

Submission to the Joint Select Committee on Road Safety 2021

Introduction and Northern Territory Context

The Northern Territory Government's Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics (the Department) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the 2021 Joint Select Committee (the Committee) on Road Safety Inquiry.

This submission complements the Department's earlier submission to the Committee in July 2020, and provides an update on key Northern Territory road trauma data and addresses the Committee's Inquiry terms of reference.

Over the last 10 years, on average 41 people die and around 500 people are seriously injured each year on Northern Territory roads. On a per capita basis, the Northern Territory has the highest road fatality rate of all Australian jurisdictions.

The Bureau of Infrastructure Transport and Regional Economics (BITRE) report that in 2019, the Northern Territory recorded 14.64 road deaths per 100 000 population, which is over three times the national rate of 4.68 over the same period.

The Northern Territory Government continues to address the most fundamental road safety issues, such as high rates of drink driving, non-wearing of seatbelts and speeding. These are all areas where other jurisdictions have made significant progress, however they remain a challenge in the Northern Territory, particularly in our regional and remote areas.

On average over the last 10 years:

- 72 percent of fatal crashes in the Northern Territory occurred in regional and remote areas and over 48 percent of fatalities were attributed single vehicle run off road crashes;
- 40 percent of fatalities involved alcohol;
- 33 percent of fatalities involved people not wearing seatbelts;
- 28 percent of fatalities involved speed;
- Indigenous people represented over 50 percent of fatalities. Not wearing seatbelts was a factor in over 50 percent of these deaths; and
- 19 per cent of fatalities were pedestrians, with Aboriginal people representing over 80 per cent of pedestrian fatalities.

Despite these challenges, the rate of fatalities has decreased in the Northern Territory. In the 10 years to 2010, an average of 50.3 fatalities occurred on Territory roads, compared to 41.1 in the decade to 2020, representing a decrease of almost 20 percent over this time.

More significant progress has been seen in decreasing rates of non-seatbelt wearing, driver fatality and fatigue related fatalities, however drug driving, which was once seen as an emerging threat, is now increasingly present as a contributing factor in road trauma, while pedestrians and motorcycle crashes in the Northern Territory remain over-represented in road trauma statistics.

Northern Territory position on the Inquiry Terms of Reference

A) Measures to support the Australian Parliaments ongoing resolve to eliminate road crash fatal and serious injuries with a focus on ways to achieving Vision Zero by 2050.

The Northern Territory Government welcomes the ongoing commitment from the Australian parliament to continue to advocate for improved road safety outcomes across all areas of Australia.

The importance of continuing to address Australia's road trauma has been reinforced through a number of streams of work undertaken by the Infrastructure and Transport Ministers Meeting (ITMM), including establishing road safety as a standing item on the agenda of ITMM.

Further, the Department is actively involved in supporting the development of road safety policy which will contribute to safer roads and road environments, through work done by the National Transport Council (NTC).

Below outlines key government measures currently in place to reduce trauma and harm on our roads.

National Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030

The Department welcomes the recent endorsement of the National Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030 (the Strategy) at ITMM. The Strategy and associated Action Plan will be the main measure to achieve Australia's goal of Vision Zero.

The Strategy sets out Australia's road safety objectives, key priorities for action and road trauma reduction targets for the decade to 2030. The Strategy also lays the groundwork for the longer-term goal of zero deaths and serious injuries by 2050.

The Department has worked collaboratively on the development of the Strategy and proposed Action Plan with all jurisdictions and the recently established Commonwealth Office of Road Safety.

Road Safety is one of the Northern Territory Government's highest priorities, and while it is acknowledged that the new national Strategy targets are considered ambitious, the Department will work towards implementing measures that have the greatest impact in reducing harm on Northern Territory roads.

[Northern Territory Government Towards Zero Road Safety Action Plan 2018-2022](#)

The Department continues to support the reduction of road crash fatalities and serious injury, through the Northern Territory's Towards Zero Road Safety Action Plan (Towards Zero 2018-2022), which was launched in March 2018. Planning is now underway to develop the new Northern Territory Strategy that will complement the National Strategy and Action Plan.

Towards Zero outlines actions which aim to improve road safety in the Northern Territory by guiding improvements in road safety, and the vision aims to inspire ownership by all road users of the Territory's roads. All levels of government (including across portfolios), media, vehicle and technology manufacturers, business, community and individuals, are encouraged to consider how they can contribute to taking a more active role in road safety.

The actions within Towards Zero target 11 priority areas. Some of the high priority areas for the Northern Territory include Alcohol and Drugs, Seatbelts and Child Restraints, Speed and Driving to the Conditions, Roads and Roadsides and Aboriginal People, to address their over representation in road trauma.

[National Road Safety Program](#)

The Australian Government has allocated \$2 billion towards road safety infrastructure upgrades across the nation. The Northern Territory Government will receive \$144 million of this and will jointly contribute further towards this program.

The Northern Territory Government and the Department are very appreciative of this funding to target high risk areas on the road network. However, the program has also been used as a COVID economic stimulus program, with a "use it or lose it" policy. It is very challenging for the program to be delivered in six month tranches – particularly given the issues the civil construction faces in Northern Australia during the wet season for up to six months of the year. To date, the Australian Government have been sympathetic to the Territory's unique challenges and this has been welcomed.

