

ACRS Submission to the Joint Select Committee on Road Safety



About the Australasian College of Road Safety

The Australasian College of Road Safety was established in 1988 and is the region's peak organisation for road safety professionals and members of the public who are focused on saving lives and serious injuries on our roads.

The College Patron is His Excellency General the Honourable David John Hurley AC DSC (Retd), Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia.

Mr Martin Small: President, Australasian College of Road Safety

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Introduction

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Joint Select Committee on Road Safety. The Australasian College of Road Safety (ACRS) would be very pleased to appear before the Select Committee to discuss this submission and answer any questions from members.

The ACRS is very pleased that this Joint Select Committee has been established, and strongly endorse the expressed desire by the Chair for it to be conducted in a bipartisan manner.

The ACRS is committed to the elimination of serious road trauma. We support our members in their efforts to eliminate serious road trauma through knowledge sharing, professional development, networking and advocacy.

We recognise the significant policy change which is occurring at a national level in Australia. This is necessary because the sustained under-investment in the institutions, the systems, and the policy frameworks which are needed to drive safety improvements has inevitably impacted upon results, which can no longer be hidden by the default policy position of victim blaming, a position now thoroughly discredited.

Specifically, we recognise:

- The decision made by the former Minister of Transport and Infrastructure to call a national inquiry into the country's poor road safety performance
- The independent report which articulated the problem at a national level, clearly exposing the limits to which this is simply a State and Territory issue
- The conduct of a governance review by the Commonwealth Government and the subsequent re-establishment of an Office of Road Safety in Canberra.

We strongly endorse the commitment by Australian Transport and Infrastructure Ministers in August 2019 to eliminating road fatalities by 2050, and encourage them to extend this to the elimination of serious injuries as a new national road safety strategy for Australia is prepared. It is our expectation that this is the vision which is used as the starting point for the new national road safety strategy which will be developed in 2020.

As admirable and important as this vision is, we need to recognise that we are starting from a position of relative weakness, having suffered a lost decade in road safety. Fatal road traffic injury reductions have flatlined, and non-fatal injuries are increasing. The targets set for 2020 reflected business as usual, and business as usual went backwards. Australian Government advisors informed Ministers and stakeholders last year that the targets won't be met.

The Joint Select Committee on Road Safety has been established to inquire into and report on:

- a) the effectiveness of existing road safety support services and programs, including opportunities to integrate Safe System principles into health, education, industry and transport policy;
- b) the impact of road trauma on the nation, including the importance of achieving zero deaths and serious injuries in remote and regional areas;
- c) the possible establishment of a future parliamentary Standing Committee on Road Safety and its functions;

- d) measures to ensure state, territory and local government road infrastructure investment incorporates the Safe System principles;
- e) road trauma and incident data collection and coordination across Australia;
- f) recommending strategies, performance measures and targets for the next National Road Safety Strategy;
- g) recommendations for the role of the newly established Office of Road Safety; and
- h) other measures to support the Australian Parliament's ongoing resolve to reduce incidents on our roads, with a focus on the recommendations from the Inquiry into the effectiveness of the National Road Safety Strategy 2011–2020.

We have responded to the terms of reference in order below. However, we note here that the Select Committee will address “Other measures to support the Australian Parliament’s ongoing resolve to reduce incidents on our roads, with a focus on the recommendations from the Inquiry into the Effectiveness of the National Road Safety Strategy 2011–2020.”

ACRS endorsed the Inquiry report when it was published in 2018, and considers it remains just as relevant now. For the extremely limited resourcing that was made available, the Inquiry report delivered a remarkably cohesive and compelling, necessarily high-level, analysis of the national state of road safety in Australia. No other national level analysis of road safety in Australia has been published since which has overtaken or comprehensively addressed the findings and recommendations from the Inquiry, noting that the summary report issued after the Governance Review addressed the institutional road safety management functions which have to be led by the Office of Road Safety.

Responses to the Committee Terms of Reference

a) The effectiveness of existing road safety support services and programs, including opportunities to integrate Safe System principles into health, education, industry and transport policy

There are many services and programs which have been designed and are being delivered which are likely to be effective in reducing serious road trauma, and some are likely to be effective in systematically eliminating serious road trauma. However, generally, there is insufficient investment in them, or they are not incorporating management and policy design elements that will allow them to be even more effective. The lack of investment, and the lack of safety discipline in current investment, is a vital reason for Australia's poor road safety performance over the last decade.

