the mindset towards the L-P transition is that instead of going from learner to provisional you actually had learner 1 and learner 2. So when you are actually driving solo you are still an L2, and if you stuff up as an L2, you go back to L1. That also means that someone does still consider themselves to be a learner in that vital period.

Ms FORREST - Even though they haven't got the other driver in the car.

Mr FREETH - Yes. So we're encouraging a thought that, 'Oh, no, it's not all good now. No-one's around but I'm still in the process of adapting'.

Ms FORREST - So you're saying that the provisional licence should actually be the L2 phase, and then the P becomes the second phase of your provisional licence.

Mr ABBOTT - Learner 1 would still be 120 hours or whatever it is; then you pass your test and you are L2. You're still a learner but you can do some solo, and then you go onto a P.

Mr FREETH - And during the L2 you'd be doing the course that we are developing for coaching and taking it to the next level. They will hold your hand through that critical period of 12 months.

Mr ABBOTT - That's sort of flipping around that New South Wales do. They have a progressive P-plate; we think it should be a progressive L-plate. That's only our personal opinion.

Ms FORREST - How long have you been doing this stuff?

Mr ABBOTT - Years ago we were teachers so we have a background in education and then Rick moved into attitudinal-type work.

Mr FREETH - Personal development and coaching.

Mr ABBOTT - I went into drug and alcohol education and then we came back and did a little road safety in 2000.

Ms FORREST - So you have long experience in dealing with young people and these issues.

CHAIR - Are there just the two of you in your company?

Mr ABBOTT - We are the only two directors.

CHAIR - How many staff members do you have?

Mr ABBOTT - It fluctuates, we have had as many as 80 at one stage, when we delivered the bike education contract in South Australia so we had about 40 employees taking all year 5s out on the road on bicycles

Ms FORREST - They are starting to think they know everything at that stage.

Mr ABBOTT - What was behind that was that it becomes illegal for anyone aged over 12 years to ride on the footpath any more, so that was the Government's way of educating them about how to ride on the road. It was a 10-week program. We would go into a school for 10 weeks at a time and teach young people, year 5s, how to ride on the road safely.

Ms FORREST - Was that in school time?

Mr ABBOTT - Yes, in school time. It was a great program, very expensive, but a good program.

Ms FORREST - Were you funded to do that by the South Australian Government?

Mr ABBOTT - Yes.

Mr FREETH - There are a lot of governments with bike education programs built into the school programs, but it is up to the schools to take it up and train kids.

Mr ABBOTT - For example, Eddie Wheeler funds in the ACT a bike education program but because they do not have the funds of the South Australian Government, they employ us to run it. We teach teachers how to run it in their own school, therefore the cost is nearly zero for the school, it is just the cost of bringing four staff in, as we were doing in South Australia, which adds up.

Mr FREETH - We are a registered training organisation as well.

CHAIR - It is very good that you are doing this educational program because there are so many people, particularly public servants, who say that it is not effective, teenagers think they know everything. I have always been very keen on it being a requirement that there be some course or information even if it did not involve practical driving. I assume that is very strongly your view, too, that it is beneficial.

Mr ABBOTT - Absolutely.

Mr FREETH - There have been a lot of programs that do not work. We have to acknowledge that there have been plenty, but that is why we are excited about this because it is taking a totally different approach.

CHAIR - And is it being effective?

Mr ABBOTT - We are two of four people writing a curriculum for the national program and that is only in third-draft stage so it is not even close to being evaluated.

Ms FORREST - Has your program has been evaluated?

Mr ABBOTT - Yes.

Ms FORREST - Could you provide a copy of that?

Mr ABBOTT - I would probably have to talk to Eddie about that but I am sure it will not be a problem. Basically the NRMA-ACT Road Safety Trust provides the money for Road Ready to happen in the ACT, so he will have that.

Mr FREETH - I think the thing to look at is that this is an evolution of understanding in terms of road safety. We look at the programs being done in the ACT now and with our experience and new insights into all this, we say these things now need to move to the next level. We would like to talk to the ACT Government about what we think is missing from our local P-plate program, which is some in-car experience. When this was first designed and came out that was not even a consideration.

Mr HARRISS - I think the data would support the contention that speed is a major contributor to road fatalities. Given that we have trained an L to get to the stage of setting them loose on the road, why would we not want to limit their speed for, say, the first year as we do in Tasmania? I hear what you said about when we are teaching them to drive and we probably all let them crank it up to whatever the road speed is, but because speed is the major contributor, doesn't the Tasmanian law have some merit to it? We train them, they can only go at 80, then for the first year of their Ps, they are limited to 80. Is that a reasonable proposition?

Mr FREETH - Speed is a factor in every crash because stationary objects do not collide. We have to have a look at speeding and the conditions under which speed is employed. I think that is one of the big misunderstandings about it. Aeroplanes travel at 900 kilometres an hour. If as you get faster you get more dangerous, they must be the most dangerous things on the planet yet statistically air travel is much safer than road travel.

