

August 2021

Submission

Joint Select Committee on Road Safety

Prepared and submitted by:



We understand that The House of Representatives and the Senate resolved that a Joint Select Committee on Road Safety be appointed to inquire and seek stakeholder views on five key aspects listed in the Terms of Reference.

Terms of Reference

(a) measures to support the Australian Parliament's ongoing resolve to eliminate road crash fatal and serious injuries with a focus on ways to achieving Vision Zero by 2050.

(b) the effectiveness of existing road safety programs across Australia; opportunities to improve them and encourage broader take-up of effective approaches.

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

(d) opportunities to embed road trauma prevention across Australian Government portfolios and agencies.

(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.

The Australian Road Safety Foundation (ARSF) is proud to submit this document for consideration for the Committee's consideration.

The ARSF is supportive of all current road safety activities and is of the view that these activities, such as better vehicle safety standards, improved roads, improved medical response and increased policing etc must all continue to reduce the road toll and the impact of road trauma.

However, in order to keep improving, additional activities and programs need to be implemented to work cohesively and collaboratively with the current systems.

The ARSF welcomes the opportunity to share its views and provide this submission for consideration as part of the consultation process.

Background

Every six seconds someone is killed or seriously injured on the world's roads.

Of all the systems with which people have to deal every day, road traffic systems are the most complex and the most dangerous. Road Trauma places enormous social and emotional costs on the community.

The Facts:

- Currently there are around 1100 deaths each year in Australia alone;
- Annual Global Road Fatalities equal 1.3 million people;
- Land transport accidents accounted for 0.7% of all hospitalisations and 9.8% of hospitalisations due to injury in Australia during 2008/09;
- The mean length of stay in hospital for persons seriously injured in road vehicle traffic crashes was 4.9 days;
- Nationally, and in each jurisdiction, the age-specific rates of serious injury due to land transport accidents were highest at ages 15 – 24 years;
- The annual economic cost of road crashes in Australia has been estimated to be more than \$30 Billion;
- This is in addition to the social and community cost

The Australian Road Safety Foundation (ARSF) is a not for profit organisation dedicated to increasing awareness on the health impacts of road trauma, reducing road fatalities and injuries. It achieves this through innovative road safety awareness programs, driver education, advocacy and research assistance.

The ARSF has established a well-known national presence and reputation with strong support from the Federal Government, private sector, State governments and the Police for its initiatives, programs and events across Australia.

The ARSF's vision is to drive the safety of every road user, every day, to achieve significant year-on-year reduction in road deaths and injuries nationally.

The Foundation's key focus of work is to promote road safety and principal objective of promoting better health outcomes in the community by reducing the physical and mental illnesses which arise from death or injury occurring on our roads.

The ARSF operates across a number of key channels, including:

- Increasing awareness on the long-term health impacts of road crashes;
- Expansion of our road safety advocacy position via media operations;
- Implementation of the RoadSet program - national road safety education program for school students;
- Provision of additional support for various community road safety activities;
- Provision of training resources for both school students and parents;
- Identification for new road safety research opportunities, both nationally and internationally;
- Further development of the Australian Road Safety Awards Program;
- Further expansion of the Rural Road Safety Month initiative;
- Further expansion of the Fatality Free Friday national road safety initiative;

The ARSF is in a unique position to offer recommendations and perspective on the points raised in this submission.

Commentary Points

1. *Measures to support the Australian Parliament's ongoing resolve to eliminate road crash fatal and serious injuries with a focus on ways to achieving Vision Zero by 2050;*

Response:

The ARSF supports the Australian Parliament's ongoing efforts to improve road safety outcomes.

We also encourage the Parliament's continued efforts to improve collaboration with all road safety stakeholders, enhance resourcing to expand the capabilities of road safety NGO's and to foster a national leadership position on road safety.

To achieve the reduction targets of the new National Road Safety Strategy, it is essential that we expand the narrative beyond the historical state-based approaches. Whilst there is still a strong need for state-based approaches for issues such as licencing and enforcement etc, there is also the need for a more co-ordinated national scope to complement state-based initiatives and regulations.

