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Sub. no 4  
**Safe Speed**

Safe Speed is non commercial and dedicated to improving road safety

7<sup>th</sup> October 2003

Committee Secretary  
House of Representatives  
Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
AUSTRALIA

Dear Sir,

**Inquiry into National Road Safety**

Secretary: *Frankston*

RECEIVED

7 OCT 2003

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
STANDING COMMITTEE ON  
TRANSPORT AND  
REGIONAL SERVICES

I have just become aware today of your call for submissions into your "Inquiry into National Road Safety". I note that your deadline date is October 17<sup>th</sup>, and sadly I will not be able to investigate or analyse Australian data before that date. I note however, that similar road safety policy changes have taken place in the UK and Australia, with apparently similar results.

For now, I would like to describe our analysis of the cause and mechanisms of a similar loss of trend in fatality rate here in the UK. There are many vested interests which deny that these trends or mechanisms exist (and if they did they would be admitting the failure of their own policies), but our analysis is supported by senior "opposition" politicians, notably Tim Collins who is shadow secretary of state for transport.

In 1993 in the UK there was a clear shift of road safety policy. After decades of policy soundly based on individual driver responsibility, skill, consideration for other road users and above all positive safety culture, we began to adopt a road safety policy based on reducing vehicle speeds and enforcement of speed limits.

That policy has now reached high levels, to the extent that the strength of traffic police is down to about 1/3<sup>rd</sup> of 1993 levels, and the majority of roads policing involves speeding offences with information gathered by camera enforcement.

The net effects of this policy appear to have been as follows:

- Road deaths have stopped falling
- Our national roads fatality rate has stopped falling (and shows strong signs of underlying rises)
- Projecting pre 1993 trends suggests that by now road deaths should have fallen to 1,800 to 2,200, but in fact for the last five years deaths have been "stuck" at just over 3,400
- 5,500 road deaths to date result from this loss of trend

While many may consider it "obvious" that policies of speed enforcement and speed limit reduction should improve road safety our most careful analysis suggests that the opposite is true by the following mechanisms:

- We have convinced many drivers that the most important road safety factor is speed limit compliance. They now feel safe as long as they are not exceeding a speed limit.

**Safe Speed – promoting intelligent road safety**

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- We have forced many drivers to keep a very careful eye on speed limit and speedometer. As a consequence they have less attention left for other safety considerations. We know that driver attention is a critically important factor in accident causation.
- We have allowed speed enforcement to replace other forms of traffic policing. Doubtless this has many consequences, but it is notable that a rise in drink drive fatalities has recently been reported. We believe that fewer police patrols have led to lower risk of detection and a higher rate of offending.
- Camera enforcement has tended to produce an "underclass" of unregistered, unlicensed and uninsured drivers who avoid conviction because they cannot be traced. It has been reported that about 1 in 20 vehicles may belong to this underclass. We expect them to be more dangerous than other drivers as they also tend to neglect other safety requirements.

From the above list we regard the distortion of drivers' priorities as the most dangerous factor. It should be obvious that while drivers are paying attention to one relatively minor safety factor (speed limit compliance) they are not paying as much attention to critical safety factors.

Our conclusion, therefore, is that a decade of ever increasing "slow down" messages to drivers has tended to make them less effective at avoiding accidents.

See our web site for further information.

Please let me know if I can offer any further assistance.

Yours faithfully

Paul Smith