Safer speeds on local streets: Conversations and objection handling

Victoria **walks**

COMMON CAUSE AUSTRALIA

MAV MUNICIPAL ASSOCIATION OF VICTORIA

Step 1: Decide which objections to respond to, and why

Private objections (not aired publicly): Councils will likely encounter community objections during phone calls, via 'have your say' consultation websites, and in written correspondence to council and councillors. See some considerations below as to whether to respond. If you've determined a response is required, go to Step 2.

Public objections: e.g. commentary on social media (including on Council's own posts) or in traditional media.

Sometimes it is necessary to respond to objections, for example when an opinion is put to you in a media interview or on social media.

In other cases where council has discretion (e.g. council website; media releases), it may be worth focussing more on persistent misconceptions that are holding back support. Consider:

- Is the objection an **opinion** (e.g. changing speed limits is the wrong policy option, or a waste of money given other pressing issues; note many of the objections listed in the table below are opinions) or a **misconception** (false – e.g. this will add significantly add to travel times)?

- If the latter, is it a persistent misconception that is holding back the support of supporters and persuadables, or is it just within opponent echo-chambers? Even if it's persistent, it may not be a 'showstopper' that is holding back support.

- Note **there is a cost to publicly responding to objections**, as this gives them 'airtime' (attention) and can introduce objections that other readers or viewers had not previously encountered ('planting seeds'). However, there is a benefit if objections can be dispelled easily, from *within our frame.*

Step 2: Work out how to pivot responses to our frame

Assuming that council has decided or is required to respond to an objection, some suggested responses are provided in the following pages.

Summary

- **Keep to script:** stick to our key message of **safety for everyone** who uses our local streets. Practice and remember a few key phrases.

- **Streets, not individuals:** Focus on the type of street environments that enable safety for all. Avoid blaming people driving (or anyone else).

- **Avoid negation** (saying what something is 'not'): Do not repeat the objection to debunk it! e.g. in the first example below, avoid saying "it's not true that fixing potholes will do more for road safety than safer speeds." Instead, go straight to our frame, straight to our response.

- Your **tone** is very important: People may not remember the details of what you say, but they will likely remember how you made them feel.

The most common **pitfall** when responding to objections is to respond within their frame, the opponent frame. Here is an example of common objection you might hear, along with an unhelpful defensive response from within the opponent frame, and a helpful response that pivots to our frame:

An objection, within the opponent frame (Individualising: 'personal responsibility' frame, blaming people walking and riding)

A defensive response, still within the opponent frame ('personal responsibility', blaming people driving)

A helpful response that pivots to our frame: 'streets are for everyone'

"Pedestrians shouldn't use their phones while walking. Bring back personal responsibility for safety."

"Many drivers also use their phones while driving. They also need to be more responsible."

"Safer speeds are about creating safer street environments for everyone, whether we're 8 years old or 80, whether we can see well or not at all, whether we walk fast or slowly"
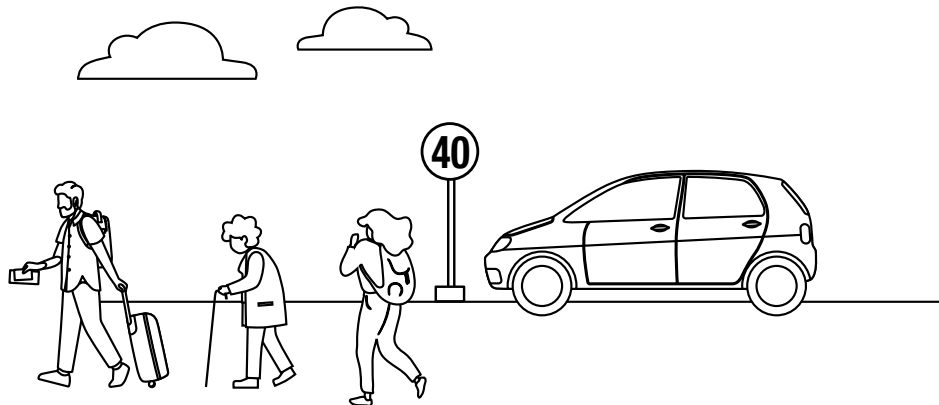
Suggestions for responding to some common objections, from within our frame:

OBJECTION	SUGGESTED RESPONSE, WITHIN OUR FRAME
Safer speeds are the wrong policy option	
Fixing potholes and/or building speed humps will do more for road safety than safer speeds	• *"Safer speeds are the **cornerstone** of road safety."* Or: *"Safer speeds are the **foundation** for a whole range of road safety measures to work well. For example, pedestrian crossings work when drivers have enough time to see people crossing and stop in time."* • Or: *"We are implementing safer speeds as a key part of a **package** of road safety measures, that includes fixing potholes as well as building speed humps where there's a history of speeding."* • [If no street treatments] *"Safer speeds are the best way – and a cost-effective way – of improving road safety."* • *"Safer speeds of 40 and 30km/h create calmer safer conditions for walking, bike riding and driving, regardless of whether there are any speed humps or other traffic calming measures in place.*
Separation is the solution: build more pedestrian crossings and bike paths or bike lanes	• *"Everyone deserves to move around our streets safely. In our huge network of local streets, it's not feasible to install crossings at every intersection, and there's often no space for bike paths. Safely sharing our streets requires everyone to be patient and look out for each other – which is much easier to do in [40/30] km/h zones."* • *"We're creating the types of streets where people are safe to walk, ride and cross wherever they need to. This means people walking, riding and driving can co-exist well. As a result, it often means construction of new bike lanes isn't required on quieter streets and car parking can be retained."*
Shifting responsibility to individuals	
People crossing should get off their phones and pay attention	• Pivot to: speeds that account for everyone's needs. E.g. *"[X %] / a significant number of walkers who are hit by cars are children or older people – and they're generally not using a phone. No matter how well they've been taught about road safety, children are easily distracted. Many older people can't jump out of the way of a car. Our current traffic speeds are just too fast for us to take care of everyone."* • Add: make drivers part of the solution: *"Driving at safer speeds of 40 or 30km/h is an important way to help keep everyone safe."*
People driving should pay attention; provide better driver training/ongoing requirements	Take the focus off red herrings like better driver training. Regardless of training, the physics stay the same. • Show the survivability diagram. *"Less speed means less impact force, which means less severe injury."*

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Suggested ways of responding to community objections to safer speed proposals

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OBJECTION	SUGGESTED RESPONSE, WITHIN OUR FRAME

Safer speeds will make streets *less* safe

Drivers will get frustrated and drive aggressively	(a) Our frame: *"Safer speeds are about looking after everyone who's using our streets, whether they're walking, riding or driving. They encourage a more relaxed and respectful driving culture."* (b) Proof: *"Safer speeds of [40/30] km/h have made our local streets much safer, with large reductions in crashes, injuries and fatalities."*
Drivers will be looking at their speedos instead of the road	(a) Our frame (safety) + proof: *"30km/h speed zones are proven to be safer, with fewer crashes, injuries and fatalities."* (b) Simple explanation: *"30km/h speed zones are much safer because drivers have more time to see people walking, riding and driving, and to respond to avoid a crash."* (c) Normalise good driving practice + provide a simple explanation: *"Checking our speed is part of good driving practice, something we should all be doing no matter the speed limit. 30km/h allows us to see much more of what's happening on the street, as well as to check our speed."*
Drivers will be looking for speed signs instead of looking at the road	As above, with a slight edit to (c): ● *"Looking for speed signs is part of good driving practice, something we should all be doing no matter the speed limit. 30km/h allows us to see much more of what's happening on the street, as well as to look for speed signs."*

Don't spend our money bringing in safer speeds

It's unnecessary, or it won't work to improve safety	● Emphasise "the foundation" or "the best way" and don't get drawn into the money argument; it's enough to say "cost-effective". e.g. *"Safer speeds are the best way – and a cost-effective way – to improve road safety on our local streets."* ● Social norming + community-driven (not council): *"In our [July 2024] survey, many [LGA] residents told us they want safer local streets. That's what we are now delivering, with safer speeds key to improving safety."*
It will only benefit a few people. Council should be focusing on benefits for the majority.	Council's responsibility is to plan for everyone in the community and help keep everyone safe: *"At [name] Council, one of our jobs is to help keep everyone in our community safe. That's why we're rolling out safer speeds."* *"When we plan for the 8 year old and the 80 year old, we're also planning for parents with prams, blind people, and someone using crutches. Safer speeds are for everyone in our community."*

