

Welcome to Coburg North

Ending the Dangerous Drift from 'Activity Street' to Race Track



Safer Walking and Riding for Murray Rd (SWARM)

May 2026

Introduction

Murray Rd (named Gaffney St in the west and Southern Rd in the far east) runs parallel to Bell St in Melbourne's north and links Pascoe Vale with Heidelberg.

The stretch between Gilbert Rd, Preston and the Upfield Path at Batman Station, Coburg North is unusually dangerous for all road users. It contains four undivided 60kmh lanes (two in each direction), with curves and undulations which contribute to it being one of the most dangerous roads in Melbourne's north per vehicle kilometre.

The main reason we believe it's so dangerous for all users is the decision to move from 2 to 4 lanes in 2011. The then Department of Transport claimed this was due to 'concerns about driver behaviour, specifically instances of drivers overtaking on the left'. However, an FOI request and other liaison with the department shows no road safety assessment, consultation with Council or other stakeholders, nor other analysis was undertaken at the time or subsequently.



Image 1a: Intersection of Murray Rd, Connolly Ave and Meghan Ave. Google Maps images show where lanes were widened and the median strip was removed making it dangerous for those visiting Barry Beckett Childcare, Newlands Kindergarten or the Senior Citizens centre. Note also the crest of the hill less than 100m from where this image was taken, which reduces visibility and increases speed.

Image 1b: Murray Rd at Connolly and Outlook intersection before and after. It is now very difficult to cross the road to catch the 526 bus. This particularly impacts the residents of the Petersen Ave public housing flats visible on the left.

Having analysed and lived with the impacts of this decision, we believe it was a grievous error that has contributed to hundreds of crashes, injuries and near-misses as well as a pervasive sense of fear among road users and the community.

In 2025, our neighbourhood WhatsApp and Facebook groups reported around 40 crashes on this short stretch of road, and there are likely others that weren't noticed. These incidents are recorded at our [SWARM Incident Reporter](#) (see page 13). In the first four months of 2026 we have documented further incidents, as well as a fatal collision off Newlands Road.

This short report describes the dangers on Murray Rd and their impact on road users and the community. It calls on the Government to take urgent steps in the 2026-27 Budget to address these risks to improve safety and livability. This report builds on the report we wrote in November 2025.

Drivers at Risk: Undivided Lanes and Blind Curves at 60 km/h

This stretch of Murray Rd contains four undivided 60kmh lanes, with curves and undulations which contribute to poor visibility.

It is statistically the most dangerous road for drivers in the area. Murray Rd has a serious injury crash rate of 25.21 per 100 million vehicle kilometres travelled (VKT). This is over 150% higher rate than the equivalent stretch of Bell Street, which is designed to handle large vehicular traffic volume with straight, high visibility roads, illuminated traffic signs and speed cameras. Austroads statistics show that over the four-year period 2019 to 2023, Murray Rd was reported to have 15 fatal or serious injury crashes, compared to only 4 on the parallel section of Bell Street. Murray Rd also has 150% more crashes and 150% higher crash rate than the equivalent-length stretch of Gaffney St to the west, which has the same traffic volume but is only one lane in each direction.

Because of the high speed limit and road design, dangerous driving is prevalent:

The 60kmh speed limit is much higher than similar roads in the area, with every other arterial road in the area except Murray Rd and Elizabeth St now having portions with current or planned speed limit reductions. A stark contrast is Sydney Rd where it intersects with Murray-Gaffney being approved for a reduction to 40km/hr while 60km is deemed 'appropriate' for Murray Rd.

The current lane configuration encourages dangerous driving. Merri-bek Council data showed max speeds well over 80 km/hr in every hour, with 39% of westbound drivers speeding over 60 km/hr at the Merri Bridge. The double lanes mean there is no safe space for pedestrians or cyclists (or scooter riders). The benefits to arterial through traffic flow are negligible given the single lane to the east and west and the much greater capacity of Bell St running parallel.

Stolen cars are a common factor. Motor vehicle theft in Coburg North was 104% higher than the Victorian average in the past three years. Joyriders are attracted to the lack of safe road design, especially in comparison to other council and state roads in the area. The cover image shows one such example that languished at Merri Creek for four weeks.