If you go back to likelihood and consequences, they manage that massive risk because the consequence is always going to be massive. The only way they can deal with that is likelihood and that is why it is such a regulated environment to make sure crashes are rare. When we come back to our environment on the road, we have to look at likelihood and consequences from the same perspective and speed in itself is not the issue. It is a factor, but someone can be driving at the speed limit and so totally legal but is completely oblivious to things present and capable of moving into their crash avoidance space but they do not perceive or respond -

Mr HARRISS - Including weather conditions.

Mr FREETH - Yes. You can be driving quite legally in pea soup fog, you cannot get pinged by it so the law is misaligned with the risk from that perspective. That is why we have to get into people's heads to think differently about their speed, manage the speed and use it in their ability to cope with risk. Using speed is the secret. That is a complete reversal in thinking. We use it but we now need to use it in the most risk-free manner that we can.

Mr ABBOTT - Further to that, it is very difficult to say to young people that speeding is bad because everyone on the road speeds. If you drive into Canberra city now and sit on the limit you would be the only car sitting right on the limit.

Mr FREETH - That is an absolute statement, but is true for the majority of vehicles.

Mr ABBOTT - It is difficult to say that you never speed.

CHAIR - I think that more and more people are observing limits in Tasmania but there are a lot who aren't, particularly on the open road. I would say that the majority of people are observing the limits most of the time.

Mr HARRISS - But even two clicks over and we are breaking the law.

Mr ABBOTT - That is right.

Mr HARRISS - It might be a minute margin.

Mr FREETH - We are breaking an arbitrary thing in that we have said at that point something is different, but has the risk actually changed? You can have two people travelling at speeds two clicks apart and the person who is two clicks over may be infinitely safer because they are the only person in the car, they are aware, the road is dead straight, there are no possible things that can jump at them, compared with a person who is doing 90 kph, chatting to the passengers in the car with a trailer fully laden on a greasy road. We need to think not so much about the numbers but about the bigger picture.

CHAIR - The ability of the driver and the adequacy of the brakes, et cetera.

Ms FORREST - One could have been driving for 10 hours and one could have just started driving five minutes before. You can use that scenario, too.

Mr FREETH - We know that driving for 10 hours is the equivalent of a person who is 0.05, in terms of impairment.

CHAIR - We have been told that 5 kph over the limit is equivalent to what increase in their blood alcohol reading?

Mr HARRISS - It is not equivalent, the graphs follow each other.

Mr ABBOTT - Speed, alcohol and fatigue follow the same graph.

Mr HARRISS - You can apply that in an extrapolated way although it is not quite the same as people point out, but it is interesting.

Mr ABBOTT - It is an interesting thing to show people that being tired is like being drunk, although I would not say that it is exactly the same as being drunk or speeding.

CHAIR - Would you mind giving us some details of the Road Ready program?

Mr ABBOTT - That is the 10-hour pre-learner program. Obviously it is all in class because the young people who come do not have a learner licence, so we can't do any practical activities in that program.

CHAIR - And most would be done at schools, I suppose?

Mr ABBOTT - In the ACT there are around about 6 500 people who get their learner's each year and we are seeing not quite half of them. Anyone who comes to the ACT from another State or another country, or anyone who is not at school, comes to us. The schools run it over a 10-week period, whereas we run it over two days. In the right environment running it over a 10-week period is probably better but it is obviously more attractive to a young person to get it done in two days. You have to do this course or you can't get your learner licence. They think, 'Let's get it done and go and get our learner licence', rather than waiting the whole term at school.

CHAIR - So do you have five hours each day?

Mr ABBOTT - We can split it up over three nights or two days.

Mr FREETH - Like anything, when you try to squeeze something else into a crowded curriculum, you find that it can be delivered really well or really badly. I am sure there is a range of delivery and benefits that the kids get in school.

Ms FORREST - You train the teachers?

Mr ABBOTT - We are trainers and there are other people who train them, but they are teachers.

Ms FORREST - The teachers deliver it?

Mr ABBOTT - Yes, the teachers deliver it.

Mr FREETH - Having seen it happen in schools, it is like, 'Who's going to do Road Ready?' and it is almost a chore. They will often leave it until the last week of school to try to keep the kids there. There is the intention and then there is the delivery of the curriculum. Initially it is highlighting the problem, the fact that in this country there are 1 500-2 000 people killed every year, that road crashes and road trauma are a massive issue that we need to become aware of. If it was somewhere else where we were losing those numbers of people or having those sorts of injuries, we would be up in arms. Imagine if it was soldiers off around the world, but we seem to have become desensitised to it. So we are bringing understanding of the issue. Then we have a look at the stats. We try to understand more about who has the crashes, when you are most vulnerable, what time of day, week or month, and age and sex. It is just drilling into it a bit further to get a better understanding. If we know more about types of crashes and what they will be most vulnerable to as new drivers then we are more likely to be able to do something about it. So it is building awareness building and knowledge and then understanding that driving is quite a complex task. A lot of people think, 'As soon as I can physically do it, I'm there'. We give them a simulated activity that they love, where you have multitasking and you are hitting the sensory overload and getting them to understand and then pulling it apart and saying, 'These are the three basic skills that you're going to need.'

