Australian Government

Response of the Australian Government

to the Report of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services

National Road Safety – Eyes on the Road Ahead

An inquiry into National Road Safety

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CONTENTS

OVERVIEW

Road crashes are a major cause of human trauma. There have been over 163,000 road fatalities in Australia – more than a third of these in the past 25 years. In addition to the burden of personal suffering, the monetary cost of crashes has been estimated to be in the order of $15 billion per year (in 1996 dollars). Improved road safety is achievable. From 1970 until January 2004 the fatality rate dropped from 30.4 to 7.7 deaths per 100,000 population. The rate is now at its lowest since record keeping commenced in 1925. This reduction has been achieved in spite of a huge increase in motor vehicle use. From 1970 to 2002, the fatality rate per 10,000 registered vehicles has dropped from 8.0 to 1.3.

This improvement has come at a price in terms of money and social responsibility. The Australian people have been asked — and have agreed — to pay for safety in vehicles and for better roads, and to accept tougher regulations and enforcement measures. Most importantly, people have heeded the call to drive more responsibly.

Australia achieved significant reductions in road fatalities in the early- and mid-1990s, but since 1997 the rate of reduction has slowed. There is much more that we can and must do. Some other developed nations are achieving fatality rates of just 60 per cent of our rate and these nations are working towards further ambitious reductions.

In 2001 the Australian Government and State and Territory Governments endorsed a target of a 40 per cent reduction in the number of fatalities per 100,000 population by 2010 to no more than 5.6. It is a difficult target, but an achievable one. Achieving this target will save about 3,600 lives over that period. It is a target that will require strenuous effort by all parties involved in road safety. In addition to transport agencies, it requires the continuing support of road users and user groups, the media, police, health care providers, schools, local government, vehicle builders, employers and the wider community.

The challenge is to move our thinking from ways to limit the number of road deaths to how to create a genuinely safe road transport system, and to work out how to achieve such a system.

The road toll should not be accepted as inevitable.

The priority given to road safety should reflect the high value that the community as a whole places on the preservation of human life and the prevention of serious injury. The community, in turn, has an essential role in developing positive approaches to safe road use – a role which requires its widespread support and participation.

There is a balance to be struck between furthering many legitimate community objectives and increasing exposure to the risk of road trauma:

- Health and environmental benefits exist through increased walking and cycling.
- Economic and employment benefits are associated with greater road freight cartage and other vehicular traffic.

- Quality of life benefits exist in affording personal mobility to young and older people.
- Smaller cars and motorcycles offer consumer and potential environmental benefits.

Consultation and input

Responses tabled in this document reflect input from:

- the Finance and Administration portfolio, on Recommendation 19
- the Treasury portfolio, on Recommendations 27 and 35.

A number of recommendations relate specifically to the responsibilities of the Australian Transport Council; responses from State and Territory agencies have been considered in formulating this document.

General comments

These general comments are made to provide context for the specific responses to individual recommendations.

In Australia's federal system of government, road safety strategy and policy measures are principally driven by the States, Territories and local governments who conduct their own comprehensive programmes. The Commonwealth role is to:

- collate statistics and conduct and coordinate research;
- fund strategic transport infrastructure through AusLink and the treatment of black spots;
- regulate new vehicle standards and monitor vehicle safety recalls; and
- facilitate the sharing of data and ideas among stakeholders.

The National Road Safety Strategy 2001-2010

The Australian Transport Council, which comprises Australian Government and all State and Territory Ministers with transport responsibilities and includes an observer from local government, has adopted the National Road Safety Strategy 2001-2010.

The National Road Safety Strategy aims to dramatically reduce death and injury on Australian roads.

This Strategy has been developed as a framework document which recognises the safety plans of the Federal, State, Territory and local governments and other organisations involved in road safety. Individual governments will continue to develop and implement their own road safety strategies and programmes consistent with this Strategy but reflecting local imperatives. Research indicates that many current measures have not reached the limit of their cost-effective potential for all groups and areas. The target of this National Road Safety Strategy is to be achieved by:

- continuing existing effective measures;
- enhancing and/or achieving wider implementation of measures with further potential; and
- introducing new measures;

through pursuit of the following strategic objectives:

- improve road user behaviour;
  - education
  - driver training and licensing
  - enforcement
- improve the safety of roads;
- improve vehicle compatibility and occupant protection;
- use new technology to reduce human error;
- improve equity among road users;
- improve trauma, medical and retrieval services;
- improve road safety policy and programmes through research of safety outcomes; and
- encourage alternatives to motor vehicle use.

In November 2004 the Australian Transport Council endorsed the 2005 and 2006 National Road Safety Action Plan. This new Action Plan deliberately builds on previous work. It recognises that many of the measures contained in the last Action Plan (for 2003 and 2004) were well-researched, cost-effective, and continue to be highly relevant to the goals of the National Strategy. However, changes have been made to reflect recent developments and new information; and as we move into the second half of the 10-year Strategy period, greater attention has been given to actions that will influence road safety beyond 2010.