OBJECTION	SUGGESTED RESPONSE, WITHIN OUR FRAME
Other common community objections to safer speeds	
Safer speeds are just an excuse for revenue raising	• It's best **not** to respond to this proactively (such as through FAQs) because of the common association between "speed enforcement" and "revenue raising"; we don't want to add safer speeds to the mix. It doesn't help our cause to bring up "revenue raising" only to debunk it. • In reactive messaging, e.g. if this is put to you in a media interview, you could (a) again reinforce that safer speeds are key to improving road safety, that's why councils are bringing them in, and (b) point out that councils don't receive any revenue from speeding fines. • Either way, the message is: *"Council is doing this to improve road safety, for the benefit of everyone in the community."*
It *feels* so slow driving at 40 or especially 30km/h; it's hard to drive slowly; it will be so hard to get used to (and I'll accidentally speed and get fined)	*"Throughout Victoria in new [40/30] km/h zones, it's very common for people to get used to driving at that speed within a few months."*
It *is* so slow: it will make my journey time much longer.	Lead with our story about **people** and **safety**, then give a simple explanation about journey times. e.g. *"Let's remember: safer speed zones save lives and dramatically reduce crashes and injuries.* *In [location], the safer speed zone will have very little impact on car journey times. That's because drivers already travel quite slowly here, as they slow for turns and parking, and stop at intersections and traffic lights. The streets are well-suited to [40km/h or 30km/h]."*
It's confusing going between several different speed zones in close proximity	• Response depends on local context, e.g. *"This will create one consistent 40km/h zone, where currently there is a mix of 40, 50 and 60km/h."* • On the other hand, if there will be a mix of 30km/h and 50km/h where previously there was only 50, then emphasise the 'horses for courses' idea: *"In the same way that school speed zones apply to all schools in [LGA], we are progressively rolling out 30km/h in [LGA]'s shopping and dining strips. That means where there are many people walking to shops, cafes and pubs, and drivers pulling in and out of on-street parking, these areas will all become a consistent 30km/h."* • Also emphasise clarity (to replace the idea of confusion), e.g. *"As well as being clearly sign-posted, the [40/30km/h] zone sits within the natural boundaries of X Major Rd, Y Main Rd and Z Arterial Rd – making it a clearly defined area."*

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Suggested ways of responding to community objections to safer speed proposals

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OBJECTION	SUGGESTED RESPONSE, WITHIN OUR FRAME
Drivers won't obey 40 or 30km/h limits, so new limits will have no safety benefit	Start with social norming and values, keeping everyone safe: ● [Social norming] *"Most people recognise the importance of speed limits and stick to the limit."* ● [reinforce what drivers can do] *"Driving within the limit of 40 or 30km/h is an important way we can help keep everyone safe."* ● [proof] Limits of 40 or 30 do work. e.g. for proposed 30km/h: *"30km/h zones curb the worst speeding offenders. In a 40 zone, a few irresponsible people drive at 50km/h or more. In a 30 zone, this brings their speeds down closer to 40km/h."*
Safer speeds aren't needed – there have only been a few crashes here. Or prove the need, based on crashes.	*"Crashes matter, because of the often devastating impact they have on people's lives. It's clear many crashes can be prevented just by driving a bit more slowly. For example, in [name area], crashes were [halved] after the speed limit was changed from 50 to 40 km/h."* [following the above, in a longer response] *"It's not only crashes but near misses that suggest to potential riders and walkers that a street is unsafe. If we want to create streets where kids can walk and ride to school, and people of all ages and abilities feel comfortable walking and riding throughout our huge network of streets, then safer speeds are essential."*
Safer speeds will hinder retail trade by discouraging people from coming to the area.	*"Safer speed zones can generate more trade, as people prefer to linger in street environments with calmer, quieter traffic. Many people enjoy taking the opportunity to walk or ride, or the calmer experience of parking and pulling out of car parks in safer speed zones."*
Safer speeds are 'anti-car'.	Hardline opponent frame – ideally ignore. Or address the 'anti-car' sentiment from within the 'streets are for everyone' frame: *"We're improving safety for everyone who uses our local streets, whether you're walking, riding or driving."* Avoid negation: do not repeat the claim to debunk it! i.e. avoid saying "the proposal is not anti-car". Go straight to our frame.
Our nanny state government is trying to push cars off the road by stealth, by making driving slow and frustrating.	Hardline opponent frame – ideally ignore. In our survey, this was the least supported opponent statement. Continue to communicate our frame: e.g. *"Everyone deserves to move around our streets safely. Council is creating safer streets for all."*