Drivers face danger when turning right into Outlook Rd, Connolly Ave, Jackson Parade or driveways on Murray Rd because they must wait in the middle lane. This position exposes them to rear-end collisions from vehicles approaching quickly over the crest of a hill or around a curve, who may be travelling too fast and/or be blinded by sun glare.

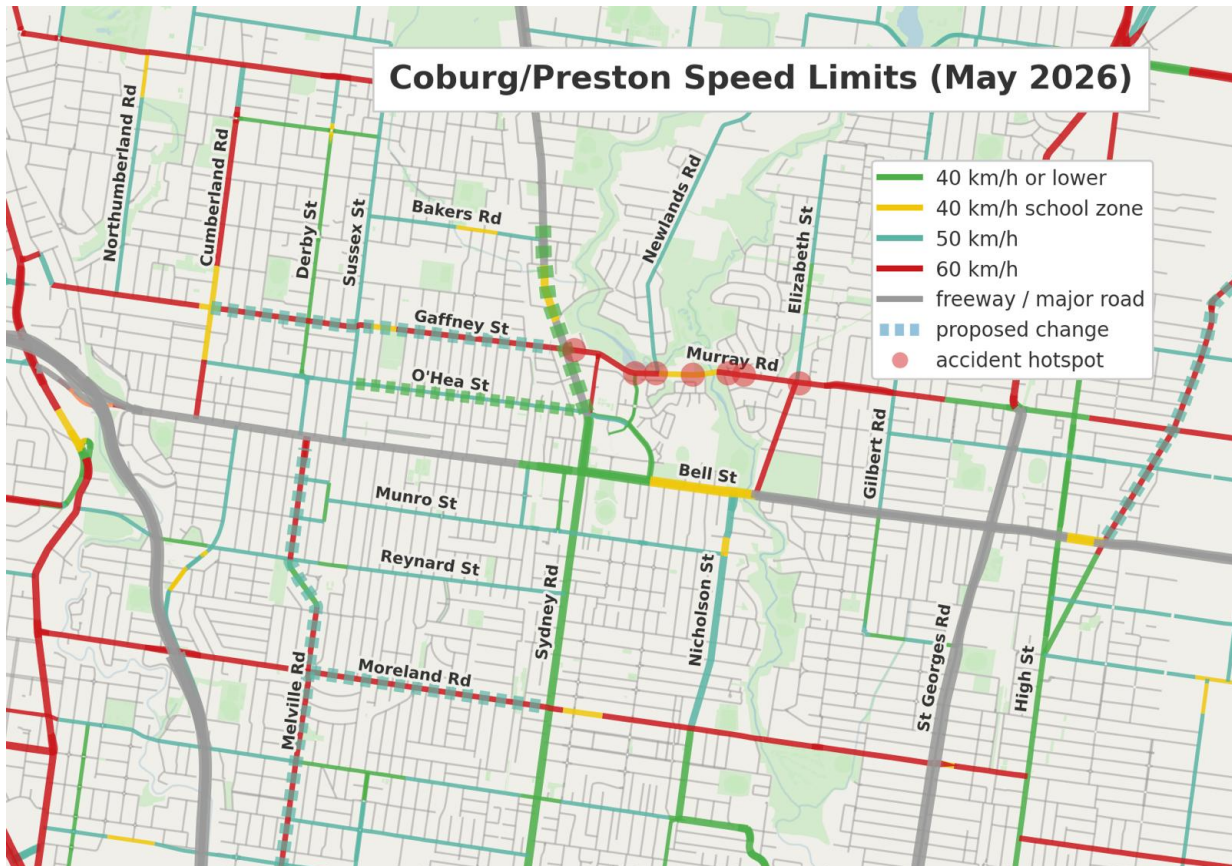


Image 2: Coburg/Preston Speed limits as of 8 May 2026

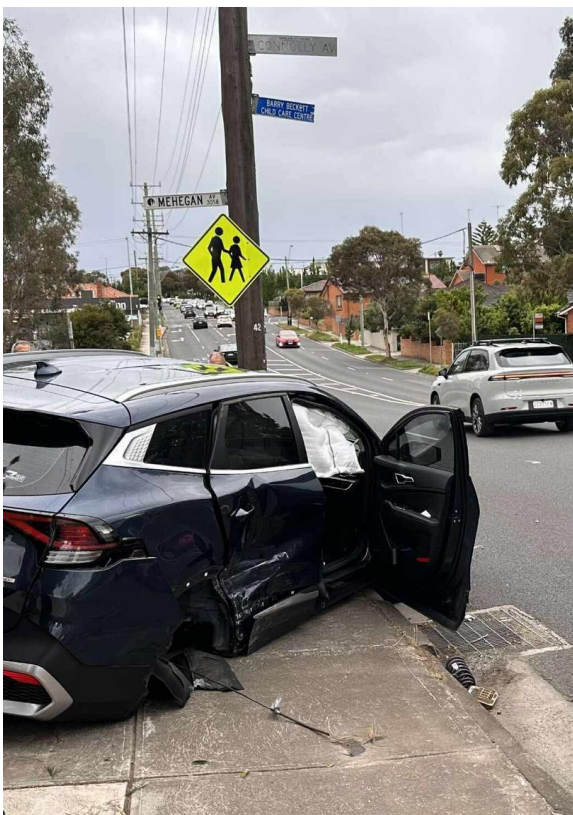


Image 3a, left: This serious crash occurred on the intersection from Image 1 on 7 November 2025.

Image 3b, above: Linesmen worked to repair the pole for over a week. The cost and disruption of constantly repairing public and private property is unacceptable.

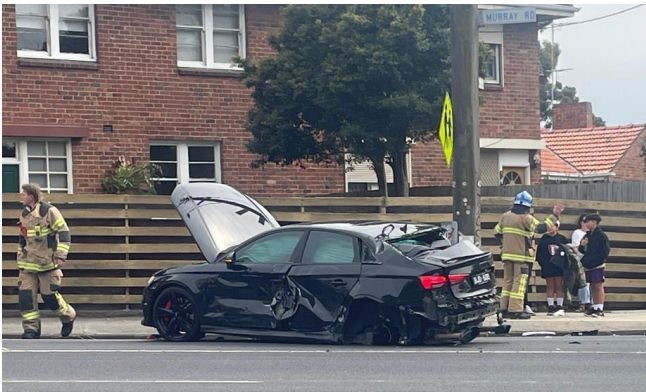


Image 4a, above left: The same intersection had a serious crash two weeks earlier on 25 October. Two children were in the white vehicle.

Image 4b, above right: the same incident viewed facing east

4c, left: A firefighter consoles the children who had been on the way to the nearby basketball centre.

The Corridor Fails as a Cycling and Scooter Route

As the Government's Speed Zoning policy notes, vulnerable road users including cyclists, scooter and motorcycle riders, are much more likely to suffer death or serious injuries at impact speeds above 30 km/h due to a lack of protection in the event of a collision.

Murray Rd is too dangerous for cyclists despite being part of DTP's Principal Bicycle Network. There are no cycle lanes between Sydney Rd and McGowan St, meaning cyclists wanting to travel between them are forced to risk the undulating 60kmh double lane road where 39% of cars speed, or risk the very narrow 'shared user path' – see Image 6 below.