An important aim of this Action Plan is to highlight the *Safe System* concept as an overarching framework for road safety intervention. The Safe System approach emphasises the way different elements of the road transport system combine and interact with human behaviour to produce an overall effect on total road trauma. The key components of the system are **safer roads and roadsides (infrastructure), safer speeds, safer vehicles, safer road users and other supporting measures.**

The mix of measures adopted in individual jurisdictions, and the details of specific measures, will vary to reflect local circumstances and priorities. The Action Plan cannot pre-empt the administrative or legislative processes required before implementation of many of these measures. However, all jurisdictions agree that planning and implementation should focus on these priority areas. The Action Plan is not intended to be a list of everything that should or will be done to improve road safety. Action on a much broader range of measures will continue, in line with the strategic objectives of the National Strategy, and the strategies and action plans of individual jurisdictions and other organisations.

AusLink

The Australian Government recently introduced the AusLink approach to land transport infrastructure for the following reasons:

- Road and rail infrastructure is essential for Australia's economic and social future. It must be efficient, competitive, reliable, safe and secure.
- The demands on Australia's land transport infrastructure are forecast to increase substantially in the next 20 years. The transport task will become more complex as traffic volumes rise.
- Australia's population is changing. This increases the pressure on urban and regional links, while the social and environmental costs of land transport are rising.
- The existing planning and decision-making framework is short-term, ad hoc and fragmented across transport modes and jurisdictional boundaries. The development and implementation of a national vision for critical land transport links is vital.

AusLink provides Australia with a framework to address these challenges.

AusLink is designed to achieve better national land transport planning, funding and investment decision-making. It means increased investment in land transport, improved long-term planning, encouragement of the best ideas and solutions, and targeting investments to achieve the best outcomes.

AusLink will promote sustainable national and regional economic growth, development and connectivity by contributing to the development of an integrated National Network which:

- improves national and interregional connectivity for people, communities, regions and industry
- improves national, interregional and international logistics
- enhances national, interregional and international trade
- enhances health, safety and security
- is consistent with the obligation to current and future generations to sustain the environment
- is consistent with viable, long-term economic and social outcomes
- is linked effectively to the broader transport network.

AusLink has the following core components:

- a defined National Network of important road and rail infrastructure links and their intermodal connections
- the National Land Transport Plan which outlines the Government's approach to improving and integrating the National Network, and the investments it will make
- a single funding regime, under a new AusLink programme, for the National Network
- separately earmarked funding for local and regional transport improvements
- new legislative, intergovernmental and institutional mechanisms.

AusLink differs from earlier approaches to infrastructure planning and decision-making in several ways.

- It provides an integrated corridor approach to planning. This new approach focuses on meeting future passenger and freight needs in the best way, irrespective of the transport mode rather than focusing on separate rail and road transport modes. This is the cornerstone of the AusLink approach to planning and funding land transport infrastructure.
- Many investments provide substantial benefits to States as well as national benefits. On this basis, AusLink involves shared responsibility and funding for the National Network with States and Territories.
- AusLink has a national focus on sustainable development and connectivity, while considering community health, safety and security.
- It encourages integrated land use and transport planning to protect vital national transport corridors and improve transport, urban development and environmental outcomes.
- It promotes a consistent approach to translating better planning into better solutions.
- AusLink increases private sector involvement in land transport infrastructure planning, financing, operation and ownership. This will generate new ideas and additional investment, fast-tracking the development of Australia's National Network.

The AusLink National Network replaces the existing separate National Highway System, Roads of National Importance and the interstate rail network.

The Australian Government will use eight strategic directions to guide its land transport investment priorities over the coming five years.

Planning on an integrated long-term basis

The Australian Government will negotiate long-term strategies with the States and Territories to develop the National Network on a corridor basis.

Improving the eastern seaboard north-south corridors

The Australian Government will improve the capacity and performance of the vitally important eastern seaboard north-south interstate corridors by upgrading critical road and rail links, increasing rail's market competitiveness and improving intermodal integration.

Improving the capacity and reliability of other interstate and interregional corridors

The Australian Government will enhance the capacity and reliability of other critical interstate and interregional corridors, including in remote areas, to ensure national connectivity.

Addressing congestion on key urban links

The Australian Government will work with States to address congestion on urban and outer metropolitan sections of the National Network – including on links to ports, airports and other centres of intermodal activity – to facilitate passenger and freight flows.

Utilising technology

The Australian Government will improve infrastructure performance by facilitating the development and application of appropriate and cost-effective new technologies.

Improving safety and security

The Australian Government will improve safety on the National Network in line with the National Road Safety Strategy and, through the Australian Rail Track Corporation, on the national rail system. It will improve security on the National Network in line with the National Transport Security Strategy.

Protecting past investment

The Australian Government will, with States and Territories, protect the community's substantial past investment in national road and rail network improvements.

Supporting regional and local economic growth

The Australian Government will improve the capacity of local government to address local transport infrastructure backlogs and to fund projects of strategic regional importance.

Motor Vehicle Standards

Improving the safety of vehicles is a continuous but long term process. As new vehicle models are released to the world market, the benefits of progressive improvements in vehicle design and production technology become available to the consumer. These improvements are often the product of years of research by governments, independent organisations and the vehicle manufacturers themselves.

In general terms, the more modern the vehicle, the more likely it is to offer improved active and passive safety features. Active safety features, such as improved suspension and braking systems, make the vehicle easier to control and more predictable in emergencies. Passive safety features aim to protect occupants in the event of an accident and, increasingly, other road users, particularly pedestrians.