You're going to need x number of hours of practice at minimum to get your physical, cognitive and then your perceptual understanding'. Then we are looking at the fact that you can have all that stuff in place but at the end of the day one thing that can throw it completely out of the window is risk that you might take. So we are looking at intentional and unintentional risks, ones they might be more prone to, things that they think are more risky than others, and then having a look the major risks that are faced by new drivers, such as speed. We have reframed speed in terms of the fact that most of us have no innate fear of speed in the horizontal plane. We will sit in our car at 100 kph, which is essentially a lounge room where all sensations of speed are masked, but if you ask them to walk across a plank between two buildings two storeys up they'd say, 'Oh no, I'd have a different feeling about that'. We drill into that in terms of what it is. Is it the fear of falling? No it's not. The fall won't hurt you; it will be the collision at the bottom that does so what you are fearing is pain. So we understand that we have a fear of speed in this direction, 9.8 ms^2 , but not by just turning it on the side. The equivalent of a 40 kph crash is only a two-storey building and 100 kph crash is a 13-storey building. Would you ever consider driving your car off a 13-storey building? No, but you will drive voluntarily and with no fear at 100 kph. So re-framing speed is a big one.

Drugs and alcohol: we have the fatal vision goggles where they experience impairment with these goggles that we use. Would any of you walk out and try and cross the road with these things on? No way. Then we were getting them to throw a ball and they consistently throw it two meters to the left of the person sitting straight in front of them. So this is the experiential stuff; if you thought you were throwing the ball there then where were you driving your car? Into a tree.

CHAIR - What would your alcohol reading be with those goggles?

Mr ABBOTT - We purchase them at different levels.

Mr FREETH - We use a 0.06, which is just over, and then 0.17 to 0.2 and then a narcotics one, which is like a night vision impairment. Then from that you ask what is the difference between your doing that activity just now and if you were under the influence of drugs or alcohol. At least their decision-making is still intact but if they were actually impaired they would then be liable to make bad decisions about when they are taking a passenger or choosing to drive their car and all that.

Ms FORREST - What is the response of the students after doing that? What sort of feedback do they provide?

Mr FREETH - They love it. Really the whole key to the two-day course is to take them on an emotional rollercoaster, to really experience the highs and lows and understanding that this is life and driving is a part of life. So they enjoy that but then it gets pulled back into the anticipated regret stuff, which we know is quite successful psychologically in behaviour change.

We are looking at those key factors, drugs and alcohol, and then hazards. Since we have been doing the novice work our understanding of low-risk driving has grown enormously. This came from New South Wales, a lot of it out of motorcycle research and education because these guys know that if they get it wrong they are history. So they have been working at a level much more in advance of what we have. They do the

whole thing about pro-actively having a space or a bubble that you can use to not only create your own safety but also deal with other people having a bad day or making mistakes or deliberately doing dumb things, which essentially keeps you both safe, and then how you can create and maintain and protect it. Then once you have the understanding of that concept we give them video sequences where we get them to look at what they are doing. Whenever you see something present or capable just call out because that will require a response from you, whether it be to lift off the accelerator slowly or even cover your brake or move within your lane - the three keys things to keep your bubble intact. Initially they don't see things. What we know from the research on this is that their minds have been set up for walking pace, so we tend to scan a couple of metres in front of us, naturally.

Ms FORREST - They cannot see dirty washing on the floor.

Laughter.

Mr FREETH - Hold on to that for a minute. Do the first one and ask whether they saw the pedestrian on that crossing when they were up the road and generally they'll answer that they did not. We need to be retraining their brains to scan further in front. Also, we know that new drivers tend to scan the left quadrant more vigilantly than they do the right quadrant, which explains a lot of give-way-to-right crashes. It is actually a perceptual error.

Ms FORREST - Do you know why that is? Has that been studied?

Mr FREETH - No, we do not know why.

Mr ABBOTT - I believe that it is a lot to do with sitting in the passenger seat for all their experience of driving. When you are in the left-hand side of a car, you are more likely to look to the left. When they are moved over to the right, in my opinion, they are still looking over there.

Mr FREETH - Again, we are discovering that there habit pattern errors that need to be addressed, which again gets back to the quality of the instructor or supervisor. Who is setting your brain up for how to deal with this sort of stuff?

CHAIR - How effective is that if teachers are reluctant to do this and so do it at the end of term?

Mr FREETH - I can guarantee that schools are not doing it at the level that we are. This has evolved through our learning and being at the leading edge of this national project which the rest of the world is looking at.

Mr ABBOTT - In my opinion again, unlike practice, anything in road safety is better than nothing. Even if they are only taking on board little bits of this stuff, no-one else in Australia is doing this course. I believe it is better than nothing.

CHAIR - That is right. You use videos. Are you quite extensively explaining the risks and things like that?

Mr FREETH - Yes, definitely. For example with speed, there the theory about you wash off half your speed in the last five minutes that people are being bombarded with, but we need to show them. Have you seen the pizza man video where the guy steps out in front of the car?

Mr ABBOTT - It is a Victorian TV commercial.