Supply chains issues have also impacted this program. For example, given the program is road safety based, every jurisdiction requires long lengths of guardrails, at the same

time. Additionally, internationally supplied items such as integrated circuits for intelligent transport systems are in short supply internationally due to COVID.

The Northern Territory Government would support this program becoming an ongoing initiative. The Department would also recommend a review of the program conditions to accommodate the challenges outlined above.

B) The effectiveness of existing road safety programs across Australia; opportunities to improve them and encourage broader uptake of effective approaches.

The Northern Territory faces many unique challenges in achieving better road safety outcomes and delivering a road network that is safe for all road users. Approximately 70 percent of the road network remains unsealed and the geography and extreme climate creates challenges for road users and managers.

The Northern Territory's small population of around 245 000 people, are widely dispersed across the main urban centres to very remote communities which are many hundreds of kilometres away from urban or small service centres. This requires people living in regional and remote areas to spend more time on roads to access service centres. Around 30 percent of the Territory's population are Indigenous and nearly 80 percent of Aboriginal people live in regional and extremely remote areas. Tragically, Aboriginal people are over represented in our road trauma, accounting for around 50 percent of our road fatalities.

Making progress towards overcoming road safety challenges, the Northern Territory has successfully implemented several key policy measures over the last decade, which have assisted in reducing the road toll. Some of the more significant measures include:

- in partnership with the Australian Government, ongoing investment in road and roadside infrastructure;
- increased alcohol testing rates and the introduction of drug testing;
- introduction of speed and red-light cameras;
- removal of open speed limits;
- higher penalties for speed, drink/drug driving, non-wearing of seatbelts;
- introduction of a demerit point system;
- introduction of longer learner and provisional driving periods;
- introduction of child restraint legislation;
- improved driver licensing and education services, including a review of the DriveSafe NT Remote program; and
- expansion of subsidized public transport.

The NT supports the proposed National Action Plan which identifies actions to be undertaken by governments (Federal and State/Territory) over the next five years and which supports the Strategy to achieve fatality and injury reduction targets.

Ongoing investment in the NT's undeveloped road network is required and the continued rollout of new road safety upgrades and improvements under the Federal Government \$2 billion Road Safety Program is welcomed. This significant investment will continue to assist the Northern Territory to deliver infrastructure that will save lives and reduce injury. Additionally, maintaining funding for existing programs including the Blackspot Program, will allow a continual program of infrastructure investment to continue where it most needed.

The cumulative effect of the measures implemented has seen a significant reduction in the Northern Territory road trauma over the longer term. Annual fatalities in the Northern Territory were over 80 per annum in the late 1980's, these have reduced to the equal lowest recorded number of fatalities of 31 in 2020.

C) Opportunities for government policy in health, education, industry, transport and other areas to contribute to road trauma elimination, integrating Safe System principles.

The NT supports the new National Road Safety Strategy's adoption of the social model approach to more effectively engage all sectors of society. The social model recognises that road safety is everyone's responsibility and cultural change is a necessity across Australian society, in order to influence improvements in the road safety of our communities.

Through the implementation of the Northern Territory Towards Zero Action Plan, an emphasis has been placed on broader engagement across NT Government agencies, the business community, NGO's and the broader community, to encourage wider ownership of the road safety issue in society and to deliver meaningful actions which are supported through all levels of government.

D) Opportunities to embed road trauma prevention across Australian Government portfolios and agencies.

The Northern Territory welcomes the establishment of the Office of Road Safety's initiative to embed the social model as the basis of the Strategy encouraging ownership across all levels of the Australian Government.

The Office of Road Safety should be the main conduit for Australian Government agencies to work collaboratively to reduce road trauma. Identification of new broad performance measures in the Action Plan will allow tracking against the Strategy priorities and highlight if enabling actions are making a difference.

E) Opportunities to reduce road trauma in the workplace, working with Work, Health and Safety agencies and employers across Australia; including a focus on heavy vehicles and the gig economy.

Under work health and safety laws, businesses are required to ensure the health and safety of workers and third parties so far as is reasonably practicable, including risks associated with using vehicles for work or working near road traffic.

The Department worked with Austroads in the development of their report 'Vehicles as a Workplace: Work Health Safety Guide in 2019', with the Guide designed for organisations and individuals who use vehicles for work purposes on the road networks of Australia or New Zealand.

The Northern Territory has embedded the use of safer vehicles and work practices in Government Fleet policies, by only choosing five star rated passenger vehicles, SUV's and light commercial vehicles and includes guidelines for emissions standards and vehicle retention periods.

The Northern Territory applies a work, health and safety approach to managing driver fatigue in the road transport industry, recognising interstate fatigue management practices for cross border operations. The Department is working with the local Regulator to review heavy vehicle specific guidance to manage the risk of fatigue.

The Department has committed to a range of activities and initiatives to strengthen health and safety practices to the wider community, including activities focussing on road safety around roadwork sites.

Conclusion

The Department thanks the Joint Select Committee on Road Safety for the opportunity to provide a submission, and welcomes further engagement with the Committee should further information be required on road trauma in the Northern Territory, or road safety in regional and remote areas more broadly.

The Northern Territory welcomes the strong commitment in the new national Strategy and Action Plan, and the Department looks forward to continuing to work collaboratively with the Office of Road Safety and the Joint Select Committee on Road Safety to achieve better outcomes for all road users.