

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

ROAD SAFETY INQUIRY

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ROAD SAFETY

Background:

Road safety has to be put into an historical context. For all of recorded human history, people have travelled the world, by foot, by animal, by boat. Before cars became affordable and available in quantity, people relied on public transport, or slower forms such as horses and push-bikes. There was a different MENTALITY. People lived to a timetable, or they allowed more time in travel arrangements. Roads did not allow for speed, vehicles were not very fast, and there was not much private traffic anyway. Even so, there were still crashes. The old bullock tracks, even when sealed, forced motorists to drive slowly, especially if stuck behind a truck.

Now people travel further, faster, and more often, and they can afford it - those with jobs anyway. Historically, modern transport in all its forms, is an aberration, the product of the INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION.

A combination of inventiveness, access to coal and iron ore, control of financial capital, the enclosure of the commons, colonialism, masses of unemployed and landless people in the cities, and existing global trade networks created a system capable of mass production of standardised products and parts, engineered with precision.

Before cars, there were pushbikes, and it was the availability and popularity of bikes that started the push for better roads. Early cars were hand-built, and only affordable by the very-well-off. Henry Ford changed that with his PRODUCTION LINE, specialisation and conveyer belts. He also made sure his workers had high enough wages to buy his cars. So he got his money back, as well as creating a market for an affordable private vehicle. People who couldn't afford housing could buy a car. This also made the "workforce" more mobile.

The car, however, was a direct threat to public transport and the social mentality that went with it. Public transport had to be destroyed in order to open up the roads for cars. Transport systems were bought up and shut down. Publicly-owned systems were allowed to run down.

Cars promoted images of individualism, freedom and convenience, but the market would not have been successful without CHEAP FUEL, which encouraged a rapid growth in road traffic generally, as mass production of commodities required a wide distribution network.

The demand for a better road infrastructure had both good and bad consequences. The connection between cities and rural areas allowed access to more resources for all, but with increased car use, people would not wait for

deliveries but would go themselves to the larger centres. This increased traffic congestion, the demand for city car parking spaces, and more frequent crashes. This is not a new problem, but it shows that the growth of technology has not been accompanied by a growth in the authorities' awareness of the social LIABILITY of this form of transport.

Tasmania:

Even here, it is clear that the motoring lobby has always been influential, or been allowed to be. Whenever there was conflict between public and private transport, the MOTORISTS generally won. Tram lines were pulled up, trolley cables pulled down, passenger rail services terminated, bridges built without consideration for alternatives, such as trains and trams - still the case.

The excuses have always been ECONOMIC. The bean-counters in their silos were not encouraged to work across the administration and become aware of the pros and cons, that a saving here could lead to higher costs elsewhere, that narrowly-based decisions had broader social consequences. The social good cannot be metricated.

Cars have totally changed URBAN PLANNING, destroying public spaces, and spawning the car-dependent suburban sprawl, and multi-storey private shopping malls. It's ironical that public transport systems were being closed down just when technological improvements were about to make clean, electric transport more comfortable. With proper promotion and prioritisation, trams, trolley buses and trains could have been successful. Instead of putting resources into public transport, governments CHOSE to promote roads, and this has been a never-ending waste of resources..

Motorists demand better roads, government provides them. This produces a sense of ENTITLEMENT, especially as governments have made no effort to limit the power of cars, ones that are often promoted with names denoting strength and status. It is not rational to allow cars capable of racetrack speeds on public roads. This encourages irresponsibility and narcissism. For many, the sense of self is tied to the car. People complain about being held up^{by} cyclists, pedestrians, trains, other drivers, police, and even traffic lights. The government obliges by building more lanes, more over and under passes, more bypasses.

Governments spend billions on roads, promoting it as improved safety, when really it's about looking after mates in the construction industry. Better roads do not make better drivers, quite the reverse. They encourage

speed and risk-taking. People under-estimate the time and distance required to overtake another vehicle, especially a B-double, travelling at 110 kph or more. The competitive nature of CAPITALISM flows onto the roads. The personal mobility capsule is the product of rivalry, not solidarity. The government is complicit in this by promoting new works, like the Brighton bypass, as "saving" ten minutes travelling time on the Hobart-Launceston run, and at what cost? This is about spin, not road safety.