Mr HARRISS - I don't think so.

Mr FREETH - In it, a guy walks out with a pizza and a car appears from the left and cleans him up. Then it goes to a trauma surgeon who explains what happened in that crash with a car travelling at 72 in a 60 kph zone. He says that if the driver had been travelling at the speed limit the guy would not have been hit at all, just received a nasty fright.

Mr ABBOTT - There is a variety of resources. We use television commercials. We believe that television commercials, if they are debriefed and in the right format, work quite well.

Mr FREETH - Scare tactics alone don't work.

Mr ABBOTT - If you are in your loungeroom eating your dinner and see such a commercial before it goes to some other program we are not big believers that that works. But if you are in forum and you break it down by talking about your feelings and why it happened, we think it does have benefit.

CHAIR - You are probably concerned about copyright, with that

Mr ABBOTT - That depends. We have a number of different resources. For example, some of them are TAC television commercials so we got permission to use them. The Road Ready program itself has a resource pack with videos. We got some psychological-type studies from America that show different things and hazards.

Mr FREETH - The one that we use is where they have two teams passing a basketball around. I don't know if have seen it.

Ms FORREST - Yes.

Mr ABBOTT - That is a great one.

Ms FORREST - It is fantastic.

Mr FREETH - It just blows the kids away.

Mr ABBOTT - The kids think they have it all.

Ms FORREST - And they insist you play it on a different video the second time.

Mr ABBOTT - That is why it is always good if one person sees it.

CHAIR - Would it be possible for you to make some of this material available? We would be quite prepared to pay for it. Do you sell packs?

Mr ABBOTT - I suppose the issue there is the IP of it and as you have met Eddie Wheeler and some members of the ACT Government, we will need to contact them and ask if it is okay to provide it. So long as they're happy for us to do that that won't be a problem.

Ms FORREST - Have you used the one with the basketball gorilla?

Mr ABBOTT - Yes, at the end of hazards. Our main message with hazards is that to detect hazards you need to be able to concentrate and anticipate. At the end we say, 'Got that?', and they go, 'Yeah, I understand all that'. 'Right, let's have a little test, let's see how well you can concentrate on this basketball video and count the number of passes'.

Ms FORREST - I was sucked in the first time I saw it.

Mr ABBOTT - Yes. It's a perfect one, and at the end of it there's a bit of a throwaway, 'Well, I hope there are no gorillas walking around when you're driving'. As Rick said, we need to take them on that rollercoaster because there needs to be the serious stuff and a bit of fun stuff as well as something to make them think.

Mr FREETH - If their minds have not been set up the right way, they will miss things. I think that's the big message about that activity, you might think you got it sussed.

Ms FORREST - I was disappointed with myself that I didn't see the gorilla. You always think you're pretty good, we have this optimism bias, haven't we? I knew something was going on, but you follow the instruction, you watch the basketball and you count the passes and then they ask who saw the gorilla.

Mr ABBOTT - Where that's a problem with driving, is we're told before you change lanes, look for any cars. You look for cars and hit a motorcyclist and he says, 'You saw me and you still crashed into me', because we look for a car and there wasn't a car there, even though we saw that motorcyclist, and that's what it is showing.

Mr FREETH - It's another habit pattern error.

Mr ABBOTT - You probably saw the gorilla, but you were set up not to look for gorillas, you were set up to look for basketball passes.

Mr HARRISS - Doesn't Ruth's most recent comment raise an issue? She's watched it, she has been trained for this sort of stuff in the past. You're delivering programs to pre-learners, but what about those of us who've been on the road for a good few years and if any one asked what we think of our driving, we'd say, 'Oh, pretty good, haven't had a crash for 10 years'. Isn't there a case for having the programs which you deliver every five or 10 years from a compulsory point of view?

Mr ABBOTT - Absolutely.

Mr FREETH - We'd reach our road safety targets if we did that.

Ms FORREST - How confident are you of that?

Mr FREETH - Yes, absolutely.

Ms FORREST - Would you mandate it every five years on licence renewal?

Mr HARRISS - I think that's really powerful.

Mr FREETH - For starters, I reckon probably only 2 per cent of people, if that, actually drive at low risk.

Mr ABBOTT - I can guarantee if Rick and I drive, we will never cause a crash. Never. We might be in one, but we will never cause one.

Mr HARRISS - Because you are aware of all of these hazards, self-inflicted or by negligence and time. There is a range of other things that you're aware of.

Mr ABBOTT - Also, as Rick said, we put a bubble around our cars to allow for other motorists making mistakes. If we can't see five seconds ahead of ourselves, we will slow down. The reason we slow down if we can't see five seconds ahead of ourselves, is that if something happens and someone enters our space, we have time to react to it. Therefore by slowing down before anyone can get in that space, we are allowing for something. It could be that someone has a heart attack and they come on to our side of the road. You have to allow for that. It's not necessarily people being stupid, it's things that go wrong.

CHAIR - Or people coming across because they're inattentive.

Mr HARRISS - Or a mechanical malfunction with your car, out of your control.

CHAIR - A great risk these days is what's going to happen with people coming towards you, what are they going to do?