The Australian Design Rules (ADRs) are intended to be minimum standards to apply to new vehicles when they are first supplied to the market in Australia. They are developed and administered by the Vehicle Safety Standards Branch within the Department of Transport and Regional Services.

In addition to meeting minimum safety features required by regulation, newer vehicles often include very advanced safety features. These are most likely to be introduced at the top end of the market, but in time filter their way through the vehicle fleet to become standard items. This has been the case with equipment such as airbags, which are becoming progressively more advanced. Frontal driver and passenger airbags are now standard on nearly all passenger vehicles in the Australian market, with side and curtain airbags becoming increasingly so.

The more advanced occupant protection systems are focussing on improvements to prevent accidents before they occur, and to prepare vehicles and their occupants in the event that a collision becomes unavoidable. These include visibility assistance, lane guidance and collision warning systems. The general range of systems that fall into the category of 'intelligent transport systems' is developing at a very rapid rate. Governments are monitoring these developments internationally to ensure that the take up of advanced systems is not impeded by existing regulation, but also to avoid potential downsides such as the increased potential for drivers to become distracted or overloaded by information provided through these systems.

The motor vehicle industry is highly competitive, and is one of the most global of all industries. Australia is a small market internationally. The challenge, therefore, is to provide the right framework that encourages consumers to purchase newer model vehicles with the most advanced safety features that they can afford, and vehicle manufacturers to offer products that include the most advanced safety features available within a model range internationally.

The Australian Government seeks to adopt international vehicle regulations where possible and to contribute to key research areas, such as pedestrian protection, side impact protection and vehicle compatibility research. This not only gives effect to international agreement obligations, but helps avoid impediments to vehicle manufacturers introducing models with advanced safety features to the Australian market. Regulation will be considered where there is a clear case supported by appropriate research, but other strategies can be employed where a need can be met more quickly or more effectively through an alternative approach. These include partnerships with industry; using fleet purchasing power to apply market pressure for enhanced safety features to be included in fleet vehicles; and parallel programmes such as the Australian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP), which aims to provide consumers with improved information on the safety of individual vehicle models and encourages manufacturers to provide enhanced safety features.

Novice driver education

The marked over-representation of young novice drivers in road fatality and injury statistics prompted the former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services, the Hon John Anderson MP, to propose a national programme of post-licence driver education at the Australian Transport Council meeting on 23 May 2003. In October 2003, the Standing Committee on Transport considered an Austroads report, reviewing promising results from a new driver development programme in Finland. The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) subsequently commissioned development of a best-practice curriculum for a novice (P plate) driver development programme.

The next step is for a major trial, supported by industry, to be undertaken and evaluated. The trial is the first stage of the Government's election commitment to work with the States and Territories to introduce a national compulsory driver education scheme for all new provisional licence holders. The trial was launched at a forum on young driver safety held on 15 December 2004 and chaired by Mr Anderson.

The vehicle industry has offered to contribute up to $1 million towards the cost of a trial and the Australian Government, through the ATSB, has contributed $3 million. Further funding has been committed by the NSW and Victorian Governments and the Insurance Australian Group and the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria to enable trials to proceed in 2006. The total cost of the trial is expected to be over $10 million.

A Steering Committee of the funding partners has been established to manage the trial programme. The Committee, chaired by the ATSB, has tasked a Technical Working Group to develop the curriculum, evaluation plan and overall project plan. An Experts Group, comprising three international and three Australian experts, has been established to provide advice on the curriculum.

A ten-member Advisory Group was appointed by Mr Anderson to provide advice to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services and the Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads on all aspects of the trial. It is chaired by Dr Wendy Macdonald, an Associate Professor at La Trobe University, and includes representatives of the driver training industry, motoring organisations, the media and young drivers.

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB)

The ATSB is an operationally independent bureau within the Australian Government Department of Transport and Regional Services and aims to improve national road safety by:

- undertaking research projects;
- collecting and analysing statistics;
- coordinating the National Road Safety Strategy and Action Plans; and
- providing safety, education and information material.

RESPONSES TO THE RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in its road safety planning:

- set best practice benchmarks for all road safety activities;
- sees that these benchmarks are incorporated into future National Road Safety Action Plans; and
- directs funding to those jurisdictions which comply with the best practice benchmarks so defined.

Do not support

The Australian Government continues to support positive outcomes for road safety and recognises that this does not always result from jurisdictions applying the same benchmarks for all road safety activities.

The National Strategy and supporting arrangements are intended to encourage benchmarking and the pursuit of best practice through a formalised process of information sharing, activity reporting and outcomes monitoring. The Australian Government's role in this process is principally one of coordination and facilitation.

The National Strategy sets a clear and measurable overall target of achievement in terms of road safety outcomes. Progress towards the target, and the comparative contributions of individual jurisdictions, are regularly and publicly reported. In these reports, which are made available on the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) website (www.atsb.gov.au), action plan items are subject to a 'traffic light' system of classification, with green indicating that the action is complete, yellow indicating that the action is underway or under consideration and red indicating that there has been no action. The National Road Safety Action Plan for 2005 and 2006 clearly shows the areas where greatest improvement is needed, identifies major successful initiatives, and secures agreement on broad action priorities.

