



TRANSPORT AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Members present:

Mr SR King MP—Chair
Mr JR Martin MP
Mr LL Millar MP
Mr LA Walker MP
Mr TJ Watts MP

Staff present:

Ms D Jeffrey—Committee Secretary

PUBLIC HEARING—INQUIRY INTO THE SUMNERS ROAD INTERCHANGE UPGRADE PROJECT

TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

MONDAY, 23 MAY 2022

Brisbane

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The committee met at 9.00 am.

CHAIR: Good morning. I now declare this public hearing for the committee's inquiry into the Sumners Road Interchange Upgrade project open. Thank you for your interest and your attendance here today. I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay our respects to elders past and present. We are very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, whose lands, winds and waters we all share. My name is Shane King, member for Kurwongbah and chair of the committee. With me here today are Lachlan Millar MP, member for Gregory and deputy chair; James Martin MP, member for Stretton; Les Walker MP, member for Mundingburra; and Trevor Watts MP, member for Toowoomba North. Pat Weir MP is absent from the committee today.

On 29 November 2021, the Transport and Resources Committee resolved to conduct a public works inquiry into the Sumners Road Interchange Upgrade project located in the Brisbane suburb of Sumner. The purpose of today's hearing is to assist the committee with its consideration of the inquiry. The committee's proceedings are proceedings of the parliament of Queensland and are subject to the standing rules and orders of the parliament. As parliamentary proceedings, under the standing orders any person may be excluded from the hearing at the discretion of the chair or by order of the committee. The committee will not require evidence to be given under oath, but I remind witnesses that intentionally misleading the committee is a serious offence. You have previously been provided with a copy of instructions to witnesses, so we will take those as having been read.

The proceedings are being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the parliament's website. Media may be present and will be subject to the chair's direction at all times. The media rules endorsed by the committee are available from committee staff if required. All those present today should note it is possible you might be filmed or photographed during the proceedings by media, and images may also appear on the parliament's website or social media pages. I ask everyone present to turn mobile phones off or to silent mode. I also ask that responses to questions taken on notice today are provided to the committee by 4 pm on Tuesday, 31 May 2022.

COX, Mr Chris, Co-convenor, Brisbane West Bicycle User Group (via teleconference)

CHAIR: Welcome. I invite you to make a short opening statement.

Mr Cox: Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to participate in this public hearing on behalf of West BUG. Road upgrades like the Sumners Road Interchange project are often assessed with a laser-like focus on outcomes for motorists. However, really to get the full benefit of busting congestion in urban areas, we need to create modal shift away from motor vehicles to other forms of transport, including human-scale transport like bicycles and walking. These modes of transport are very useful for short trips in suburban residential areas like Sumner and provide significant benefits to the community in terms of reduced noise and air pollution, reduced traffic congestion, improved health outcomes and more physical activity. It is for this reason that we took a particular interest in motorway upgrades and particularly this Sumners Road Interchange project.

Our primary focus was on improving the north-south Centenary cycleway, which is a primary cycle route between Carole Park and the CBD, to avoid what was previously a significant dogleg and a detour. The inclusion of a tunnel as part of that design was something we were really pushing for. It is also on the east-west connectivity where the motorist-centric design approach remains quite obvious. What I mean by that is: there are unprotected, painted on-road bike lanes that have slip lanes requiring fast-moving motor traffic and heavy vehicles to merge across vulnerable bicycle riders; there are long wait times for pedestrian crossings; pedestrian crossings do not automatically turn green in line with traffic movement—if you do not hit the button in time you miss out; there are multiple leg crossings to get from the end of the Sumners Road bridge to Monier Road which only sits on the northern side; and there is an absence of footpath connection on the southern side of Monier Road. These all combine to reduce the appeal for local residents walking, riding or scooting to local businesses, Darra station and recreational facilities.