Mr ABBOTT - Exactly. Rick was saying that we talk to the pre-learners about the highest number of crashes for novice drivers because they are different from us. We will have different crashes from P-plate drivers. The P-plate driver number one crash is coming up and wanting to turn right, seeing a car coming but not having the experience to judge their distance or speed, and making the turn anyway.

Mr FREETH - And usually they have one or two passengers.

Mr ABBOTT - Whereas for the rest of the population, our number one crash is rear-enders. There are different crashes for different people. What we are trying to get to the young people is that when you're driving along and you see someone coming towards you with their right-hand indicator on, they may not be able to judge your distance and speed. What should you do so that idiot doesn't turn in front of you and you hit them? It is going to be their fault, but if someone's dead, who cares whose fault it is?

Mr FREETH - But if you backed off, covered your brake, you have taken reaction time out. If you have buffered, then you might still have the crash but it would be less severe so the consequences are less.

CHAIR - Even if you have the right of way it is not a good idea to insist on it.

Mr FREETH - You are dead right.

Ms FORREST - There is one other thing that is an argument that has been put for that. We talk about the two-second gap when you are out on the open road -

Mr FREETH - We talk about three.

Ms FORREST - Yes, but on Tasmanian roads you cannot see even one second ahead half the time. The risk is that someone is going to come into your gap from behind all the time and so you are constantly readjusting back because you are allowing the gap, particularly if it is five seconds, so Harry Hurry is going to come from behind and get into your gap so you are going to have to drop back again.

Mr ABBOTT - We had two arguments to that.

Mr FREETH - That is why we have to change people's minds.

Mr ABBOTT - We went out for a drive in Sydney in the middle of the day and we counted the number of cars that entered our gap and left our gap. In a 20-minute drive through Sydney it was 17-18, and the same number that come into your gap also leave it so you can make that time back up again. We also show the kids a little PowerPoint presentation. If a car entered your space every 20 seconds for a 30-minute drive, so every 20 seconds they entered and did not leave so you have to constantly back off, you would lose 90 seconds in the whole journey. We started off saying you actually lose half a song but we reframed it to say you actually gain half a song so you can listen to an extra half song on your journey. So if you back off every time they enter you get an extra half song - 90 seconds extra.

Ms FORREST - We talk about speed limits on roads but people say that it will take them another 20 minutes to get to their destination. In fact no-one who is trying to push the change actually looks at the reality of those times because often it is only a matter of seconds. Is that a way we need to approach it, that if there is a change or if you adopt these sort of practices it will actually add half a song?

Mr FREETH - You just have to look at the underlying psychology of what drives us and why we get upset about those things. Someone pushing in or it taking us so long are coming from childhood programming and that is where we have to go even further. Why do I get annoyed when someone pushes in front of me? It probably goes back to kindergarten -

Mr ABBOTT - The tuck shop.

Laughter.

Mr FREETH - We never understand why but we experience an emotional reaction to that, so we see the road as a race rather than a network.

Mr ABBOTT - The road is not a queue; the road is a network. We are all going to different places and we all come from different places so why say that someone has pushed in? This is not a line.

CHAIR - They have as much right to be there as we do. It is a matter of courtesy and encouraging people to be courteous and to actually make way for people doing that because they probably need to get into another lane to turn right a bit further up. If they cannot do that then they will take risks and it could cause damage to others.

Mr FREETH - That is why we have to challenge people's attitudes in thinking otherwise they just continue to repeat the program. They do not understand. They think they are free thinking but they are not, they are driven by -

Ms FORREST - Road-rage stuff.

Mr FREETH - Yes, these inbuilt programs.

Mr HARRISS - Wouldn't that be a major obstacle for mature-age drivers to submit our ourselves to, because we think we have been driving for so long we are invincible.

Mr ABBOTT - Maybe you need to look at changing their behaviours and not their attitudes. For example, a fixed speed-camera does not change anyone's attitude but it changes their behaviour at that particular place. Young drivers think they are invincible too, so we have to look sometimes at just the behaviour and not necessarily the attitude. In a perfect world we would change people's attitudes. It is much harder to change than their behaviour.

Ms FORREST - Some are very ingrained when they are living within a family where an attitude prevails and they see their parents driving in that way.

Mr ABBOTT - They sit in the passenger seat and see dad speeding or whatever, 'I'm late. Okay, it is all right to speed when you are late'.

Mr FREETH - But having said that, if we are not going to change that behaviour there is also an element of harm minimisation for the rest of the community that can come into this. At least if you understand a bit more about low-risk driving, though you might drive 10 kph over the speed limit, you will buffer, you will actually respond to hazards earlier, you will do some things that reduce your risk even though you are still not behaving totally in the way that we would like. You are still going to have the benefit. That is where for the old heads we are perhaps teaching them about how to manage their risk better.

Mr ABBOTT - We do lots of work with harm minimisation but we have to be very careful never say to whoever is a participant that it is okay to speed so long as you do X, Y, or Z. We work on the sober driver program; it is okay to drink, just do not drive. You have to be careful the way you state it but harm minimisation is a huge part of our programs.