Planning and implementation of road safety measures in Australia are largely driven by State, Territory and local governments. It is the responsibility of each jurisdiction to establish detailed implementation plans that take account of the national priorities. These are typically expressed in individual State and Territory road safety strategies and action plans.

Under AusLink, funding is directed to jurisdictions on the basis of a range of strategic objectives, one of which is improved safety. If funding were distributed only on the basis of compliance with centrally determined benchmarks for road safety activities, there would be serious potential for those objectives to be distorted.

Funding under the National Black Spot Programme is available for the treatment of Black Spot sites, or road lengths, with a proven history of crashes. Each State and Territory is allocated a proportion of funding under the programme based on its relative proportion of population and casualty crashes. The funding primarily focuses on cost-effective treatment of hazardous road locations. Nominated sites are competitively ranked according to criteria which identify the crash history of a site and the expected benefit from a proposed treatment.

Recommendation 2

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ask the Australian Transport Council to:

- incorporate the collection of comprehensive and nationally consistent road accident injury data in the next National Road Safety Action Plan; and
- incorporate targets for reducing serious road injury in the *National Road Safety Strategy, 2001–2010.*

Support in principle

The Australian Government supports this recommendation in principle, but notes that the historical data are not yet available to support such an approach.

The Australian Government acknowledges the importance of nationally consistent road injury data and has already taken measures, through the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB), to establish a reliable national database using hospitalisation records. This is noted in the National Road Safety Action Plan for 2005 and 2006:

> *The availability of good injury data is important for developing well-designed countermeasures and monitoring outcomes. The recent creation of a national statistical collection based on hospitalisation data promises to fill a major gap in this area, but the timeliness of information needs to be significantly improved. Greater insight is also required into the nature and impact of severe long-term injuries.*

Accordingly, one of the priority actions in the Action Plan is to: *improve the national hospitalisation data series (in particular, reduce time lags) and explore data sources on severe long term injuries.*

A stated objective of the National Road Safety Strategy 2001–2010 is to reduce the burden of road injuries, as well as road deaths. However, the Strategy did not adopt an explicit target for injury reductions because there was no reliable national injury database to provide the necessary benchmark information.

In developing the latest Action Plan, the appointed Task Force of officials (from all jurisdictions) considered the scope to develop an injury target using the new national hospitalisation series. It was concluded that the database did not contain sufficient historical data, and was not yet sufficiently refined, to support a meaningful target. It was agreed that this could be reviewed at a later time when the database is further developed. The Australian Government accepts this position.

The Action Plan makes the additional observation that measures that reduce road fatalities also tend to reduce the number and severity of injuries: for example, national data for the period 1980 to 1996 show a very strong correlation between reductions in fatalities and reductions in police-reported serious injuries.

Moreover, the planning, implementation and evaluation of specific road safety initiatives is generally based on data for road injuries as well as fatalities.

Recommendation 3

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ask the Australian Transport Council to implement a comprehensive system of targets, timelines and accountabilities in future National Road Safety Action Plans and that each new Plan incorporate a more comprehensive review of its predecessor than presented in Plans to date.

Noted

The Australian Government notes this recommendation; however, the Australian Transport Council has agreed that it is the responsibility of each jurisdiction to develop detailed implementation plans that take account of agreed national priorities.

The National Strategy and associated Action Plans are intended to set high level goals and priorities. Introducing a comprehensive system of targets and timelines at this level would place undesirable constraints on the planning activities of individual jurisdictions and stakeholder organisations.

It would also reduce the ability of the National Road Safety Strategy Panel to push boundaries and initiate innovative ideas. In practice, if every action was required to have specific targets and timelines attached for each jurisdiction, only actions which had already been through the necessary budget and internal planning processes in each jurisdiction could be included – the Action Plan would then become largely a statement of what is already being done.

The Strategy and Action Plan are already supported by a system of accountabilities, including annual reports to ATC on implementation progress and outcomes, both nationally and by jurisdiction. This information is also placed in the public domain.

Nevertheless, the Australian Government believes there is some scope to improve the standard of performance reporting against items identified in the Action Plan. It proposes to take this matter up with other jurisdictions through existing consultative arrangements (the National Road Safety Strategy Panel).

Recommendation 4

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ask the Australian Transport Council to undertake a study of different speed enforcement measures in all State and Territory jurisdictions with a view to developing national best practice speed enforcement guidelines.

Support in principle

The Action Plan for 2005 and 2006 calls for the development and promotion of an evidence-based guide on best practice in speed enforcement, taking into account:

- evidence from research showing that hidden speed cameras can achieve greater casualty reductions than more visible operations that allow offenders to adjust their speed before they are caught;

- the safety outcomes of reduced enforcement tolerances in some jurisdictions; and

- the need for a balance between complementary approaches: tightly targeted enforcement programmes (highly visible operations at dangerous locations producing localised effects) and broader deterrence programmes (less predictable, designed to reduce average speeds across the network).

The Australian Government endorses this action and will take advice from the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) on how best to progress the matter.

Recommendation 5

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government initiate the adoption under the next National Road Safety Action Plan of:

- uniform national 50 km/h speed limits on local urban roads;
- uniform national 60 km/h speed limits on urban arterial roads; and
- exemption provisions for rural communities from uniform national urban speed limits.