On-road cycling without protection is really only tolerated by what we call the strong and fearless, who are the people who will be comfortable riding in just about any condition. That is generally less than one per cent of the population. Long wait times and multiple crossings can add

up to five minutes which, in Brisbane's summer heat, can be pretty unpleasant, and these conditions contribute to a high level of traffic stress. The higher that level is, the less likely people will choose to leave the car at home. People who walk or cycle if conditions are more appealing—what we call the interested but concerned—which, based on surveys, can be up to 60 per cent of people, are less likely to tolerate that and they will stick to driving. This reduces the benefits of these projects seeing as we do not fully realise the return on investment in active transport facilities which is, according to the TMR website, anything up to \$5 for every dollar spent. Conversely, the north-south improvements with the tunnel on the Centenary cycleway are outstanding. They reduce travel time for a cycling trip by up to five minutes by avoiding that detour and having to wait for lights.

In our view, the Sumners Road Interchange project is a step in the right direction, but there is room for improvement. My hope in providing evidence today is that future Transport and Main Roads projects can not only look to provide active transport facilities as an additional benefit but also treat it as a priority from the start and therefore achieve greater outcomes for all residents.

CHAIR: You directed your concerns about the upgrade and the project to the department. Has the department responded to you about these?

Mr Cox: I have had only one response regarding the wait times and traffic light timings, and they have advised they are not looking to revisit those at this time due to the low levels of pedestrian use. I would tend to argue that, as I have indicated, there is a low level of pedestrian use because the conditions still are not terribly appealing. It is a bit of a chicken-and-egg type response. To date, that is the only area of concern that has been addressed or responded to.

CHAIR: You have almost answered the question I had about whether this project has increased cycle and pedestrian use. Would you say there is any increase at all?

Mr Cox: I would definitely say there is an increase because previously it simply was impossible to cross east to west. Even though there was a footpath on the old bridge, you had to cross two slip lanes without any protection to do it, so people just did not. It is definitely better than it was and there is definitely an increase in use, but I just do not think it has maximised the potential increase at the moment.

CHAIR: On the visit we were interested in how the footpath-to-road ramps were designed and angled. The rep who was with us said something about how you can use them at speed. Do you find that they make a big difference over the traditional ramp?

Mr Cox: Certainly from a motoring perspective, the ramps are at less of a tight angle than the previous ones that were there, so you do not have to ride the brakes as much. Contrary to that, again speaking from a cycling perspective on those on-road bike lanes across the bridge, the motivation for increasing vehicle traffic makes that very intimidating when you are in that on-road bike lane and you have motorists trying to get to the ramp quite quickly. A lot of them will accelerate to get in front of you and then cut across the bike lane to get into the ramp, although some are a little bit more sensible and just ease the brakes and go in behind you. It can be quite intimidating, particularly when you have a large vehicle, like a heavy goods vehicle—and there are a lot of them; it is an industrial area in some respects—and sometimes motorists do not necessarily see that there is a bicycle in front of that truck. They are planning their movement and then suddenly you are appearing, from their perspective, out from behind the truck, even though you are alongside it. There are some benefits. This is a focus on improving motor traffic flow, and I would say that has been very successful, but I think it has had some potentially negative consequences for what has been provided for active transport and that continues to serve as a bit of a deterrent.

Mr WATTS: I have two questions which overlap. One is in relation to the design and the general culture within the design team as to whether you think they have looked at the needs of a bike lane with equal veracity as the traffic. As part of that, as someone who has done a lot of cycling, I am interested in the separation. In Scandinavian countries there is massive separation between bikes and traffic, with physical barriers as opposed to a painted line. Do you see there are better opportunities to provide those physical separations going forward?

Mr Cox: Absolutely. On your first question about the culture of the project—not necessarily this project specifically but the project process—I think there is genuine consultation and they take on board feedback from groups like ours. I think there is a tendency that the active transport facilities are not really considered unless there is that input from the local community or from local advocates. If there are not people asking for it it can get overlooked, rather than being, 'We should do this.' Obviously you would assess it based on the location. You would not necessarily do this on a motorway upgrade or the highway interchange west of Toowoomba somewhere, where there is not going to be a lot of pedestrians or cyclists. We are talking about an inner urban area here.

In terms of separation, absolutely that is something that I think needs to be considered. When you look at Sumners Road and this interchange, it is a four-lane, 60-kilometre-per-hour road with heavy vehicles. Unprotected, painted bike lanes just do not cut it for that. As I said, they would really only appeal to those who are very brave on the roads—ones who have been riding for years and are comfortable mixing with traffic—but that is not your average mum and dad and kids who are trying to get to the local soccer field.