Mr HARRISS - With this national program that you are working on what is the desired end result of that? Who is driving the policy or what has been the catalyst for it and what sort of sort result it has got?

Mr ABBOTT - It has a long history in that John Anderson, seven or eight years ago, came out publicly and said, 'I want every young person to do an advanced driver program'. He said, 'I did one when I was a kid and I reckon every young person should do it'. We were a bit floored that he said everyone should do an advanced driver program because we know research says that advanced driving is not good for young people. Initially Ford and Holden jumped on board and said 'Yes, we would like to sponsor that' so that all young people in Australia drive a Ford or a Holden, so it got a bit of momentum from the car makers. But what has come out of it is that ATSB, the RTA and VicRoads got together and said, yes, this has some legs. Would it not be great if a program were available to every young person in Australia, no matter where they come from. It has to be done at a time after they have got their Ps because they have to have some experience to draw on to do the program. So they did packets of research, both here and overseas. They brought experts in from overseas and within Australia and really set up a good framework. They then tendered for a team of curriculum writers. Two other people and ourselves got that contract and we are writing that curriculum. It is going to be a nine-hour program. Three hours will be in class, three hours in the car and then three in class again.

Mr FREETH - In-class is an informal workshop atmosphere.

Mr ABBOTT - The intent is to reduce the number and severity of crashes. That is the aim.

Mr HARRISS - So the aspiration is that it will be available but not mandated?

Mr ABBOTT - I do not think that they can speak for the States on this sort of a policy. Their desire is to write the program, then trial it with 26 000 young people, half in New South Wales and half in Victoria, half of the young people do it and half of them do not, and then evaluate it. It will be the biggest evaluated road safety program in the world. Then they might say that by doing this program we have evaluated that there is a 5 per cent less chance of having a crash.

Ms FORREST - How many years are they going to monitor them?

Mr ABBOTT - Initially it was 18 months. Everything has blown out so I would not be surprised if that blows out as well. My understanding is then that the Government will then own this program

CHAIR - The Federal Government?

Mr ABBOTT - The Federal Government at this stage owns it. They will own this program and then it will be up to negotiations with States. My understanding is that they would not have the power to say to Tasmania that you must do this for your P-platers.

Ms FORREST - With the in-car component, the three hours in a car, what sort of things are happening at that point?

Mr ABBOTT - Total low-risk driving. Two young people and one coach go out. In the first drive the coach will sit up front observing rather than having a checklist. Then it is an

opportunity to sit in the back and let the young people drive, going through all the low-risk things - the safety bubble, hazard recognition, hazard response, gap selection.

CHAIR - You have given us a full outline of the Road Ready program, have you finished that?

Mr FREETH - You got to hazards but you did not get to choices.

CHAIR - You mentioned hazards and then the video sequences.

Mr FREETH - There are a couple of other modules.

Mr ABBOTT - Three more.

Mr FREETH - Yes, that was re-training their brains for hazard recognition and response. That is followed by choice and decision-making, getting them to understand that sometimes their behaviours are not always in line with their beliefs.

Ms FORREST - Public health issue.

Mr FREETH - Then strategies to manage difficult situations that they might find themselves in, so dilemma things.

CHAIR - It is very good.

Mr FREETH - Then practice, the importance of practice in all conditions and overcoming whatever obstacles might get thrown at them like it is too wet, it is too dark, it is too busy. There is some good video on that as pictures are worth 1 000 words in helping them to understand. The classic line is that kids need practice not excuses.

Ms FORREST - It is hard to organise the fog to practise in, isn't it?

Mr FREETH - Yes.

Then putting it all back into perspective. A lot of it has been about independence and understanding that a huge amount of responsibility goes with your licence and you could lose it. So explain the -

Ms FORREST - Do you encourage them to value their licence?

Mr FREETH - A lot of people think that we run this course to help them get through the Road Rules test. They are two separate things and the Road Rules test can be done either after, before or during that course because in the course we do not teach Road Rules. When a young person applies to do the course they are sent the information to start studying the Road Rules because we tell them in all publications we are not helping them get through the Road Rules test. You have to know the rules, we are just looking at the road safety and the responsibilities associated with getting a licence.

CHAIR - What is involved in the provisional course?

Mr FREETH - I suppose if you look at training and facilitation, in the learner course or the Road Ready program there is quite a large aspect of training or instruction because these people have never legally driven a car before. A lot of the scenarios we are talking about we have to put in their heads. Whereas when we get into the provisional course it is a facilitated driving workshop and when we train our facilitators we tell them the most important thing is to shut up every now and again because it is about the young people talking to each other. The premise behind that is that young people are always told not to speed by their teachers, their parents so if a couple of old fellows like Rick and I go in there and say don't speed they think, 'Here we go again'.

In all of our programs we get a young person sitting over here saying, 'Yeah, I do drag racing' whatever and then a young person over here saying, 'You dickhead, why do you do that?' Totally different. Once we can get them talking to each other like that -

Ms FORREST - Do you put boys and girls together?