Structural Failure Due to Removal of Painted Median

The narrow pavement coupled with lack of parked cars or a bike lane means fast traffic passes close to pedestrians (see Images 4 and 6 below).



Image 5: DTP undertook a site visit in June 2022. Two days later the same bus stop was destroyed by a car, though only the driver was injured.



Pedestrians looking to travel from Pentridge to Preston station must walk 800m to Bell St for a bus. The 526 bus does (infrequently) serve some parts of Murray Rd and the Newlands estate, however a physical bus stop destroyed by a car in June 2025 (see image 5 below) will not be rebuilt because Merribek council confirmed the original design breached current Disability Standards by inhibiting wheelchairs from passing. Vulnerable bus users, many of whom live in the decrepit public housing opposite, must stand in the rain or hot sun. We understand council has since confirmed an in-house, compliant shelter design exists for the site, but the stop currently sits behind around 80 others on its bus shelter waiting list. With the 526 not running at night, commuters must walk down dangerous Murray Rd from Batman Station or the 19 Tram on Sydney Rd, including across the incredibly dangerous Newlands Rd sliplane.



Image 6a: Incident recorded 6 June 2025



Image 6b: After hitting the bus stop, the driver was fortunate the car didn't hit the pylon or tree. The car was abandoned there for several weeks, attracting the graffiti seen in the cover image, before eventually being removed by the Victorian Government.

