

**Submission**

**No 35**

## **DRIVER AND ROAD USER DISTRACTION**

**Name:** Cr Tom Sherlock

**Date Received:** 7/05/2012

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Councillor Tom Sherlock



4 May 2012

Dear Staysafe Committee

**Account of Mosman Council determination on billboards at Spit Junction**

In the interests of road safety I have compiled this summary of my experiences and observations of the process to determine whether or not to allow large billboards on a pedestrian bridge at Spit Junction, Mosman, in NSW (2088). Please note that all analysis, unless otherwise stated, is my own, and does not necessarily reflect the views of Mosman Council or of other elected Mosman Councillors.

The bottom line is that the billboards were approved by Council on Tuesday 1 May, following community consultation, for a 15 year period. This will bring the Council about \$426,218 pa in revenue, but from my perspective I am not convinced that the road safety implications have been understood or managed.

There seem to be a number of conflicts of interest in this situation, which are important to note:

1. Council – will get a large amount of money from billboards, vs making a decision in the interests of road safety
2. RMS – while I don't think RMS gets money from these billboards, I believe RMS does get funding from some billboards, vs the RMS objective of road safety
3. Advertising company – in this case oOh! Media. On the one hand they want motorists to be attracted to look at the advertising, but presumably they don't want distraction to cause accidents

Bearing in mind that I am neither a traffic expert nor a psychologist, but someone who has tried to access these disciplines in order to make a good decision, I've summarised areas which I think need to be covered in billboard assessments in this table:

Assessment area: Assessment by:	Physical location of billboard	Billboard content (Digital vs static, illumination, ad type)
Traffic expert	Road geometry Accident statistics Traffic speed Traffic volume	Brightness of illumination
Psychologist	Level of background distraction – from other signs, from road conditions	Some kind of rating of content, ie strength of attraction/ distraction

	Degree of attentiveness required, eg more when cars are faster, closer to pedestrians, closer to each other, more at road junctions	
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I have colour-coded the table according to my assessment of whether these areas have been covered satisfactorily (green), to some extent but not satisfactorily (amber) or not at all (red).

Commentary on these:

- There does not seem to have been any input to the decision making process by any form of psychologist. Thus all the Australian and international research on driver distraction from this perspective does not seem to have been taken into account
- While there has been a “traffic safety report” as required by the RMS, the report (Attachment-1) seems superficial and possibly partial – eg this from the introduction “Military Road, as with all major arterial routes, presents an ideal location for effective outdoor advertising signage due to the high level of exposure to motorists and travellers”
- The traffic safety report states that “The proposed sign will have a level of illumination which will comply with the relevant specified criteria” but does not state what these are. There is nothing on illumination in the draft VPA (Voluntary Planning Agreement). However it may be covered in SEPP64, which I have not reviewed. The planning assessment from Mosman Council in September 2010 does state conditions, generally referring to “Transport Corridor Guidelines – Road Safety Guidelines for sign content..”
- With regard to content, is the Council’s report stated that there would not inappropriate content (sorry I don’t find the exact reference). However I am not convinced that there is a sufficient level of content specification.

Other comments and information:

1. When I reviewed the RMS road advertising guidelines (“dop07033\_outdooradvertising\_transportcorridors\_guidelines.pdf”) I noted that it says on p19 that “A sign should not be located less than the safe stopping sight distance from a marked foot crossing, pedestrian crossing”. However I could not find any publicly available document that explained what the “safe stopping sight distance” was for a straight and level road at 60 kph. So I don’t know whether this is an issue for Spit Junction
2. Mosman Council has previously applied for accident black spot funding for Spit Junction in August 2010, as it is a major junction and there are a lot of pedestrians and a number of pedestrian crossings. However the RMS (then RTA) rejected this saying that “this location does not meet the necessary requirements and criteria for this type of funding. This was due to the number and severity of pedestrian accidents at the crossing in a 5-year period being nil in 2004-2009 and two in 2005-2010. This did not meet the necessary BCR [Benefit Cost Ratio] that was needed to submit an application.”

3. There was community consultation on the billboards which resulted in 9 submissions, of which 4 were against, 3 were for and 2 were general comments – ie there was generally a low level of community interest
4. In the course of trying to better understand the issues around billboards, I found this report helpful “Driver distraction by advertising: genuine risk or urban myth?” by Brendan Wallace of the Centre for Applied Social Psychology, Glasgow – this is on the internet at “<http://cogprints.org/3307/>”. I also contacted a number of academics working in the driver distraction field, including Professor Michael Regan, who I understand is also making a submission to this Inquiry.

I hope that this letter will be helpful to the Driver and Road User Distraction Inquiry, and I am happy to provide any further input on request to support this important and timely initiative.

Yours faithfully,

Councillor Tom Sherlock

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Phone: [REDACTED]

**Links to Attachment:**

Attachment-1, traffic safety report, “14052012-2185578-174309-1.pdf”, listed as “Revised Traffic Safety Assessment - Bridgepoint Pedestrian Bridge 8.2009.343.1”  
<http://portal.mosman.nsw.gov.au/Controls/XC.Document.Dataworks/Document.aspx?id=EQtli2MHJQA%3d&ext=pdf&popup=0>

Note if this link doesn't work directly, this is a link to the DA on the Mosman Council DA Tracker. The document is listed under the “Documents” tab  
<http://portal.mosman.nsw.gov.au/Pages/XC.Track/SearchApplication.aspx?id=008.2009.00000343.001>