



Joint Select Committee on Road Safety
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Joint Select Committee on Road Safety Inquiry 2021

“Please just act!”

When I made my submission to the 2020 Australian Parliamentary Inquiry into road safety, I said “I’m not sure if I was pleased or despondent to see the announcement of yet another Inquiry into road safety in Australia”. Most people in road safety are fatigued with Governments’ inaction and avoidance of responsibility. But they are frustrated and devastated by the inaction of governments to do what has been suggested, or even implement the actions of the previous inquiries dating back over 15 years. To be honest, I’m tempted to ignore this Committee the way that Governments have ignored previous submissions – but I’ll persevere.

If this inquiry achieves only one thing, can it please be to ***implement the recommendations and suggestions from previous Inquiries.***

The Problem

Despite good progress, Australia has consistently failed to meet its road safety targets.

- In 2000 there were 1810 fatalities on Australian roads, so we set a national target of 1071 fatalities for 2010.
But there were still 1353 fatalities in 2010.
- In 2010 we set a national target of 1071 fatalities for 2020.
But there were still 1106 fatalities in 2020 (despite a bonus reduction due to reduced travel during COVID).
- In 2015 36283 people were seriously injured on our roads, an *increase* of 36% or 9585 people since 2000.

The improvements are commendable, and a credit to everyone involved – but they are simply not good enough.

But importantly ... **we didn’t reach our 2010 target in 2010 or our 2020 target in 2020.**

In fact, ***we didn’t reach our 2010 target in 2020.***

Worse, than that, it is estimated that both traffic fatalities and serious injuries will rise considerably over coming years¹, as the following charts tragically illustrate.

¹ BITRE (2018), *Modelling road safety in Australian states and territories.*

Figure 3: Actual and predicted Australian road deaths

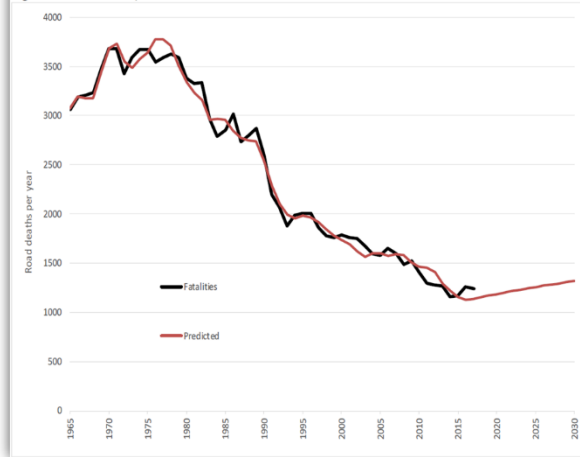
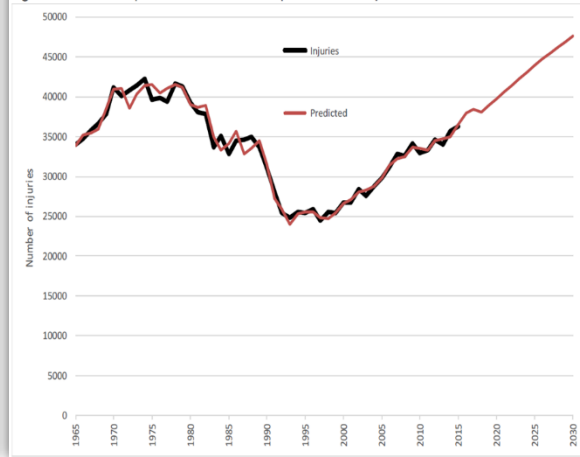


Figure 6: Actual and predicted Australian hospitalised road injuries



A major problem is that ***no one is accountable or responsible*** for these failures.

But the real problem is that the Australian Parliament has failed in its responsibility to protect Australians on the roads.

Until the Australian Parliament (bipartisan, not just the Government) ***takes road safety seriously, we will only achieve moderate changes.*** Hundreds more Australians will die unnecessarily and tens of thousands more will be seriously injured unnecessarily.

What is required

I don't write what most others will about what the solutions are. They're probably right, at least to a certain degree. But it hasn't been enough. We can try harder, but that won't be enough either. Basically,

- Unless we embrace complexity and appreciate the future context, road safety will continue to fail to reach our intended objectives, and
- The management of road safety would be substantially different (and better) if the successful practices of other hazardous industries, such as aviation, were applied.

The underlying propositions of this submission are:

- Continuing to manage road safety as has been done in the past is unlikely to achieve the improvements that are desired for the future,
- Road safety is far more difficult, complicated and unpredictable now than in the past, and
- Other safety critical industries have achieved greater safety improvements by applying systems approaches that road safety should learn from and apply.

So, **structural reform needs to occur in road safety management,**

- New approaches are required to improve road safety,
- Systems approaches, successfully applied in other safety critical industries, offer the best opportunity to improve road safety,
- Road safety can best be improved by adopting a new comprehensive, systems-based approach, and
- Stronger governance and accountability are required.