Pedestrians wishing to cross Murray Rd to reach Coburg High School, Barry Beckett Children's Centre, Coburg Children's Centre or Pelican Childcare must cross four lanes of fast traffic as the painted medians were removed in 2011. A 2024 Barry Beckett Childcare survey of parents found their number one issue was not to do with the centre's operations but road safety outside it on Murray Rd.

As this list of educational institutions shows, the area has a high number of children and young people. The 2024 Legislative Assembly *Inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users* heard that Coburg High School has an uncommonly high proportion (53.4%) who walk or ride to school. The sustainable travel figure (includes walking to Public Transport) for Coburg High School students heading home is 86%. Many parents of local primary school children (Newlands, St Pauls and Coburg Primary) also cycle with their children.

Confinement: Feeling Trapped and Afraid

Our community survey collected 124 written accounts of hits and near misses by vulnerable road users, including pedestrians and cyclists. It found the road is viewed as "too dangerous" by cyclists and is actively avoided, making it an "obstacle to everyday life". We are aware of numerous incidents and near misses involving cyclists, including a cyclist knocked off their bike and into a traffic lane by a car turning out of James St. Two Coburg High students have been hit on bikes on the Murray Rd shared path in separate incidents. On 21 April 2026 a scooter rider was found injured on the Merri Creek bridge section of the shared path and required ambulance and police attendance, one of a growing number of incidents involving e-scooter riders alongside cyclists and pedestrians.

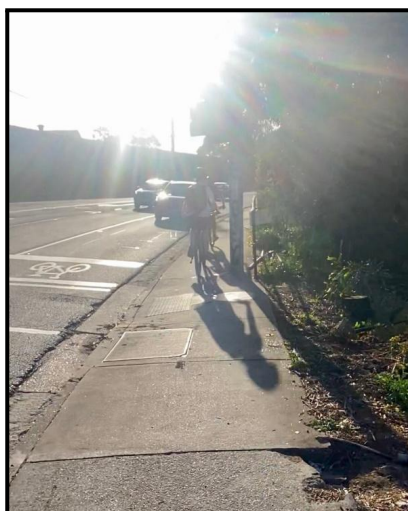


Image 7a, above: This narrow 'shared' path opposite Stockade Ave is terrifying for pedestrians and cyclists.

Image 7b, left: the view looking west



Image 8a, top: Fears are well-founded given the multiple crashes that have occurred here. This one occurred on 13 October 2025 at 6:40pm when many were out walking their dogs in the park. A vehicle was 'T-boned' with serious injuries.

8b, above left: tow trucks arrive as dusk falls.

8c, above right: the view from the park

8d, left: Cones and tape now serve as a barrier. Children continue to cycle there.

The Ongoing Costs of Inaction

The sense of fear that many feel leads to avoidant behaviours which shows the road is functionally failing its community and many would-be users.

In 2023, SWARM conducted a [community survey](#) which had 355 respondents, including 124 written accounts of hits and near misses, experienced predominantly by pedestrians and cyclists:

"I don't know a single neighbour who doesn't have a scary Murray Rd story."

"My brother died on this road... sadly another young man died hitting the same power pole near Outlook Road [in 2023.]"

"Feeling we were millimetres away from speeding cars - one second of distraction or bad driving and we'd be wiped out."

"Car Crashed - Dog on leash walking off the footpath and onto the road due to owner pushing a pram and no room on the path."

"My daughter has been yelled at riding her bike to coburg high cause she was on the footpath for Murray Rd. She does not feel safe riding a bike on Murray Rd. Now no longer rides her bike."

The safety issues experienced by respondents were:

- Footpath/ shared path too narrow (86%)
- Traffic too close to footpath (81%)
- No separated bike lane (79%)
- Speeding (61%)
- No safe east-west cycling route (56%)
- Red light running, being hit or near misses at crossings and intersections (51%)
- 60 km/hr speed limit too fast (50%)
- Don't feel safe walking or riding with young children (50%)

While we acknowledge this was a self-selected survey, the volume of detailed individual responses clearly show the depth of local feeling. These findings are corroborated through our consultation with local businesses and organisations, such as Barry Beckett Childcare - see above.

The Newlands Estate was originally designed to prioritise the 'human scale' and feature a street layout that fosters a sense of community. However, it has a major arterial road running through the middle of it, which contributes to a sense of fear and segregation for many residents.

The road design undermines major public and private investment

The danger also hinders liveability in the burgeoning activity centres in Coburg and Preston, and the Coburg North Sports Hub between them planned for redevelopment soon.