Integrating safe system principles in all sectors of society is an important task over the next decade. Aside from professional obligations to eliminate serious road trauma which exist in many sectors, such as the transport, health, and justice sectors, all organisations in Australia have a duty under work health and safety laws to ensure the safety of their own employees and other road users, or "bystanders", those employees encounter in road traffic.

There are a variety of opportunities for a national program of activity which works through each sector, identifying critical safety issues and mechanisms for progressively eliminating serious road trauma. These opportunities include organisations developing safe systems of work in road traffic (as required under work health and safety law) or implementing road traffic safety management systems (as set out in ISO 39001 Road Traffic Safety Management Systems).

Much more systematic building of road safety partnerships outside of government is warranted, including community commitment to the elimination of serious road trauma and the capacity to act in support of this goal.

An integration agenda itself is, however, likely to be insufficient to get Australia out of its current slump in performance. This slump has been due to a lack of safety investment and safety decisions within the public institutions which are most directly responsible for the safety of road users – that is, the institutions which are responsible for:

- Leading and coordinating the design and delivery of road safety strategies and plans
- Planning, design and management of the network
- Accelerating new vehicle safety technology into the national fleet
- Strengthening standards and compliance associated with the use of motor vehicles
- Emergency medical response, trauma management and long-term care for road traffic crash victims
- Building and sustaining road safety research and development, and professional and management capacity.

Urgent attention is required to turn around current performance trends, by focusing on re-energising road safety management practices and decision making within the transport sector.

b) The impact of road trauma on the nation, including the importance of achieving zero deaths and serious injuries in remote and regional areas

For some years, the College called on the Australian Government to task the Productivity Commission with undertaking a full enquiry into the impact of road trauma on Australia's productivity, and the national investment and policy decisions required to achieve the nation's policy goals of a safe road transport system. The core function of the Commission is to conduct public inquiries at the request of the Australian Government on key policy or regulatory issues bearing on Australia's economic performance and community wellbeing.

Hundreds of Australians are killed, and thousands more injured as a result of everyday use of publicly owned and regulated infrastructure. The estimated annual economic costs of this trauma is \$30 Billion. The Select Committee may wish to consider what it is about these extraordinary, persistent, social and economic losses which means that a systematic investigation of the problem by the Commission is unwarranted. The conclusions to this consideration may inform an understanding of the impact of road trauma on the nation.

We continue to experience a disparity between the number of deaths occurring on roads within urban areas and those in our regional/remote areas. The latest data shows that around two thirds of road deaths are occurring on regional roads. At the Australasian Road Safety Conference (which is run by the ACRS, in partnership with Austroads) in Perth in 2017, 19 regional and remote participants to attend the conference, representatives who would otherwise be unable to participate. Feedback from each attendee was very positive in terms of both networking opportunities for future work and knowledge transfer. The ACRS strongly supports significant investment and improvement in the safety of regional Australia.

We do not seek to diminish in any way the extraordinary impact of road traffic fatal and serious injury to any community. Therefore, we also recognise that urban Australia suffers disproportionate serious injury losses, and that serious injury is associated with catastrophic and long-term consequences within families and communities. We need to respond to both the flatlining in fatal injury reductions (dominated by regional Australia), and the worsening of non-fatal injuries (dominated by urban Australia).

In health terms, road traffic injury is a non-communicable disease of mobility which disproportionately affects the young and the poor. Along with developing safer mobility systems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, the ACRS considers that we must provide for the safety of Australians wherever they live. We are concerned about inequalities in road safety wherever they occur.

c) The possible establishment of a future parliamentary Standing Committee on Road Safety and its functions

The ACRS strongly supports the establishment of a parliamentary Standing Committee on Road Safety. This would be an entirely appropriate response from the Australian Parliament to the National Inquiry commissioned by the Australian Government, affording the inquiry report, and the response to that report by the Australian Government, the significance that it deserves. Sustained policy and legislative attention will be required at a parliamentary level if we are to recover from our current performance slump and get road safety on track towards our common goal of eliminating serious road trauma by 2050.

The Standing Committee should actively foster and maintain a bipartisan spirit in its endeavours. It should be prepared to hold the Australian Government of the day to account for achievement of safety results for the people of Australia. It should also be prepared to engage constructively on legislative and policy proposals from the Government, including providing support for safety focused decisions which may have proved contentious in the past, and promoting collaboration with and support for State Government and Local Government road safety management programs.

