

The shocking and tragic road toll during the summer holidays has put additional focus on an investigation by the House of Representatives Transport Committee into how to improve national road safety. *About the House* reviews some of the evidence presented to the committee so far, including ideas from truck driver and road safety advocate Rod Hannifey.

*Below: Truck driver and road safety advocate, Rod Hannifey. Photo: AUSPIC*



There are more than 1,600 road deaths in Australia each year, and more than 22,000 serious injuries. Road crashes are a major cause of premature death, especially for young people, and in particular for young males. The Bureau of Transport Economics has estimated the economic cost of road crashes is about \$15 billion per year, using a conservative methodology.

That's the bad news.

The better news is that from 1970 to 2002 Australia's road fatality rate dropped from 30.4 to 8.7 deaths per 100,000 population. The number of fatalities per 100 million vehicle kilometres travelled dropped from 4.4 in 1971 to 0.9 in 2001. Seat belts, random breath testing, helmets, speed limits, road and vehicle design and law enforcement have all contributed to the fall.

But, according to Kym Bills, the Executive Director of the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB), Australia is still well short of OECD best practice.

Mr Bills is involved with implementing the National Road Safety Strategy. The 2001-2010 strategy is a cooperative framework for coordinating the road safety initiatives of federal, state, territory and local governments and other organisations and bodies capable of influencing road safety outcomes.

The strategy has a 40 per cent fatality reduction target, from 9.3 deaths per 100,000 population in 1999 to no more than 5.6 deaths in 2010.

"The goal of 40 per cent is challenging but achievable if governments, the industry, road user bodies and others all work cooperatively towards it," Mr Bills told the House of Representatives Transport Committee at a day-long forum in Canberra.

# Hannifey's RULES



Photo: AAP/Paul Miller

Uniform progress toward the 40 per cent target would require an annual reduction of about five per cent in the fatality rate. After the first two years, to December 2002, the actual cumulative reduction was 6.8 per cent—short of the pro rata target. In response, the ATSB, with other jurisdictions, coordinated a new, focused Road Safety Action Plan for 2003 and 2004.

“It was designed to provide a clear focus on priority action areas,” Mr Bills said.

Those priority areas were:

- safer roads, including black spot programs;
- speed management, including improving compliance with speed limits through integrated education and enforcement, and selective reduction of limits on roads with a relatively high crash rate;
- reducing impaired driving, including as a result of alcohol, drugs and fatigue; and
- encouraging corporate and individual vehicle purchasers to select safer vehicles.

“There is a strong consensus that those first two are particularly important over the next decade to achieve the reductions we need,” Mr Bills said.

The action plan also puts forward a small number of group specific measures for special groups like cyclists, motorcyclists, pedestrians, elderly road users, youth and Indigenous people. But, according to Mr Bills, “global or indirect measures are usually most effective”.

Mr Bills said projected gains from safer roads were heavily dependent on expenditure decisions. “It is not a simple matter of more road spending giving better results,” he said.

“Priorities assigned to different types of road spending are quite critical. Modest increases in safety targeted projects, like black spots or mass action, can achieve the same safety outcome as a large investment in general road construction, and the benefit-cost ratios are very high for many of these safety treatments.”

Allied to the Road Safety Action Plan is a National Heavy Vehicle Safety Strategy because about one in five road fatalities involve a heavy vehicle. Strong growth in road freight is forecast, even after allowing for substantial increases in rail transport.

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Truck driver Rod Hannifey has a number of practical ideas for improving road safety, which he presented to the forum. Mr Hannifey was the Australian Trucking Association’s national professional driver of the year in 2001, and is a road safety advocate.

“I have become involved in road safety issues because of a need to get truck

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drivers involved and to get their views through to people such as yourselves,” Mr Hannifey told the committee.

“Certainly from the truck driver’s point of view, we can achieve better outcomes than we have now.”

The first area Mr Hannifey would like to see addressed is education for car drivers.

ATSB statistics show that 80 per cent of fatalities between cars and trucks are the fault of the car driver. Mr Hannifey believes we could halve that number of fatalities through greater driver education at time of licensing

Fatigue is also important. Frequent, well-signed rest areas with adequate shade are a key.

“Truck rest areas are a very big issue. There has been a lot of work done on car rest areas but they are empty at night. In 10 years and two million kilometres, I have seen five cars parked in a car rest area at night and yet they have ‘No trucks’ signs. They are designed to keep us out and you have truck drivers sleeping two feet off the side of the road because there is nowhere for them to park.”

He suggested an immediate start could be made by just clearing suitable areas on

“Main Roads in Queensland have just agreed to do a similar blue reflector trial on all of the roads from Goondiwindi into Queensland. It is simple, cheap and effective. It is only an informal rest area; we cannot expect the road authorities to go out tomorrow and build us 10,000 rest areas, but we can put up blue reflectors to tell drivers where these places are simply and cheaply. You have only got to save one truck driver who was struggling to get to a rest area 40 kilometres down the road and fell asleep and there is \$1 million worth of accident avoided. They could do the whole of New South Wales with blue reflectors.”

Mr Hannifey said caravans also presented an issue.