If there are to be thousands more people living around Pentridge and Preston market, many of whom will not have their own greenspace or a car, their access to parks and sporting facilities needs to be safe and welcoming or the fear, isolation and safety risks will be compounded. These residents have no safe way to bus or cycle between the two activity centres.

As recorded in our community survey, Murray Rd is used by vulnerable road users to access many facilities in central Coburg as well as Preston Market. Murray Rd/Gaffney St is within or bordering the northern section of the Coburg Activity Centre Core and will be a crucial link between the Activity Centre and the important green space, including Coburg Lake which was cited in the Victorian government's consultation as one of the four key 'places you love spending time in'. Murray Rd is [cited in the consultation summary](#):

Safer access needed along Murray Road to access key places like Coburg Lake, Coburg Central, Pentridge, Preston market

The Gaffney St section is mapped as a [Key Pedestrian Street](#).

There is recurring public and private property damage

The government (and taxpayers) have to pay for repairs to public infrastructure on Murray Road. In the interest of space, we won't list all recent accidents, but we are aware of countless instances of damage to roadside structures, including the aforementioned bus shelter, traffic lights, street signs, barriers and pedestrian crossings. Since this report's first version, a B-double truck has again mounted the shared path and destroyed the recently-repaired Newlands Rd bridge; the traffic signals at the Sydney Rd corner have been struck by a truck (February 2026) and brought down again the following month; and a sign and two parked cars at Outlook Rd were destroyed by a single driver in January 2026.

Based on current incident frequency, some of the road infrastructure has exorbitant lifecycle costs, such as the crossing lights at the intersection of Murray Rd and Elizabeth St, which lasted only seven months and where turning trucks repeatedly mount the shared path. It was extremely disappointing to see no safety changes made here after recent extensive resurfacing and repainting works.

There has been private property damage to vehicles, including faultless drivers and legally parked cars. It's likely most of the 30 crashes we've recorded in 2025 involved at least one written-off vehicle.

Recommendations

1: Revert Murray Rd to one through lane each way

In order to make Murray Road safer, revert the road to a single through lane in each direction, matching the configurations of the road sections to the east and west. The traffic volume does not justify two lanes, and Bell St has been well-designed to handle additional traffic throughout the day.

This aligns with the Engineers Australia recommendation to 'convert four-laned undivided urban streets to two-laned streets, wherever possible, to improve safety and re-allocate space from moving vehicles to higher value uses, such as creation of median crossings, bicycle priority lanes or provision of kerb side parking.'

2: Reallocate road space by installing pedestrian refuges, wider footpaths and protected bike lanes

Reverting the lanes creates the space necessary to reinstate infrastructure lost in the 2011 change and could address many of the safety issues that have gotten much worse since then.

Pedestrian refuges or dividing the road with a nature-strip, such as on the section between Grandview Rd and Gilbert Rd, would hugely improve pedestrian safety.

Bike lanes or wider shared footpaths can address the safety issues for cyclists. Car parking can also improve pedestrian safety, at the expense of cyclist safety, though few people park on Murray Rd due to most having driveways and the dangers of car theft and crashes. The addition of trees would improve amenity for vulnerable users.

3: Review crossings, intersections, speed limits and traffic calming measures

In recent years, speed humps, wombat crossings, red light cameras and speed cameras have been added to nearby roads which have had a positive impact on road safety. The same kind of improvements should be applied to Murray Rd. Our community Incident Reporter shows a high concentration of crashes at the Connolly/Outlook/Murray intersection and the Elizabeth St intersection. These locations are critical to commuter and child safety, including the heavily used 'pool crossing' adjacent to Coburg High School.

Most comparable roads in the area have seen speed limit reductions which has encouraged more traffic to Murray Road, making it more dangerous. The stretch of 60 km/h road between two long sections of 40 km/h to its east and west is jarring and dangerous.