Applying a systems-based approach requires all elements to be thoroughly managed (which they aren't at present), including **participants, processes, principles, policy tools**, component **parts, purpose** (improving road safety) and interdependent **partnerships** or interactions within the system. *Thoroughly and diligently adopting systems approaches to road safety strategy, policy, planning and practice has the potential to significantly improve outcomes*, as others have found in other fields of safety management. These comprehensive, sophisticated, contemporary and proven techniques offer the opportunity to efficiently and effectively achieve the next reductions in road trauma that are necessary but have become increasingly elusive recently. **We certainly need much more holistic, efficient and effective ways of operating than our traditional practice.**

Terms of Reference

Several opportunities for governments are recommended below. Most don't neatly fit into the categories in the Terms of Reference (ToR), because doing so would compartmentalise either actions or responsible participants. This silo approach is the antithesis of managing the system as a whole and not parts, participants or policies independently. Therefore, the following paragraphs describe just a few specific issues that are relevant to the Terms of Reference, although there are many more that should be implemented.

Governments should accelerate the uptake of **technology** and only allow the import of **5 star crash rated vehicles** (ToR [b],[c]). The latest Government initiative is to make Advanced Emergency Braking (AEB) mandatory is illustrative of how far we are behind in adopting safe vehicle and technologies. The current proposal is to make EAB mandatory only on certain new truck and as a trade off for productivity benefits². It's still only a proposal, it's too little of the truck fleet, it's none of the passenger fleet and it's 15 years too slow. By contrast the European Union in 2009 mandated Advanced Emergency Braking Systems and Lane Departure Warning Systems on heavy duty vehicles from 1 Nov 2013, and from 1 Nov 2015 for all other new vehicles³.

The gig economy is emblematic of Government's failure to **recognise future issues** (ToR [e]). These changes result in our futures being more unpredictable than ever before, and therefore more difficult to manage. They have been occurring for many years but are poorly addressed by governments and often ignored completely. Road safety needs to address future issues that have already emerged and others that will, such as e-mobility and freight supply chain innovations. We need to move from a historical perspective to proving what we need in the future. The gig economy has been influencing society significantly for at least the last 15 years although it is much older. Yet road safety has ignored it, changing consumer patterns, other business changes (like Bitcoin and blockchain), transport system changes (like e-mobility and ridesharing) and technological changes. Road safety must adopt a focus towards the future, as the International Transport Federation has recently described in *Travel Transitions: How Transport Planners and Policy Makers Can Respond to Shifting Mobility Trends*⁴. Managing the consequences of the gig economy and other system changes requires stronger professional capabilities, new data, more sophisticated analytical techniques, a different strategic approach and more.

² Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications (2021) *Discussion Paper: Safer Freight Vehicles*.

³ European Parliament (2009) *Regulation (EC) No 661/2009*.

⁴ ITF (2020) *Travel Transitions: How Transport Planners and Policy Makers Can Respond to Shifting Mobility Trends*. [Travel Transitions: How Transport Planners and Policy Makers Can Respond to Shifting Mobility Trends | ITF \(itf-oecd.org\)](https://www.itf-oecd.org/travel-transitions).

Occupational safety regulators need to meet their responsibilities to ensure the safety of workers while driving (ToR [e]). Road crashes are by far the biggest source of death and serious injury in workplaces⁵, but they are systematically ignored by occupational safety regulators which is outrageous.



Occupational safety regulators must improve their practices by:

- Reporting on road safety outcomes and their activities to reduce road trauma,
- Developing and applying standards for road safety in workplaces and require all workplaces where employees are required to drive to have a specific road safety plan,
- Routinely applying programs for compliance, monitoring and reporting of road safety in workplaces, and
- Upskilling their own staff.

There are numerous specific tools to improve road safety in workplaces, such as those provided by National Road Safety Partnership (www.nrspp.org.au).

Road safety strategies must be restructured (ToR [a],[b],[c]) to:

- Increase the number of participants contributing to the outcomes,
- Increase the variety of policies applied to include incentives, subsidies, social behaviour change, mode shift (to public transport and freight rail),
- Increase the range of target areas to include post-crash management and upstream areas like commerce and community attitudes,
- Ensure integration between complementary activities (to break down the silos between different participants and actions),
- Adopt more thorough crash investigation and data analysis techniques, and
- Adopt a focus to the future not the past.

The Safe System approach has achieved some success but needs to be expanded to achieve the outcomes intended, that have failed to materialise.

⁵ National Road Safety Partnership www.nrspp.org.au, based on data from Safework Australia (2019) *Work-related Traumatic Injury Fatalities*

Recommendations for the Inquiry

In addition to the more specific recommendations described above, **the Australian Government should lead the restructuring and transformation of road safety in Australia.** It can do this in many ways, including:

- ✓ **Establish a joint standing committee for road safety,**
- ✓ **Have the Minister report to Parliament each month on the road toll and its comparison with targets,**
- ✓ **Require all transport projects to describe their effects on road safety in terms of the number of people killed and seriously injured (i.e., not as a microeconomic cost value in dollars),**
- ✓ **Require much more sophisticated road safety strategies based on systems approaches (which is fundamentally different to 'Safe System'), and ensure they look to the future not the past,**
- ✓ **Only import five-star crash rated cars,**
- ✓ **Increase the investment in current road safety programs that exist,**
- ✓ **Restructure insurance to incentivise insurance companies and their customers,**
- ✓ **Initiate programs Influence the community to adopt a culture of safety on roads,**
- ✓ **Ensure that occupational safety regulators enforce safety responsibilities while employees drive during work, and**
- ✓ **Accelerate the adoption of new technologies.**

You can find much more extensive information in my submission to the 2020 Inquiry. And I'll be pleased to provide more information or discuss with you further, if I can help at any time.

Kind Regards,

Dr Brett Hughes