Australia's road safety performance has continued to improve due to a range of measures including better road engineering and design, enforcement, improved vehicle safety standards and design as well as improvements in medical response.

It is essential that the progressive enhancements in these areas continue.

However, in order to keep improving and to reach the road safety targets by 2050, additional activities and programs need to be implemented to work cohesively and collaboratively with the current system.

In recent times, the impacts of the COVID-19 Pandemic appear to also be having a flow on impact in road safety. Anecdotally, there appears to have been a number of culture shifts during this period. These shifts appear to have been in areas such the changes in road use patterns (public transport use, increases in sales of motorbikes and bicycles) traffic flow and congestion etc. It is also appears to be creating changes in social and cultural norms. This area relates to actions such as speeding and other areas of driver and road user behaviour and more research needs to be done to understand the motivations for this.

Alarmingly, we have not seen large reductions in the road toll during the COVID-19 period. In fact, some states have seen large increase in their road toll rates during this time. The vulnerable road user group is also another sector that is displaying a worrying trend in deaths and injuries at this time.

Therefore, whilst all our traditional road safety activities and programs need to continue, there is also a need to look for new areas of action and innovation.

This should include a focus on the issue of work-related road safety, rural and regional road safety, education, school-based road safety education that focuses on life-long learning and development. Some channels of activity could include the following:

- a) Exploring opportunities to create community engagement via leading Road Safety NGOs
- b) Establishing principles for a new road safety culture nationally
- c) Marketing and promoting to drive community awareness nationally
- d) Working with community and business leaders to promote road safety

- e) Activity to increase the awareness of “Work Related Road Safety” and compliance under the Chain of Responsibility legislation
- f) Opportunities to incentivise good behaviours and promote community action and personal responsibility
- g) Continuation and expansion of the successful RoadSet school program
- h) Explore new research opportunities for road safety education and training
- i) Continue to forge alliances across portfolios and agencies to focus on road safety as a public health issue.
- j) Explore opportunities to foster national community ownership of the road safety issue

2. The effectiveness of existing road safety programs across Australia; opportunities to improve them and encourage broader take-up of effective approaches;

Response:

Historically, Australia has performed well in our efforts to reduce road trauma and improve safety on our roads. The number of road fatalities has been substantially reduced from 30 per 100,000 in 1970 to around 8 per 100,000 – In 2014, the national road toll for that year was 1153.

The reason for the successful reduction of the road toll over the past 30 years has been the adoption of ADR rules – compulsory wearing of seatbelts, the overall improvement of vehicle reliability and safety, enhanced road law enforcement, better trauma response and treatment and policing as well as improved road engineering and design.

However, despite all these advancements it is clear that a critical piece of the puzzle is still missing because the deaths and injuries from road crashes continue. Our overall reduction rate has stalled and the average annual fatality rate since 2014 on average has been 1,189 per year.

Even more concerning, Australia has failed to meet its road safety targets for the past 5 years.

We are also starting to see road tolls increase in some jurisdictions during the current COVID -19 pandemic. The full impacts of the pandemic may not be known for some time. However, this period has already produced some troubling trends. These have included significant changes in general road user behaviour for actions such as speeding and there have been increases in the number of vulnerable road user deaths.

The various lockdowns and travel restrictions have not translated into significant road toll reductions. Whilst some states have experienced reductions others have had significant increases. For example, during 1 January to 15 August 2021, there were 174 fatalities as a result of crashes within Queensland, which is 19 fatalities (or 12.3%) greater than the same period for the previous year and 26 fatalities (or 17.6%) greater than the previous five year average for the same period.

At a national level, the Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics (BITRE) reported the following.

- There was a total of 102 road deaths during the month of July 2021. The current figure is 1.6 per cent higher than the average for July over the previous five years.

- During the 12 months ended July 2021, there were 1,148 road deaths. This is an increase of 4.3 per cent from the 12-month period ending July 2020.
- Presently, the rate of annual deaths per 100,000 population stands at 4.5. This is a 3.8 per cent increase compared to the rate for the 12-month period ending July 2020.