Do not support

The Australian Government does not support this recommendation in its current form as it reflects a broad-brush approach rather than one that is better tailored to the particular needs of a locality.

In June 2003, the Australian Transport Council approved amendments to the Australian Road Rules to include a national default speed limit of 50 km/h in built-up areas. (The default speed limit applying to all other roads continued to be 100 km/h). This has since been implemented in all States and Territories except the Northern Territory (the NT Traffic Regulations have been amended to provide for local government authorities to implement the 50 km/h default urban speed).

While the Australian Government has supported and facilitated the introduction of this default 50 km/h limit, it does not agree to initiate uniform national limits as proposed in the recommendation. This is partly because the setting of speed limits is primarily a State and Territory Government responsibility. It is also because speed limits on individual roads and road sections need to be set according to a range of factors, including the design, function and crash history of the road, all of which can vary significantly across roads broadly categorised as 'local urban' or 'urban arterial'.

For example, roads classified as 'local urban' can include school precincts or areas with high pedestrian activity that are appropriately zoned to 40 km/h (or lower); while roads classified as 'urban arterial' can include multi-lane divided roads where limits of 80 km/h (or higher) would be deemed appropriate.

Rather than endorse the application of blanket limits across large segments of the urban road network, the Australian Government supports the development of an improved system to assist jurisdictions in setting appropriate speed limits on all road types.

Austroads (the Australian and New Zealand association of road transport and traffic authorities) is currently examining this issue in an important research project: *Balance Between Harm Reduction and Mobility in Setting Speed Limits*. The first stage of the project was a feasibility study, which recommended further work to develop a comprehensive speed limit system, in consultation with all jurisdictions. This work has commenced.

The Australian Government also recognises the immediate need for jurisdictions to selectively reduce existing limits on roads with high pedestrian activity or poor crash records. This is identified as a high impact action in the Action Plan for 2005 and 2006.

Recommendation 6

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ask the Australian Transport Council to undertake research into safe speed limits on rural roads with a view to implementing a system of speed limits and signage appropriate to the engineering standards and local conditions of roads.

Support in principle

As discussed in the response to Recommendation 5, the Australian Government supports the development of a comprehensive system for setting appropriate speed limits on all road types. The Austroads project, *Balance Between Harm Reduction and Mobility in Setting Speed Limits,* has the potential to significantly contribute to improved safety on Australia's rural roads.

The Australian Government also believes there is an immediate need to identify high risk sections of the rural network and apply lower speed limits where infrastructure remedies are not practical options. This is presented as a high impact action in the Action Plan for 2005 and 2006.

Recommendation 7

The Committee recommends to the Australian Government that:

- the pool available for Black Spot funding throughout Australia be increased by 25%; and
- thereafter, Black Spot funding should be divided on the basis of:
  - major projects 70%
  - projects requiring a safety audit 20%
  - lower cost projects 10%.

Do not support

The Australian Government gave an election commitment to continue the existing National Black Spots programme for a further two years after the current funding expires in June 2006 and to consider further funding closer to 2008-09.

The Australian Government considers that the existing division of funding between crash history and road safety audit type projects is appropriate. The existing Notes on Administration already provide for up to 20 per cent of funding to go to projects recommended on the basis of a road safety audit.

The programme is already able to fund lower cost projects. The average project cost over the life of the Programme is about $111,000 and funding of $35,000 or less has been provided for around 30 per cent of approved projects.

Recommendation 8

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government adopt the following measures to improve the safety of the road environment:

- With the State and Territory Governments, establish a national investment strategy for improving the safety of the road environment.
- With the State and Territory Governments, carry out further work on national road design, maintenance and safety standards.
- Increase black spot funding by 25%.
- Increase the Safety and Urgent Minor Works component of National Highway funding by 25%.
- Increase funding for low cost measures to improve the safety of the road environment.
- Ensure that design and maintenance standards on the national highway system conform with world's best practice.
- With the State and Territory Government establish a national system for rating the safety of roads.

Do not support

The Australian Government does not support this recommendation as it does not take into account the significant change of role of the Australian Government encompassed in AusLink.

The Australian Government's new AusLink initiative has embedded safety as a national objective in developing the AusLink National Network. The first National Land Transport Plan, articulated in the AusLink White Paper, sets the following strategic direction: "The Australian Government will improve safety on the National Network in line with the National Road Safety Strategy".

This strategic direction will guide the Australian Government's investment in safety on the National Network. Project proposals will be assessed against strategic objectives, including safety.

In addition, the new AusLink framework provides for better long-term planning for the development of the National Network and investigation of alternative solutions, such as technology and traffic management. A core element of planning will be the development of long-term corridor strategies, which will set objectives (which may include safety targets) for links within each corridor. This will enable the Government to make better investments to improve the operation, performance and safety of the network.

However, under AusLink the Australian Government will use criteria and evaluation methodologies that will ensure that low-cost projects with a high safety return are not overlooked simply because the scale of investment puts them below the normal threshold for detailed comparative assessment of investment options.

In relation to funding, the National Black Spots programme has been discussed in response to Recommendation 7 and under AusLink the Australian Government will be providing strategic investment on a National Network rather than assuming total responsibility for the National Highway System.