We are confident that the Standing Committee would be supported by business and community interests who are concerned about road safety, and believe that it should engage independent expert advice in preparing and prosecuting its safety agenda.

The Standing Committee should assume a national leadership role for road safety in its own right. One means of doing this would be to demonstrate leadership on those matters which are the direct responsibility of the Australian Government through its investment program and legislative agenda.

Major issues which could be incorporated into the terms of reference are:

- Investment Timelines - Short, medium and long-term investment needs in Australia for achieving zero road fatalities and serious injuries by 2050
- Investment Decision-Making Processes - The re-orientation of investment decision processes within the land transport sector to favour road safety such as a requirement for States and Territories to publish safety star ratings for their road networks, or the establishment of a National Road Safety Fund
- Support for New Vehicle Safety Technology - The acceleration of market uptake and regulatory decision making regarding critical new vehicle safety technology, such as matching European regulation of intelligent speed adaptation and autonomous emergency braking
- Address Imbalance Relative to Outcomes - Reducing inequalities in road safety outcomes, such as those suffered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and other geographic, user and socio-economic groups.

We encourage the terms of reference for a Standing Committee for Road Safety within the Australian Parliament to explicitly reference the need for its mandate to be renewed and resourced during each new Parliament until at least 2030.

d) Measures to ensure state, territory and local government road infrastructure investment incorporates the Safe System principles

In 2017, the ACRS called for the Australian Government to make the publication of safety star ratings on the National Road Network a condition for any Commonwealth investment in the network. We reiterate that call here.

Some context is required. Recognising the progress being made in systematically improving the safety of new motor vehicles through the provision of objective consumer information, mobility clubs started down the long path of applying these essential consumer safety disciplines to improving the safety of roads. This began with the European Road Assessment Program (RAP) in 1999, and was followed soon after by AusRAP in 2005.

There has been some spectacular progress globally. The International Road Assessment Program (iRAP), built on the work of EuroRAP and AusRAP, and safety star ratings for roads are now embedded in the global road safety consciousness. The United Nations now endorses uses of infrastructure safety star ratings as one of a small number of voluntary road safety performance targets for countries which are serious about tackling their road safety problem.

In Australia, progress has been painfully slow. Roads and traffic authorities were not prepared to accept AusRAP as a performance measure. Instead, they began work on their own safety rating system – the Australian National Risk Assessment Model (ANRAM). More than a decade has passed. Consumers in Australia still have no objective, easily understood, uniform public information about the safety of the roads they use. Why is this essential public safety information not being prepared and made available for public review?

Safety star ratings delivered through Australasian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) have worked spectacularly well in vehicle safety because they make transparent essential public safety information. This same approach is particularly valuable for roads in regional communities where the fatality rates are so high. Respectful, strategic conversations are needed in regional communities about the inherent safety of the current infrastructure, the safety of the speeds that are being travelled, and the options and costs associated with providing a safe road environment. Regional communities deserve this respect.

The primary measure required to drive safe road infrastructure across State, Territory and local networks is a performance measure. How safe are the roads on those networks, according to a simple five-star safety rating system, and what is being done to cost effectively and systematically upgrade the safety of those networks? Without the essential performance management discipline that a safety star rating system will deliver for the road network, in regional and urban Australia, for vehicle occupants, cyclists, pedestrians and motorcyclists, we will all remain in the dark.

We are happy to engage with roads and traffic authorities regarding how this essential performance management discipline is achieved. However, we cannot usefully engage on any matters associated with the safety of the road network safety in Australia until objective information about the safety of the road network is made publicly available for review and discussion.

e) Road trauma and incident data collection and coordination across Australia

A key finding of the Governance Review undertaken by the Australian Government was that “there is no agreed national framework for road safety performance information.” It goes on to say:

“Development of better performance information and a national framework for monitoring and evaluation to better measure, target, monitor and evaluate data and performance will provide a results framework and support the objectives of the next national road safety strategy. This is where the Australian Government could lead through the Office of Road Safety.”

The ACRS agrees, and looks forward to seeing significant progress on this during the course of 2020. We recognise that the governments of Australia have made progress in injury data collection and coordination, and but that significant further progress is required. Consideration should be given to the establishment of a National Road Safety Observatory which brings together and makes accessible all road safety data in a timely manner.