When you look at the space and the geometry that is involved in these projects, there is opportunity to do better with protected bike lanes and protected intersections while still improving the traffic flow at the same time. We have seen Scandinavian countries do a really good job of enabling cycling and walking and keeping traffic flowing, so I think there is real opportunity to improve those designs. This is a step forward. This is still better than what we were seeing five or 10 years ago, but it is a stepped improvement and we need to keep going.

Mr MARTIN: In your submission you mentioned crash data and that it can be incomplete with regard to cycling and pedestrian incidents. Are you able to offer the committee any suggestions on how these statistics could be improved? Could you expand on why you think cycling and pedestrian incidents are being under-reported?

Mr Cox: It is a good question and it is something that featured in the 2013 cycling inquiry that the Queensland parliament held. It was highlighted that the sources of traffic data are very disparate. Some data comes from ambulance, some comes from police and some comes from hospital data. A lot of cycling crashes in particular go unreported because there is no police involvement and often people are not necessarily hospitalised. They will get hurt, they will go home or they might go and see their GP and get sorted out, but none of that gets recorded anywhere.

I had a crash a couple of years ago—all my own fault—and I broke my arm, but that will not register on the street where that happened. It had nothing to do with the road, but it is not even recorded because it was not reported. There is no real reporting system that I am aware of for people to say, 'I had a crash at this location and I had this injury.' Unless you present to a hospital or report it to police, that does not happen. Most people are not going to bother to try to report to police: 'Look, I slipped on some loose gravel and hurt myself.' There is no motivation to get police involved in that and I doubt there are really the resources for police to be dealing with that kind of minor report.

I think a system that is easy for people who are either injured or have a close call or miss to report that would be really valuable. That would then get fed into official crash data. Instead, there is a lot of disparate data. I think various lobby groups have set up their own system, but that data does not go anywhere. Having an official Queensland government register and then, ideally, coordinating with other jurisdictions—Brisbane City Council or other states as well—will give us a better picture of the real casualty rate of our vulnerable road users.

Mr WALKER: Your submission states—

... lighting in the tunnel is a very high standard which provides a feeling of safety and confidence and there have been no reports of miscreant behaviour.

Your submission also states that the high fence facing the motorway deters misbehaviour such as throwing projectiles. Is it common for cyclists to have things thrown at them? Do you have any knowledge of what types of items?

Mr Cox: Absolutely. The most common things that are thrown are water bottles, cans, fast-food rubbish and things like that. There have been situations where people have had rocks thrown at them but that is less common. It is more—I do not know what the parliamentary term is—idiots who are in their cars and they see a cyclist and they just want to give them a scare.

My point about the high fence facing the motorway is that I have also seen reports of people who throw rocks onto the motorway. Obviously it is a life-threatening situation if a rock hits a windscreen or something like that. It is much more difficult to do that with high fencing. Older bridges over the motorway including the old Sumners Road bridge had a standard 1.2-metre-high railing which did not prevent that. It also did not prevent people from jumping. I have not heard of any situations of that happening on the motorway, but we know that that is common on bridges.

The lighting in the tunnel is very good. One of the concerns, particularly for women riding alone, is how many of our bikeways go through dark parks and alongside creeks and things where you cannot see anything. Anybody could be hanging around, so that is a deterrent. Installing good lighting, as has been done in the Sumners Road tunnel, is a good way to encourage more active transport for vulnerable people.

CHAIR: In terms of the cameras, are you able to access footage if there is an incident? Is that able to be provided to you or does that go straight to police?

Mr Cox: To my knowledge, we are not allowed to get the footage ourselves. If we have an incident and we report it to police, the police can source that information and review that. To my knowledge, we do not have any way to access that.

CHAIR: I was thinking for insurance purposes or something. If something were to happen, you would be required to have that.

Mr Cox: I imagine you would ask the police to consult the footage and they would provide evidence to support your insurance claim in that scenario. That is how I imagine that process would work.

CHAIR: There being no further questions, I thank you very much. We really appreciate your time. You will be provided with a copy of the transcript of these proceedings when it is available and a copy will be published on the committee's webpage. I declare this hearing closed.

The committee adjourned at 9.18 am.