



Department of Transport

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Court Reference: COR 2018 006289

Mr Nick Boesten
Coroner's Register
Coroners Court of Victoria
65 Kavanagh Street
SOUTHBANK VIC 3006

Dear Mr Boesten,

INVESTIGATION INTO THE DEATH OF BRADLEY DOBNEY – Court Ref: COR 2018 006289

I refer to your letter dated 29 January 2021, addressed to Karen Macdonald regarding the investigation into the death of Mr Bradley Dobney and Mr Jason Gilham who were involved in a road-related incident that occurred at the Western Ring Road/Princes Freeway interchange in Laverton North on 15 December 2018.

The Department of Transport (**the Department**) offers its condolences to the family and friends of Mr Bradley Dobney and Mr Jason Gilham.

Below, please find the response on behalf of the Department to the recommendation given by His Honour, Coroner Olle.

Recommendation (a) "Using the risk-based 'safe system approach', the Department of Transport should conduct a review of Victorian roads in the vicinity of 'bodies of water', to identify and consider whether safety barriers should be installed or extended to protect against potential water hazards."

An alternative to the Coroner's recommendation has been implemented.

Review of all Victorian Roads:

There are a variety of hazards on the roadside that present a crash risk to vehicles who have run off the road. This includes trees, power poles, fences, embankments, and bodies of water.

The Department agrees to the continued use of a risk based safe system approach to identify and assess road hazards including 'bodies of water' on our network to determine which roads should be treated with road safety barriers. However, with regards to bodies of

water, our approach will be to review these on a project-by-project basis. We will continue to consider all hazards concurrently in network reviews of run-off-road crashes.

It would be cost prohibitive to undertake a review of each body of water hazard in isolation. The Department currently collects and considers data on hazards from a network level. Victoria's network data collection of roadside hazards is done in accordance with the internationally recognised iRAP (international Road Assessment Program) methodology.

This data is used to determine what section of our network should be treated with road safety barriers through the use of the safe system approach. This takes into consideration the below factors as well as crash history:

- Exposure - how many people are traveling on the road and exposed to the hazard;
- Likelihood - what are the other safety features on the road that reduces the likelihood of the crash occurring eg. audio tactile line marking and speed limits; and
- Severity of crashes occurring – what is the speed limit and expected severity of a crash.

In considering this recommendation, the Department has specifically investigated run-off-road crashes in the last 5 years to ensure there is not a new trend towards a disproportionate amount of crashes into bodies of water. It has been determined that such incidences contribute to less than 2% of run-off-road hazards that have caused fatalities on our roads. When compared to the highest rated hazard being trees, which makes up 53%, it is considerably smaller. This confirms our current approach of prioritising hazards with greater risk and evaluating hazards from a network level.

The Department of Transport intends to develop Network Safety Plan which will inform the future investment and deployment of flexible safety barriers on Victorian Roads incorporating the safe system approach. This plan will identify all lengths of road at a network level for which treatments are needed for hazards (including bodies of water) to achieve Victoria's longer-term safety objectives. This plan is currently being drafted and will provide a long-term strategic approach for investment to the year 2050, which aligns with the Victorian Government's vision of zero fatal and serious injuries by 2050.

Treating bodies of water for new projects:

During the process of designing roads, or reviewing roads that will require safety enhancements, the Department will continue to utilise Austroads design guidelines (Austroads Guide to Road Design Part 6 section 4.3 Design Step D2: Identify Hazards) to identify hazards. This includes definitions of when bodies of water become a hazard and may contribute to serious road trauma.

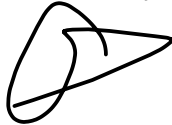
For the protection of these hazards, the Department will use the hazard mitigation process in Austroads Guide Part 6 Section 4. In February 2019, the Department updated it's VicRoads Supplements to Austroads Guide Part 6, changing the consideration for the treatment of hazards only in the clear zone (an area where approximately 85% of vehicles will recover by) to the treatment of hazards in an area of interest where there is the potential for a serious injury or fatality. This revision also noted that roadsides must be designed to eliminate the risk of fatal and serious injuries from run-off-road events, as far as is practicable.

Using this method, a range of assessments are undertaken to determine when barriers will be used to protect vehicles from the hazard, which includes an investment assessment. This is particularly important as there is often a finite amount of funding for projects.

The Department agrees that the extension of the barrier at the Western Ring Road Geelong-bound exit ramp is considered a high priority. A project has been developed for this location with a project proposal being prepared for submission under the Governments - Road Safety Program (Announced October 2020 - https://investment.infrastructure.gov.au/key_projects/initiatives/road_safety_program.aspx), with DOT noting this project as a priority for funding.

Should you wish to discuss this matter further, Chris Jones, Manager - Safer Roads and Speed (phone: 0417 475 954) would be pleased to assist.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'C Muller', written over a white background.

Carl Muller

Executive Director - Road Safety Victoria
Department of Transport

27/04/2021