Mr FREETH - Yes, but we try not to have friendship groups. We tried it in schools and things like that before but it doesn't work as well in friendship groups. The whole thing is we have moved them from school-based education to adult education and they really appreciate that they are being treated like adults. They have made a decision to come because they don't have to come. They are given some carrots to do it and they are treated like adults. As I said, we say it's a check-up from the neck up when they have been driving for six months. We are getting the young people to talk about common issues they are finding and then we try to come up with solutions. We get the young people to debate what solutions can be found. It is getting the young people to come up with common problems and possible solutions, directed by the facilitator.

CHAIR - How many do you usually have in each group?

Mr FREETH - In a perfect world we would have 12, but because funding is an issue we have 18 in a group. If the funding were available we would certainly recommend no more than 12.

Mr ABBOTT - Ten to 12 is ideal.

CHAIR - Is the age group about 18 or 19?

Mr FREETH - You must have been on your P-plates for six months so most of them are 18 or 19-year-olds but you can get P-plates much older than that.

CHAIR - I thought it was compulsory.

Mr FREETH - No. The Road Ready is, so the pre-learner is compulsory. This one is optional so therefore there has to be a carrot for this one. The carrot is that you can take your P-plates off your car, so instead of having your P-plates on your car for three years you only have them on for six months and you get an additional four-point demerit allowance.

Mr ABBOTT - You are still on a provision licence but you don't have to display it, hence the 'P off'.

Ms FORREST - I appreciate your explanation of the extra four points, because in my mind giving someone an extra four points says, 'Okay, you've got four points, you can be a bit lax now. You have a bit of room for error'. I appreciate that it is putting it back to where it was, but has consideration been given to perhaps leaving it at four points but giving them some other financial incentive such as saying that when they next renew their licence there will be a half-price reduction or something like that? Do you think that is an issue?

Mr ABBOTT - I think it is an issue both for the Government and for the young people. I think the Government is trying to run these programs at as low a cost as possible. Under the current set-up the cost to government is nothing. For the 'P off' program or the provisional program, we charge the young people to come to the program, so they are paying us directly. The Government does not give us a cent for the program, therefore if the Government was giving a financial incentive it would stop because it would be costing the Government money. That would be the disincentive for the Government. If you are saying to a young person, 'Do the program and in two-and-a-half years' time your licence will be a bit cheaper', I don't think kids think two-and-a-half years ahead. If an insurance company were to say, 'We'll give you half-price insurance for the next five years', or something like that, that might be different.

Ms FORREST - Have you had discussions with insurance companies?

Mr ABBOTT - No, because the ACT Road Safety Trust is funded primarily by the NRMA we couldn't really talk to another insurance company.

CHAIR - I imagine you have encountered the view, particularly from public servants, that this type of course is not worthwhile. We discussed this before. Are you quite definite in your views that the young people benefit from it and are not blase?

Mr ABBOTT - We would be a bit concerned about hanging our hat on saying that the 'P off' course is the be-all and end-all because there is no in-car component. We have come around to think that to be really effective you need that in-car component. The ACT does not have the in-car component.

CHAIR - What about the Road Ready program?

Mr ABBOTT - It doesn't have an in-car component because the kids don't have a learner licence.

CHAIR - I know, but what is the attitude and receptiveness of the participants?

Mr ABBOTT - Absolutely, without question.

CHAIR - We have been told by people, that young people may not be receptive.

Mr FREETH - I think one of the most encouraging things that we hear from participants is, 'I didn't know that I didn't know that stuff'. I think that is the area that we would like to tackle, the unintentional risk which is still a factor. There are the 10 percenters that you will never change so they are going to have to be dealt with in other ways. There is a

huge percentage of people who, with better information or greater awareness of the situation, will change their behaviour.

CHAIR - I just don't understand the attitude of the people in the public service who say, 'Kids of that age think they know everything. They're not going to take much notice of it'. You have proved just the opposite and that is very encouraging.

Ms FORREST - Just going back to that point about giving them the extra four demerit points, have you heard them say, 'Oh great, I'll be right now' or anything like that?

Mr ABBOTT - All you have to think about is why they come. The reason they come is that they have lost two or three points, so they come and get an extra four. I would be concerned if they said that at the end of the program, but you hear that at the beginning of all programs.

Ms FORREST - But not at the end?

Mr ABBOTT - I would be concerned if that happened. They all come and I would be very surprised if they walked out with that opinion.

Ms FORREST - How do they come to be there? Obviously it is self-selection, so are you getting the kids who have parents who are really dedicated to their kids' safety and wellbeing and say, 'You're going to go and do this'?

Mr ABBOTT - Maybe 10 per cent.

Ms FORREST - Is it ever suggested that it should be that once a young person on their P-plate has come to the attention of the law, for whatever reason, there be a requirement to go and do it?

Mr ABBOTT - We had a discussion with South Australian Government about that. They were looking at doing it and we went over and talked to them about that. I think they ended up doing something like that in South Australia. If someone has lost a certain amount of points on their P1 they could not progress to the next level until they did some sort of road safety course.

Mr FREETH - So they made it punitive.