It is clear that we cannot rest on the nation's past road safety results. The road safety issue will continue to evolve and our responses will need to evolve as well.

The fundamental aspect of road safety which has not been adequately addressed is 'the human factor'. Whilst this area is possibly the most difficult to address, it is also the area that can potentially provide the greatest gains.

This approach will need to focus on a number of key areas. This will include issues such as:

1. Exploring opportunities to create community engagement
2. Establishing principles for a new road safety culture
3. Marketing and promoting to drive community awareness
4. Working with community and business leaders to promote road safety
5. Activity to increase the awareness of "Work Related Road Safety" and compliance under the Chain of Responsibility legislation
6. Treat road safety as a national public health issue
7. Review how pre- and post-license training is conducted nationally

Finally, Federal Government needs to continue to collaborate with key Road Safety NGO's. An example of this type of Collaboration is the Year 9 RoadSet program. Road launched as a pilot program in 2020 and has already had around 50,000 students either complete the program or commit to running the program in 2021.

The RoadSet Pilot funding concludes this year and it is vital that the program's funding be extended in order to further develop the learning content and continue offer lifesaving road safety education free of charge to students nationally.

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

Response:

In our view, this question again points to two areas of activity. Both have road trauma as the number one cause of death and injury in the sector or cohort.

The first being a greater focus on the fleet safety policies and procedures across all government departments as well as a more harmonised approach in aligning those policies and safe driving standards across those departments.

Work-related road crashes currently account for about 50% of all occupational fatalities and 15% of national road deaths, with people killed or seriously injured while travelling to and from work.

At the time of writing, we were unable to source any reference documents to the assess the level of activity in this area from a Federal Government standpoint. It would be worthwhile investigating the current status of focus across departments for anyone driving for work purposes.

It is likely that fleet and driver safety polices do exist in selected government departments. However, there would be a significant leadership opportunity to place a stronger emphasis in this area.

The second area relates to the area of school-based road safety education.

Young road users are often overlooked in main stream road safety reporting, but their level of road trauma risks is unquestionable. Whilst a significant amount of work is done at the state level, it generally targets new drivers.

However, it is our most vulnerable road users that are often at the greater risk.

- Land transport accidents were the most common cause of death among children aged 1–14.
- Nationally, and in each jurisdiction, the age-specific rates of serious injury due to land transport accidents were highest at ages 15–24 years.
- During 2015–2017, land transport accidents (including road traffic fatalities) were the leading cause of injury deaths for Indigenous children aged 0–14 (31%) and non-Indigenous children (29%).
- According to the Australian Road Deaths Database, in 2018 among children aged 0 – 14: 34 deaths were due to road transport accidents, a rate of 0.7 per 100,000 children.
- Boys were slightly more likely to be killed in a road transport accident than girls.
- Children aged 10–14 had the highest death rate (0.9 per 100,000), followed by children aged 0–4 (0.7). Children aged 5–9 had the lowest rate (0.6).
- Of children who died because of a road transport accident: 59% were passengers, 29% were pedestrians, 5.9% pedal cyclists.

The statistics clearly show a significant problem, with the financial, community and social consequences are unacceptable.

To address this shocking statistic, the Australian Road Safety Foundation (ARSF) worked closely with the Australian Government to create RoadSet.

Launched in July 2020, RoadSet is an innovative program designed to increase road safety awareness skills in young Australians and highlight strategies to help prevent crashes and reduce road trauma.

This cutting-edge Ed-tech program was launched as a pilot program primarily aimed at Year 9 students. RoadSet features 10 memorable and engaging modules covering road safety issues relating to pedestrians, passengers, cyclists, skateboard and scooter riders and ultimately becoming a safe driver.

The modules in RoadSet aim to support the quality teaching and learning of road safety in school and community education programs. The RoadSet program and its recourses are provided free of charge to all schools nationally, thanks to the funding provided by the Australian Government.

There is an urgent need to intensify our efforts to address this area of road safety though a holistic educational framework.