In the AusLink White Paper, the Australian Government announced that from 2005-06 funds for the Safety and Urgent Minor Works Programme would be rolled into its contribution to maintenance on the AusLink Network, to provide States and Territories with greater flexibility. Subsequently the Australian Government has proposed that up to 15 per cent of maintenance funding to each State and Territory could be allocated to urgent minor works subject to agreement between the relevant Government and the Australian Government.

The Australian Government no longer has full funding responsibility for the National Highway, which has been absorbed into the AusLink Network, and does not set design and maintenance standards. However, the Australian Government will seek to agree 'fit for purpose' standards for the road links in the AusLink Network with States and Territories, which reflect the volume and type of traffic on those links. More broadly, the Australian Government works with the States and Territories through Austroads and the ARRB Group Ltd on road design, maintenance and safety standards.

The Australian Government acknowledges that road safety organisations have a responsibility to provide objective information to road users about the relative safety of different parts of the road network. As indicated in the Action Plan for 2005 and 2006, it agrees in principle with establishing an Australian ratings system similar to the European Road Assessment Program (EuroRAP). The Australian Automobile Association has already made substantial progress on the development of such a system, known as the Australian Road Assessment Program (AusRAP), and the Australian Government will assist this process as required.

Recommendation 9

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ask the Australian Transport Council to establish a well advertised national call centre for reporting road damage.

Do not support

The Australian Government does not support the proposal for a national call centre for reporting road damage.

Reporting mechanisms such as telephone numbers and Internet sites are already well established in the States and Territories, and complement the feedback provided by regular road maintenance patrols. There is no evidence that an additional, national call centre would provide significant extra benefits – the funds required to establish and maintain a reliable system could be spent on demonstrably more cost-effective safety measures.

Furthermore, it is important for individual jurisdictions to take direct responsibility for any reporting mechanisms, because their ultimate value depends on the capacity of relevant authorities to respond in a timely manner.

Recommendation 10

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ensure that any national standards for the design, maintenance and safety of roads reflect the needs of all road users including heavy vehicles, motorcycles, bicycles and pedestrians.

Support in principle

The Australian Government supports this recommendation in principle and notes that it works with the States and Territories through Austroads and the ARRB Group Ltd on road design, maintenance and safety standards. It is normal practice for the standards of design, maintenance and safety of roads to reflect the needs of all road users.

Recommendation 11

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work through the Australian Transport Council to establish a system for coordinating and funding road safety campaigns on a national basis.

Do not support

The Australian Government does not support this recommendation.

Road safety campaigns in Australia are developed and funded by State and Territory governments. The precise nature and timing of such campaigns are necessarily tailored to the needs and priorities of individual jurisdictions. It is accepted, for example, that the most effective road safety campaigns involve the integration of enforcement operations with supporting education and public information initiatives.

There has not been a strong case made to justify the establishment of a centralised coordination and funding regime. The Australian Government considers that such a scheme would add an unnecessary layer of bureaucracy and cost to current arrangements, and would almost certainly inhibit the capacity of jurisdictions to respond effectively to local issues and conditions.

The Government does support a cooperative approach among jurisdictions to maximise the value of available road safety resources. This can range from the sharing of ideas and materials, to participation in jointly mounted campaigns. A good example of this approach is the acclaimed speed advertisement featuring Professor Ian Johnston from the Monash University Accident Research Centre. This was originally developed for Victorian television by the Victorian Transport Accident Commission, and was subsequently 're-branded' and used to support speed reduction campaigns conducted in other jurisdictions.

There are already national mechanisms in place for facilitating greater cooperation in this area, such as: the annual Marketing and Public Education Forum, the National Road Safety Strategy Panel and the Australasian Traffic Policing Forum.

Recommendation 12

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ask the Advertising Standards Board and the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries to review the voluntary code of practice with a view to a more rigorous compliance.

Support

A review of the implementation of the revised voluntary code, which came into effect on 1 July 2004, is underway. The Action Plan for 2005 and 2006 includes an assessment of the effectiveness of this code and, if necessary, the development and implementation of a mandatory code.

In August 2002, in response to the significant level of community and government concern about the content of vehicle advertisements, the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries (FCAI) introduced the *Advertising for Motor Vehicles Voluntary Code of Practice*. The Code operates within the existing industry self-regulation framework, in which the Advertising Standards Board (ASB), a non-government organisation, is responsible for reviewing complaints about specific advertisements.

Following the introduction of the Code, a Monitoring Group was established to assess the results during its first year of operation. State road safety agencies, the Australian Automobile Association (AAA) and the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) all agreed that although the FCAI had made some progress in curbing its members' style of advertising, the Code was still not producing satisfactory outcomes. The group discussed these concerns with the FCAI at a number of meetings.

In November 2003, the former Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, Senator the Hon Ian Campbell wrote to the Chief Executive of the FCAI and to the Chairman of the ASB, stressing the importance of responsible and strengthened self-regulation by industry to obtain better outcomes.

In early 2004, the FCAI undertook a comprehensive review of both the vehicle advertising Code and the way it is administered, in consultation with the Monitoring Group and other stakeholders. A revised version of the Code was prepared and came into effect on 1 July 2004. The Australian Government supported a decision by the ATC to closely monitor the operation of the revised code.