Mr ABBOTT - Yes. I think it is good that it is not in the ACT at this stage. Lots and lots of P-platers hate wearing their Ps - they hate it. So we are giving them an incentive in saying, 'You've already worn them for six months. You have already had a badge telling people that you are a loser, so if you come and do this program you can chuck them away'.

Mr FREETH - We had a really interesting situation a couple of years back where we had funding from the ACT Government to run a campaign to promote the course. We did a save with a mate campaign; if you booked on with a friend you got a half-price course. We saw the course numbers double and we saw a different sort of kid coming along. They were just the good kids who had not lost any points but thought, 'It is \$35 so we will come along'. The great thing was they were realising how much risk they had that

they did not know they had. So we tackled another area of road safety through that. Generally kids turn up and the majority of them have lost points. 'Would you be here if you were not going to get any extra points?' No. But you will get some that have not lost points, kids who are just getting a bit of insurance up their sleeves. When we saw a much increased number of those kids we realised that we were still missing quite a few of the good kids.

Ms FORREST - So what is your sex breakdown?

Mr ABBOTT - 52/48 was our last reporting - 52 males.

Mr FREETH - We are really trying to get the males up because the girls were outnumbering the males and quite significantly for a while.

Mr ABBOTT - The boys are the ones who are wanting the points.

Mr HARRISS - Even if you attract the registrations for that reason, you have still got them and they walk out having been trained.

Mr ABBOTT - Who cares why they come. But having said that, if we were given the task of rewriting the current provisional one in the ACT as well as pushing for an in-car component, we would push for what we have been developing as an on-line survey that young people do before they come to any of our courses. It says, 'Right, in the last 10 times that you have driven, have you ever done X, Y or Z?'. It prints out a computer-generated individual risk profile for that person. So Don walks in and we go, 'Don, this was yours and your greatest risk is following too close to the car in front'. So it is then tailored to the individual. Even with these good kids that thought they do not take too many risks, if they were getting this individual thing saying, 'You are at risk of doing this, this and this', it would change the dynamic of the programs.

CHAIR - So, having had a contract with the South Australian Government, I assume you would be available if any other government or department wanted to contract you to have programs such as this in other States?

Mr ABBOTT - My only concern would be the IP of the actual courses, so long as it was our own stuff. A lot of the Road Ready stuff is not owned by us. That would be my only concern but, yes, we work with the New South Wales and Victorian governments. It is an exciting time. The thing is that in Australia we have made all the easy gains with road safety.

Ms FORREST - That is the thing; what is the next silver bullet?

Mr ABBOTT - Exactly. You talk about the three Es: education, enforcement and engineering. We were down in Victoria recently and this guy was a traffic cop and he asked if the three Es included eradication.

Laughter.

CHAIR - I cannot understand why other States have not done what you are doing now, even with some variations. Not to have any course like this, on the basis that young people think they know everything, is defeatism.

Mr HARRISS - Politically driven because it would be seen as unpopular.

Ms FORREST - When you debated this motion to establish this committee I pulled up the OECD report and there was no distinction between advanced driver and defensive driver, and even defensive driving programs would obviously be different. They are basing all their opinions on this research that is not really being critiqued and it is not very comparable. We need to start to start looking at it afresh and know what the options are. We need to be looking at specific things that have been evaluated on their own merits rather than throwing everything in the mixing pot and saying it does not work.

Mr ABBOTT - We run a number of different programs that you might consider looking at. We run one called the Streetwise Program. In any community there is a cohort of drivers that will always drive unlicensed. In the ACT I would suggest we are a little bit higher because it is a bit more rigorous and more expensive to get your licence in the ACT. The ACT Government have given funding to us to run programs. We actually target young drivers that we know are driving unlicensed. We put them through a little program, lots of breaks and all that and ram in some road rules and a little bit of safety. We go to the juvenile detention centres, the drug and alcohol rehabs, youth drop-in centres and so on. It has had some really good results. Through that something like 50 per cent have then gone on, and we have some funding for it, to do the full Road Ready program and to get their licence legally. It might be worth looking at. Even though they are only a small percentage unlicensed drivers are involved in a lot of road crashes.

CHAIR - Thank you very much, Simon and Rick. We do appreciate that and keep up your great work.

Mr ABBOTT - Thank you. We will do two things from this: get the evaluation report to Nathan, and find out if the Government is happy for us to release some of the resources to you to have a look at.

Mr FREETH - Looking at those resources in isolation might not be such a gain. The context in which they are delivered is probably more important than the resources themselves.

Mr ABBOTT - We have had people from South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria sitting in on our courses. Government people come in and have a look at it and see what merit there is.

Ms FORREST - How often do you run them?

Mr ABBOTT - Every day.

Mr ABBOTT - We run probably four a week of the learner program and two a week for the provisional program. Our website has all the courses listed, dates and times, so all you would need to do is go into the website and you would see when the learner program is and the 'P... off' program and just double them up.

CHAIR - The P... off one does not sound very welcoming.

Mr ABBOTT - Ps off your car. It was difficult to get that business name registered but we got it there.

THE DISCUSSION CONCLUDED.