Safety:

The Government is not serious about REDUCING the road toll. Look at the reaction to Covid-19. Fast action was taken to avert a massive toll, yet the massacre on the roads is regarded as a side-show. Statistically, the more cars on the road, and the faster they are driven, the more chance of fatal crashes. With modern cars fitted out like a mobile living room, the increased level of distraction increases the odds.

The government should be REDUCING the number of cars on the road, REDUCING the speed limits, REDUCING the number of visitors bringing cars on the ferries, REDUCING the amount of money spent on roads, REDUCING the power of cars. Instead it continues to promote car-based tourism, motor sports, bigger ferries (Bass Strait and Bruny Island), while messing up rural public transport.

No amount of education will prevent crashes. At certain speeds, a driver's reaction time is too slow, and the car has too much momentum to avert a crash. Two cars approaching one another at 110 k will meet at 220. Modern cars do not provide protection for the occupants. This is the fault of the manufacturer, and of the government for not demanding higher standards. Crumple zones crumple occupants.

Ultimately, road safety requires a RADICAL change in thinking. A car is a piece of industrial machinery, and should be treated as such. It is more dangerous because it is mobile. It is not a toy. If a worker is killed or injured by machinery in a work place, there is an inquiry, and an attempt to avoid another occurrence. If car crashes were treated as industrial accidents, and the roads closed until the cause was rectified, there would be an outcry. For example, people who go sight-seeing are easily distractable. Tourists should not be allowed to drive. People are not allowed to wander around a work-site, especially without hard hats.

The Port Arthur Massacre led to national gun control. People were prepared to sacrifice a privilege to ensure a safer society. Will people sacrifice their cars? More likely they will protest with rallies for "freedom"

(no social responsibility) , and "Don't lockdown our transport", "Protect our lifestyle".

Vulnerability:

The whole transport system is based on the availability of petroleum. Being an island, Tasmania is especially VULNERABLE, and is at the end of a supply chain that begins in the most politically volatile region of the world. We are dispensible. With the closing down of virtually all Australian oil refineries, we are dependent on foreign facilities, with their own vulnerability to foreign influences. Any break in supply would shut down the whole state, making Covid-19 look like a picnic. We do not have enough reserves to permit a soft landing.

Therefore, the SENSIBLE and LOGICAL response would be to educate people in the need to limit their use of fuel, introduce rationing to build up reserves, encourage more localised development that reduces vehicle movements, change the import/export trade to improve self-reliance, and improve public transport. This is only the beginning, and governments have not even begun to consider the NECESSITY for a u-turn, and therefore they are not even slowing down.

The Economy:

Governments love to hold enquiries because they can avoid making decisions. Then they can take their time "studying" any reports, and then maybe make some token effort. Putting more police on the road is like chasing a bolting horse. The main problem is in PARLIAMENT. The ideology of neoliberalism and market determinism is responsible for our social problems. The idolatry of the economy is another barrier.

It is not mere cynicism that car crashes are "good for the economy". The economy is simply a measure of certain financial transactions. It does not reflect their true value, or the health of society, or the state of relationships, or anything else that is important. There are no goods and bads. Therefore all car crashes, involving police, fire, ambulance, and clean-up personnel all add to THE ECONOMY, as do all the doctors, nurses, funeral directors, florists, insurers, chemists and equipment providers.

In a normal world, all these would be considered "costs", to be reduced as much as possible, a diversion of resources from other priorities. Covid is responsible for fewer deaths, but because of contagion, emergency measures are taken. Car crashes, with deaths, ongoing hospitalisation,

and trauma, are not regarded as an emergency, just like homelessness, unemployment, mental health, and other social crises are not. Surely this indicates a mental ABERRATION among decision-makers!