The ACRS also endorses calls for systematic no blame investigation of road crashes across Australia, raised initially by the Australian Trucking Association (in relation to heavy vehicle crashes), and identified as a key gap in the mid-term implementation review of the National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020. The Select Committee may like to ask if any public agency thinks that this would not be an important implementation initiative for the next national road safety strategy. The ACRS endorses the recommendation of the Productivity Commission regarding the extension of the Australian Transport Safety Bureau mandate to include heavy vehicle crashes in its systematic no-blame investigations, and considers this should go further to include arrangements for systematic no blame investigations of road crashes generally.

f) Recommending strategies, performance measures and targets for the next National Road Safety Strategy

The current road traffic systems in Australia are set to kill and maim hundreds and thousands of people each year. Safety leadership is essentially change leadership. A transformational response is now required.

Many things need to be done. The ACRS has no monopoly on the best ideas, and we have supported strategically focused and evidence-based demands from other organisations, such as the AAA call to strengthen national leadership in road safety, significantly improve road safety data, leverage much more safety from infrastructure investment, and accelerate new vehicle safety technology. We focus here on two key issues: performance management and funding.

Performance Management

Strong performance management systems across all public agencies with primary responsibility for road safety will be essential.

This starts with target setting. The ACRS considers that, if our goal is to achieve zero by 2050, the only reasonable interim target is for 50% reductions in fatal and serious injury by 2030. These reflect targets that have been set in Europe where they are already a lot safer than us now. We recognise that these targets are challenging, but we know they are achievable. If matched in 2040 and in 2050, Australia will at least be on the cusp of realising our ultimate vision.

Bottom up performance and delivery targets are now needed to identify what will be done to achieve our interim goal in 2030. In light of our ultimate goal, these targets could include elimination of fatal and serious injury at all school zones or increasingly achieved at a local government level.

Road safety in Australia is in such a state that we also need to look to international bodies for guidance and advice in this area. The United Nations has established voluntary road safety performance targets. These are a useful point of reference for the preparation of a new national road safety strategy, including the establishment of targets for the safety star rating of the road network.

We have called for more equitable outcomes for the most vulnerable members of the community – whether for regional communities facing disproportionately high fatality rates, or for cyclists and pedestrians in our cities where we are still only comprehending the scale of the injury disaster which is unfolding, or for poor or disadvantaged communities.

Funding

Amongst its 12 key recommendations, the national Inquiry report recommended establishing a minimum \$3 billion a year road safety fund, and enacting legislation to ensure Australian Government investment in road safety is at least 10% of the annual cost of road crashes to the country (which \$3 billion currently represents). The report recommended that a minimum 5% of funds are allocated for a road safety innovation initiative that can deliver results in Australia and provide export potential globally, and a minimum 5% of funds are allocated for a road safety enablers initiative.

It may be assumed that the announcement of an “additional \$2.2 billion in road safety funding” as part of the 2019 budget of the Australian Government was an adequate response to this recommendation. However, it can be argued that this expenditure does not meet a simple safety test – is this how \$2.2 billion in safety funding would be allocated by a Government with a vision to achieve zero road fatalities by 2050?

Funding packages highlighted in the budget were:

- An additional \$1.1 billion in funding for local governments under the Roads to Recovery program – the ACRS supports cost effective investment in the safety of local road networks, and this program does allow investment in road safety infrastructure in regional Australia. However, the Roads to Recovery program “supports the maintenance of the nation's local road infrastructure asset.” It is a road maintenance program not a road safety program, and does not include investment in the necessary road safety management and professional capacity for local government staff.
- An extra \$550 million for the successful Black Spot Program – this is a road safety program. The ACRS supports cost effective investment in parts of the network, and this program does allow targeting of known high-risk locations. However, funding should be considered within a much wider set of performance management accountabilities for State and Territory roads authorities. The United Nations has established safety star ratings as the means of setting infrastructure safety performance targets and these should be included at a state-wide level in any requirements for Commonwealth funding into the road traffic system. The College has called for no Commonwealth funding for the national road network without publication of infrastructure safety star ratings by States and Territories.
- A further \$571.1 million to improve the safety and efficiency of heavy vehicle operations through the Bridges Renewal Program, Heavy Vehicle Safety and Productivity Program and Heavy Vehicle Safety Initiatives. The question here is whether this is what a safety driven analysis of half a billion dollars investment in reducing fatalities and serious injuries associated with heavy vehicles would focus on. We note that the recent conclusion from the Productivity Commission it is unlikely that the recent heavy vehicle reforms have contributed to additional improvement to safety outcomes.