In November 2004, ATC requested that a review of compliance with the revised Code be undertaken after a period of 12 months, and the results provided to Ministers. An interim report was provided in June, and the results of the complete review will be considered by Ministers in November 2005.

Recommendation 13

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, through the Australian Transport Council, urge the development of a uniform licensing system across Australia, to incorporate:

- graduated licences for novice drivers;
- special licenses for four wheel drive vehicles and caravans;
- the use of demerit points to address all major traffic infringements; and
- the suspension or loss of licences to address serious or repeated infringements.

Do not support

The Australian Government supports the principle of broad consistency in Australian licensing systems but, from a safety perspective, does not support the development of strict uniformity. The Australian Government does not support special licences for four wheel drives and caravans.

The former National Road Transport Commission (NRTC), now the National Transport Commission, investigated the potential benefits of a nationally uniform licensing system. They concluded that there may be some efficiency gains to be expected but that safety benefits were unlikely.

All jurisdictions in Australia have some form of graduated licensing. Several jurisdictions are currently in the process of reviewing and considering extensions to their graduated licensing systems, such as increasing the number of stages or the range of restrictions applied.

There are opportunities for all states and territories to share information about the results and to exchange ideas about best practice. The current situation allows for an innovative idea to be trialled in a single jurisdiction, with all jurisdictions having the benefit of observing the results, as well as considering the range of options for implementation and enforcement. Enforcing a uniform national system could have the effect of inhibiting these opportunities for innovation.

The Action Plan for 2005 and 2006 includes proposals to examine, and if effective introduce, extensions to graduated licensing systems to improve the safety of novice drivers; for example, night time driving restrictions / same-age passenger restrictions, which have been effective in other countries.

The Action Plan also includes an action to "require all drivers and riders to carry their licence and produce it when requested by police" – this is crucial for the successful enforcement of any restrictions on provisional drivers.

The NSW Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety (Staysafe) conducted a public inquiry into issues related to safe towing, and published its

conclusions and recommendations in the 1992 report Staysafe 22: Towing Caravans and Trailers Safely. Statistics summarised in the report indicated that about one per cent of light vehicles involved in fatal crashes were towing a trailer or caravan. It was not possible to draw any conclusions about the extent to which such vehicles might be over-represented in serious crashes, because no reliable data were available to indicate what proportion of total vehicle travel involved towing. Staysafe received several submissions advocating a special licence test to qualify to tow a caravan or trailer. The NSW Roads and Traffic Authority opposed this, arguing that there was no clear case that such a requirement would produce a sufficient safety benefit to justify the significant costs and public inconvenience involved. Safety agencies from other jurisdictions, and the NRMA, supported this position. Staysafe recommended against introduction of special tests. Similar considerations would apply in the case of four wheel drive vehicles.

The involvement of 4WDs in fatal crashes per distance travelled is only slightly higher than cars. It is not apparent that a special licence would necessarily have a significant safety benefit, though specialist training courses are currently available for those drivers who want them.

The Australian Government notes comments by the former Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, the Hon John Anderson MP, that drivers should accept responsibility to equip themselves with the skills they need for the situations that they put themselves in and if they feel that they do not know, they have a responsibility to seek that training. In Australia, the vehicle industry has agreed to provide consumer information with the sale of all off-road vehicles to advise drivers and passengers about the risks of rollover in vehicles with a high centre of gravity. The form of the consumer information is to be agreed with the Minister for Transport and Regional Services.

By and large, the suspension or loss of licences to address serious or repeated infringements is current practice in most jurisdictions.

Recommendation 14

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government request the Australian Transport Council establish a task force to coordinate the implementation of drug and alcohol road safety strategies, with a view to introducing:

- uniform penalties for drug and alcohol infringements;
- tougher penalties for alcohol related infringements; and
- a national approach to detecting and dealing with motorists driving under the influence of drugs.

Do not support

The Australian Government agrees that these are very important road safety issues, but does not see the need for a special task force to coordinate the implementation of relevant strategies. The Action Plan for 2005 and 2006 includes a number of high impact actions in this area that are more specific than the recommendations above.

As discussed in the response to Recommendation 11, States and Territories require the flexibility to develop and implement road safety initiatives according to local needs, priorities and preferred approaches. Jurisdictions can certainly benefit from the opportunity to exchange information and resources, and to coordinate programmes in the right circumstances. But there are already effective mechanisms in place to facilitate these processes.

The Australian Government agrees that penalties for drug and alcohol infringements should be reviewed in order to maximise their effectiveness. This is not just a matter of relative toughness, but also concerns the types of sanctions that might be appropriate: for example, the Action Plan for 2005 and 2006 suggests that vehicle sanctions could be considered for certain offences.

It must be recognised, however, that penalties are only one component of an overall deterrence strategy and cannot be reviewed in isolation. It is incumbent on States and Territories to establish penalty regimes that effectively support their specific alcohol and drug deterrence strategies. In this context, national uniformity is not necessarily a desirable objective.

The specific recommendation for a national approach to detecting and dealing with drug impaired drivers appears to be linked to the Committee's support for the Victorian trial of random roadside testing. The Australian Government understands that most jurisdictions are monitoring the Victorian approach with interest and will consider any forthcoming evaluation of its effectiveness. The governments of NSW, South Australia and Tasmania have already announced plans to introduce random roadside drug testing.