Therefore, there is a clear opportunity and need for the Australian Government, with support from the ARSF, to continue to take a leadership role in combating this public health epidemic and better prepare our children to become safer road users. The program does require an

additional funding commitment from the Federal Government in order to continue the delivery of this vital road safety program.

4. Opportunities to embed road trauma prevention across Australian Government portfolios and agencies;

Response:

This is again an area where a greater focus on work-related road safety would provide significant benefit. It would also provide a number of action areas to help embed road trauma prevention more widely.

Work safety policies and operations are potentially one of the few avenues to facilitate overall cultural and social change.

This level of Federal action and commitment could deliver a cascading effect, expanding road user awareness across government agencies and portfolios and, ultimately to corporate organisations and the greater community.

An all of government approach would establish a national leadership position and help create a greater level of urgency around the issue of work-related road safety. This would require strong leadership from the Prime Minister, both houses of Parliament and government to formally recognise road trauma prevention as mission critical.

A Federal leadership statement of this nature, combined with a greater enforcement of workplace safety requirements and the potential for a federal accreditation program provides a fresh opportunity to establish a tangible action plan for change.

As stated earlier in this document, areas such as addressing human factors, improving knowledge, enhancing personal ownership, social and personal responsibility as well as behavioural changes are critical. These areas complement all other road safety programs and countermeasures currently being undertaken.

5. 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.

Response:

As we have stated in previous submissions, the ARSF firmly believes that the area of work-related road safety provides one of the greatest opportunities to influence road user behaviour and ultimately reduce road trauma.

This needs to target all aspects of work-related driving not only focusing on heavy vehicles but also smaller trucks, light vehicles and motorcycles etc.

It is well established that work-related road trauma is the highest single contributor to work-related deaths and injuries. Figures indicate that over the last seven years, two thirds of workers killed at work were as a result of motor vehicle incidents (Safe Work Australia 2012). Even though driving a vehicle is potentially one of the most dangerous activities within a

workplace, many organisation's risk management practices do not extend the same level of diligence as they would for other risky workplace activities.

It could also be argued that many of the current countermeasures do not fully address the issue from a holistic stand-point.

This situation could be due to several factors. Firstly, there is no single entity that has been able take a leadership position to drive improvements. Secondly, the initiatives that do exist are fragmented, and whilst many are commendable in what they seek to achieve, a great number do not align to good practice and therefore fall short. Lastly, despite legislative requirements outlining obligations associated with work vehicle use and risk management, many organisations still fail to adequately address risks associated with work-related driving.

Therefore, there is a clear opportunity for Federal Government, with support from the ARSF, to take a leadership role in combating this public health epidemic. In response, it will require leaders from the business community to step up and take responsibility for work-related road safety. Ultimately, those who sit in the board room must shoulder much of the responsibility for bringing much needed reforms, and embedding a strong road safety culture within their organisations.

The ARSF has previously proposed a collaboration with the Australian Government to establish a national work-related road safety accreditation program.

The basis of the accreditation program will be the best practice framework, the contents of which will be based on evidence-based research. The framework will describe in detail what fleet vehicle best practice is, and will be framed in terms of mutually exclusive core principles.

Importantly, the scope of the best practice framework will be organisation-wide, and have corporate governance, risk management and compliance with OH&S legislation at its core. This approach has been supported by both the *Fédération Internationale de l'Automobile* (FIA) and *European Transport Safety Council* (ETSC) experience.

There is an opportunity for Federal Government to take a leadership role and support the ARSF with the development of a national work-related road safety accreditation program. The ARSF believe that with appropriate funding support from the Federal Government, coupled with the active engagement of the business community, the accreditation program will help to significantly reduce the incidence of work-related road trauma.

If the program fulfils its potential, then the Federal Government will leave an outstanding legacy, and one that will also benefit future generations.

We would like to thank the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and we hope that many of the suggestions and recommendations we've outlined here will find practical application in future government programs.

Russell White is available for further enquiry and discussion regarding the above recommendations.

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