Much smaller safety focused expenditure, for example the essential establishment of the Office of Road Safety, should be seen as the starting point only for establishing and scaling up a major new investment in a transformative national road safety agenda. The College expects to see this investment significantly ramped up in the upcoming budget, or forecasts for how this will be done in implementing the upcoming national road safety strategy.

As the National Inquiry report put forward so well, a transformation is required regarding our road traffic system. Significant new safety focused investment planning is required immediately, and this needs to be budgeted into long range expenditure forecasts through to 2030 at the least. Current practices and processes which assume residual safety benefits from programs are not designed to eliminate serious road trauma and are not working – a flatlining of fatalities and a surge in injuries is tragic evidence of this. Those practices and processes need to be replaced with safety focused programs capable of realising our common vision. This work needs to be progressed as an urgent priority.

g) Recommendations for the role of the newly established Office of Road Safety

It is surprising that this subject was not comprehensively addressed in the report of the Governance Review commissioned by the Australian Government in 2018. The ACRS welcomes the establishment of the Office of Road Safety as a result of that review, but it is assumed that this was a decision that was made after a full analysis of the various options was undertaken. The functions of the Office would have been quite clear, based on that analysis. That analysis has not yet been made available, so we are unable to assess the role and function of the Office against the issues which were identified.

That said, the Governance Review was properly based on the best analysis of institutional road safety management functions for a lead agency, based on the road safety management framework originally published by the Global Road Safety Facility of the World Bank in 2009. Examples of the role for the Office, based on this framework are as follows:

- *Results focus* – for example, championing activity which can strategically cut to the core of Australia's road safety problem and effecting a quick turn around on the performance slump of the last decade
- *Coordination* – for example, routinely engaging, as public servants charged with leading the elimination of serious road trauma, with all government and non-government system designers who can deliver the shared 2050 vision
- *Legislation* – for example ensuring that critical new vehicle safety technology is immediately adopted within Australian law once established within the United Nations vehicle regulatory system
- *Promotion* – for example, championing the elimination vision for road safety across all arms of government, and promoting private sector take up of their WHS responsibilities to deliver a safe system of work in road traffic
- *Funding and resource allocation* – for example, reforming the current national budgeting and planning model for land transport so that it systematically favours safety of people, and developing short, medium and long-term safety investment plans in line with 2030 road safety targets and the shared 2050 vision
- *Monitoring and evaluation* – for example, leading a systematic national-level evaluation program which leads to monthly, quarterly and annual reporting against the performance targets set out in the upcoming national road safety strategy
- *Research and development, and knowledge transfer* – for example, establishing and significantly increasing over the next five years a national research and development program backed up by investment in a major professional and community capability building program.

The ACRS has warmly welcomed, but does not take for granted, the Australian Government taking the important step of establishing an Office of Road Safety. We consider that the Office should be systematically strengthened over the term of this Parliament by establishing it as a statutory body, with clear functional responsibilities, and resourcing commensurate with its role of leading the national effort to eliminate serious road trauma by 2050. There should be an annual report to Parliament against agreed performance indicators.

Attachments

Attachment 1 – ACRS Membership

The Australasian College of Road Safety membership consists of the following:

- All Australian and New Zealand road safety research agencies
- Australian and New Zealand universities
- Injury prevention, brain injury and neuroscience research organisations
- Australasian medical representative groups
- Australian federal government road safety & health promotion agencies
- State and Territory road transport agencies
- Local government agencies
- Policing agencies (both federal and state)
- Emergency services agencies
- Road safety research funding organisations
- Medical associations
- Safety promotion and training agencies
- Carer advocacy groups and associations
- Independent road safety consultants
- State vehicle and personal insurance agencies
- Driving schools and instructor associations
- Road safety advocacy groups, including motorcycles, children, youth, pedestrians, cyclists
- Road industry groups, including vehicles, trucks, roads
- International road safety consultants, agencies and advocacy groups
- Fleet safety associations
- Independent economist consultants and companies
- Engineers & engineering associations
- Legal firms
- Trucking companies
- Vehicle manufacturing companies
- Vehicle safety advocacy and testing organisations
- Other public or private companies interested in or working in the field of road safety
- Secondary, tertiary and post-graduate students currently studying in the road trauma field
- Interested members of the public