Global Climate Emergency:

All of the above is re-inforced by the GCE, with the urgent necessity to rapidly decarbonise. We do not have the luxury of time. Attention is given to electricity generation, but transport is more crucial. We cannot continue to pollute. This is not about "jobs", or profits, or lifestyle. This is about SURVIVAL, not a mere inconvenience. There's no indication that anyone in power is taking this seriously. Is it any wonder there is a mental health epidemic? We are dancing blindfolded on the edge of the abyss, to the siren song of "growth, growth, growth". If we leave it long enough, the road safety issue will resolve itself. There'll be nobody driving. But in the meantime, a lot can be done to move society towards resilience.

Suggestions:

- education program to show people the NECESSITY for drastic action; road toll not acceptable, avoidable human suffering, hospital system close to collapse, fuel vulnerability, global climate emergency, need to reset priorities and redirect resources
- get cars off the road; fuel rationing to build up strategic reserves, mandatory car pooling starting with commuters, redesign cities to eliminate central car parking, redesign streets to eliminate "rat runs", make travel easier for pedestrians and pushbikes
- increase penalties for non-compliance; permanent confiscation of cars and licences for major offences, resit licence exam for others, zero tolerance for any drug-driving including alcohol, no new licences for under-20's, everyone with a licence more than five years to resit
- disassembly plant to EMPLOY youth in complete dismantling of any vehicles forfeited, parts to be repurposed, sold, or recycled
- buy-back scheme for cars unregistrable, new or old, on- or off-road; refuse to register or continue registration of high performance or

modified vehicles, which may be stored if not bought-back

- ban all motor sports; they send the wrong message, need to save fuel and reduce pollution, also eliminates travel to venues
- ban movement of cars, campervans, mobile homes on Bass Strait ferries; locals not to take vehicles, but can return if already interstate, bus and train connections to ferries, cancel new ferries, no car-based tourism for visitors, no motor bikes either
- ban promotion, advertising and sale of new cars using fossil fuels; stop import of more cars, new or used, including off-road vehicles, trail bikes, ATVs, jet skis and outboard engines (marine equivalents)
- reduce speed limits everywhere; 70 for 'P' platers, 90 on the open road, 50 through cities (on main roads), 30 on others, 5 in shared spaces
- promote bicycle travel through provision of cheap, standard bikes; promote specialist bikes for cargo and passengers for inner-city use
- free public transport; rural bus network (may incorporate mail and general small freight), re-introduction of electric public transport
 - trams, trolley buses, trains
- rail system to be treated as project of state significance; main line to be re-routed for easier grades, straighter runs, branch lines to be rehabilitated and re-opened, inter-city passenger services to be re-instated, general mixed freight services resumed, trial of woodchips as fuel for steam engines

Summary:

Roads cannot be made safe unless speed limits are lowered and car capabilities reduced. There are too many cars on the road, and many journeys could be made by alternative means, if they were provided. Three generations have grown up with cars, and the sense of entitlement is hardening. Any suggestions that curtail motorists' perceived "freedoms" will provoke severe adverse reactions, but roads need to be treated as industrial work zones, or even war zones.

Cars are already destroying public spaces and public attitudes. Society has been redesigned around cars. In the interests of survival, there needs to be a radical change in attitudes, priorities, and social structures. Motorists have to acknowledge that driving is a privilege, not a right, and that a minority of the world's population is using far more than its fair share of the world's resources for a lifestyle that is unsustainable.

However, governments are always the stumbling block. People fought for years to get roll-over protection for tractors, then the government lets in ATVs with no protection! Now, after many unnecessary deaths and serious injuries, the government has accepted the need for change -but not right now. This is the typical attitude; give the markets a free run until the public outcry becomes too big to ignore, and then make minor concessions, or hold another inquiry. No vision, no care, no responsibility.

If all of the above seems harsh, the alternative of business-as-usual will end with total collapse of the system, utter chaos and unnecessary trauma. Technology will not save us. Electric cars can still crash, and they're just as unsafe as a conventional car - and they don't require a change of attitude.

We need to re-organise society, become more self-reliant, more resilient, more sociable. We need a new mentality and a new leadership, but there's no chance of that from the present ideologically-driven government, or the opposition. That's what makes it all so depressingly inevitable.

All previous civilisations have collapsed, even while they were still growing. It's delusional to think we can escape. It will be search-and-rescue, a salvage operation, not growth and prosperity.

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