“A bloke can drive a Mini Minor for 10 years; tomorrow he can buy a four-wheel drive and two tonnes of caravan and hit the highway with no education and no licensing—nothing at all.”

Mr Hannifey writes a column for *Caravan World* magazine to give a truck driver’s point of view and to emphasise the need for road users to work together to achieve better road safety for all.

“It could do with a big push from somebody, such as the government getting involved with some form of education similar to the video I suggested for young drivers. When you bought a caravan you could get a video with half an hour on how to load your van, how weight affects it and a tag bit on the end about sharing the road with trucks, because some people are driving vehicles the same size as a semitrailer and there are no licensing requirements for that.”

Mr Hannifey also suggests signs that announce the start of overtaking lanes should indicate the length of the lane. He has put the idea to the RTA through the Road Freight Advisory Council.

“As a truck driver, I may be following another truck and I do not know whether that overtaking lane is 500 metres long or four kilometres. I know the capabilities of my vehicle and the vehicle I am following. If I know the length of the overtaking lane, I have a chance to safely make a decision as to whether or not I have enough room to pull out and overtake.

“I have had a number of complaints from motorists in cars who think that we should automatically back off and let them out. It is very hard in a truck when you get to the end of an overtaking lane and 17 cars are trying to get past you before the end of that lane.”



Photo: AAP/Mediakoo

**"It is very hard in a truck when you get to the end of an overtaking lane and 17 cars are trying to get past you before the end of that lane."**

“We could institute an education program at time of licensing; perhaps even with a short, 10-minute video so that the young learner drivers have some idea of how to interact with a vehicle which is up to 50 times the weight of the vehicle they are driving,” Mr Hannifey said. “At the moment we do not teach them that; they do something silly, they get killed or injured and the trucking industry gets the blame in the press.”

the roadside or using stockpile sites, which can then be upgraded as funds are available. In particular, the Pacific Highway is urgently in need of more truck rest areas. The Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW (RTA) is building one at Taree from a design provided by Mr Hannifey.

On the Newell Highway in New South Wales there is a trial of blue reflectors to indicate to drivers that there is an informal parking bay available to pull over and rest. Mr Hannifey came up with the idea.

“A driver who knows a particular road knows that around the next corner is a bit of dirt where he can safely pull up and go to bed,” he said. But “a driver who does not know that road is not aware of that and, by the time he sees that, he has passed it; it is too late and it may be 50 kilometres to the next rest area”.



Rod Hannifey. Photo: AUSPIC

Yellow advisory speed signs are another bug-bear for Mr Hannifey. He says most signs are no longer realistic, and are out of touch with current motor vehicles.

"They might have been all right for Austin A40s, but anyone in a current model vehicle that is 10 years old will go around any corner with an 85 kilometre sign on it at 100 kilometres an hour without even thinking about it," Mr Hannifey said.

"Then you will suddenly come to one which says 75 and which is *really* a 75 kilometre corner, and you think, 'Jeez, what do I do now? I'm going too fast.' I believe they need reassessing. I think motorists now generally ignore them and they are not providing the benefit that they used to."

Not surprisingly, the condition of roads is also an important one for truck drivers, and Mr Hannifey has some practical suggestions. He says bumps and dips are magnified in trucks, so it is logical that when road authorities are doing their regular road audits, they should do them in trucks, not cars, to get a better picture of where attention is needed. This could also be assisted by a national 1800 phone number to report the need for road repairs.

"I constantly ring authorities and ask them to fix something. There is a gentleman in the RTA at Narrabri who has been excellent. He has fixed about 10 bumps on the Newell Highway for me, and that is just because I have rung him up.

"I have rung road authorities at 5.30 in the morning, and of course there is nobody home. At other times I have rung in the middle of the day and have rung the closest town to where I am, only to be told that Fred, Bill, Sue and Charlie are not there, are at lunch or are out the back. Now you have got to ring another office and do it again. And the average truck driver will not spend 20 minutes on a mobile phone call to report a pothole.

"If there was one number, a bloke would be likely to key it into his phone. Surely, with phone technology now, if you ring up in Moree it could direct you to the local office, and you could say, 'Ten kilometres south of Moree, on the first corner, there is a dip' or 'There is a dangerous pothole.' It can be fixed when it is smaller, instead of when it is bigger and a car has hit it and gone head-on into a truck coming the other way."

Mr Hannifey also called for action on fog lights, the indiscriminate use of which he

**"Some people are driving vehicles the same size as a semitrailer and there are no licensing requirements for that."**

described as a "menace to people who spend their life on the road". And he sees the need for properly fitted reflector lights on both the front and back of car and boat trailers, and for trucks to be warned when bends are off-camber. ■

*Rod Hannifey is a driver for Toll and he is grateful for their support in relation to this story. He appeared at the road safety forum in a private capacity and the views he expressed were personal views.*

#### **Links and contacts**

Rod Hannifey has a website at [www.truckright.myco.com.au](http://www.truckright.myco.com.au)

A transcript of the road safety forum is available on the House Transport Committee's website, with copies of submissions to the inquiry.

Visit: [www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/trs/roadsafety](http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/trs/roadsafety)

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