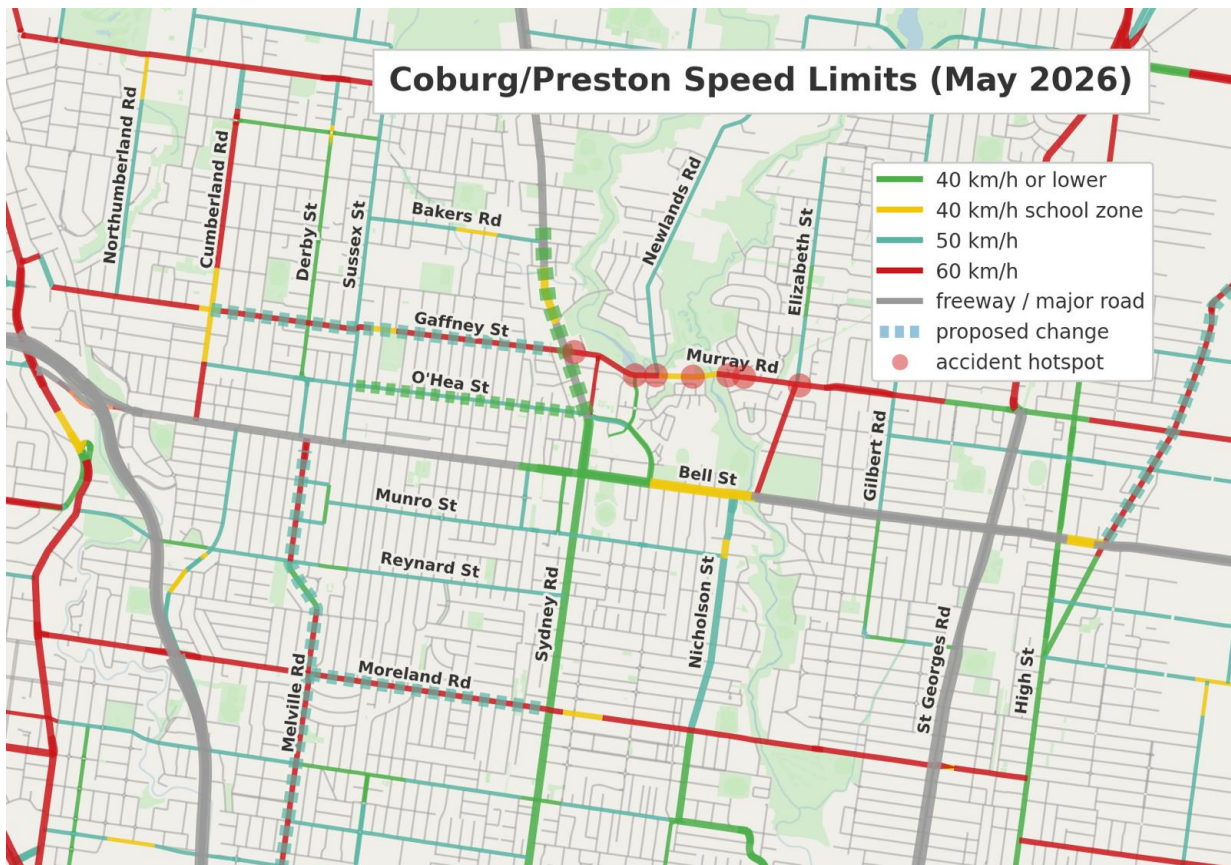


Image 2 (repeated): Coburg/Preston Speed limits as of 8 May 2026

It's disappointing that the former Minister considered that 60 km/h was "appropriate", as this contradicts the Government's August 2025 State Speed Zone Policy, which makes the road eligible for a 50 km/h limit (as an arterial connector in an urban area) and the designated 'Activity Street' section eligible for 40 km/h.

The whole road should be changed to 40 or 50 km/h. We continue to see dangerous driving on the road at all times. As noted above, a traffic survey found that 39% of west-bound drivers do not obey speed limits anyway, so engineered traffic calming will be more effective.

* * *

This short but dangerous stretch of road subjects motorists, pedestrians and cyclists to constant peril, causing chronic daily stress and regular serious accidents. The high number of children who use the road is a compelling reason to invest in better road safety before there are more life-changing injuries.

We would like a serious response to this report's recommendations and would welcome a meeting with relevant Ministers.

Contact

To contact SWARM, please email: safermurrayroad@gmail.com

To find out more about SWARM,

- Visit <https://safermurrayroad.com/>
- Read the personal accounts of hundreds of Victorians in Community Survey [here](#)
- Visit the [Facebook page](#)
- Follow on [Instagram](#)
- Check the new [incident reporter](#) to see times and locations of incidents (below). (The afternoon rush hour continues to see many accidents, even after the school zone sign was installed.)