Recommendation 15

The committee recommends that the Australian Transport Safety Bureau review the potential for video devices to cause driver distraction and propose measures to minimise the impact of such devices on driver concentration.

Support in principle

The Australian Government acknowledges growing concerns about the potentially adverse safety effects of in-vehicle devices with visual displays and agrees, in principle, that the matter should be investigated. This is reflected in the Action Plan for 2005 and 2006.

The issue was, in fact, considered by the Standing Committee on Transport (SCOT) in March 2004. SCOT noted that the New South Wales Roads and Traffic Authority was planning relevant research in the form of a joint driver simulation study with the University of NSW; it agreed to await the outcome of that study before taking any further action. The Australian Government endorses this approach, and is advised that the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) is awaiting the release of the final report, and will independently consider the need for further investigation.

There is an Australian Design Rule (ADR) requirement that requires in-car devices to be shielded from the driver's view unless it is a driver's aid. The ADR alone cannot address likely distraction of drivers in neighbouring vehicles, particularly since distraction could be caused by both in-car systems as well as portable devices used by passengers.

Recommendation 16

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government undertake a comprehensive review of the Australian Design Rules to:

- ensure that ADRs are more responsive to the rapid uptake of new vehicle safety technology; and
- ensure that ADRs cover components and replacement parts.

Do not support

The Australian Government does not believe that a review of the Australian Design Rules (ADRs) is appropriate at this point.

The ADRs are intended to be minimum benchmark standards. In accordance with World Trade Organisation (WTO) requirements, they are deliberately set to be performance-based rather than prescriptive so as not to impose design restrictions on manufacturers that could inhibit the uptake of new safety technology. Most leading edge technology is introduced at the higher end of the vehicle market and progressively filters through model ranges. In assessing the need for a new or updated ADR, the need for regulatory intervention is balanced against the extent to which the market is able to drive the desired safety objective.

The vehicle industry is highly globalised and the Australian market is small by international standards. It is Australian Government policy to harmonise the ADRs with international vehicle technical regulations where possible. This policy setting seeks to minimise regulatory barriers that may make it less cost- effective for manufacturers to offer vehicles with advanced safety features to Australian consumers. The Australian Transport Council endorsed strategies in November 2004 to accelerate the uptake of international vehicle regulations.

ADRs are national standards under the *Motor Vehicle Standards Act 1989,* which applies to the point of first supply to the market. The States and Territories all require vehicles to continue to comply with the ADRs that applied when the vehicles were supplied to the market. This means that the ADRs already apply to components and replacement parts. Ensuring and enforcing compliance of components and replacement parts with the relevant ADRs is a State and Territory responsibility.

Recommendation 17

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ask the Australian Transport Council to devise national standards for:

- vehicle modification;
- registration of specialised vehicles; and
- accreditation of secondary manufacturers.

Support in principle

Vehicle modifications, registration of specialised vehicles and regulating vehicle modifications to vehicles that are 'in-service' are State and Territory functions, and the Australian Government is unable to set policies on these issues.

The regulation of vehicle modifications is already in hand by the States and Territories and is nearing completion. The National Code of Practice for Vehicle Modifications is being developed by a working group of State and Territory representatives and will replace the existing National Code of Practice for Heavy Vehicle Modifications.

Vehicles that are modified before first supply to the market under an approval pursuant to the *Motor Vehicle Standards Act 1989* may be registered in all States and Territories.

Recommendation 18

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government join the Australian New Car Assessment Program, and contributes $500 000 per annum to its work.

Do not support

The Australian Government works cooperatively with ANCAP where there is mutual benefit from the work. The Government's priority is to research vehicle crash behaviour to support the development of improved safety standards. Research testing is combined with ANCAP testing where possible.

The Government provided limited funding to ANCAP in 2004-05 to support test programmes that also contribute to the DOTARS vehicle standards research programme. This included $0.5 million to fund pole testing of passenger 4WDs and crossover vehicles. The tests compared vehicles with and without head protecting side airbags to analyse their effectiveness in reducing injuries. The results of these tests are available to ANCAP.

The Australian Government already provides a large financial contribution towards achieving improved road safety outcomes through AusLink, the National Black Spots Programme, establishing and monitoring of motor vehicle standards, statistical databases and research. Funding for ANCAP would need to be considered in the context of other competing priorities.

Recommendation 19

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government only purchase vehicles with state of the art safety features for government car fleets, and recommend similar action to the States and Territories.

Support in principle

The Australian Government supports arrangements that promote improved safety in its vehicle fleet and supports the use of 'state of the art' safety features – particularly where an operational case exists. While safety will always remain a paramount consideration in vehicle selection, departments and agencies must also have regard to factors such as value for money, environmental impact and support for the local industry.

The Fleet Monitoring Body (FMB) within the Department of Finance and Administration is responsible for the management of the whole-of-government policy and guidance relating to the selection of general pool fleet vehicles. The FMB is preparing vehicle fleet Occupational Health and Safety guidelines for use by departments and agencies. The guidelines are designed to promote safe driving practices with a view to reducing driver injury and vehicle damage. In light of the Committee's recommendation, these guidelines will be broadened to provide increased emphasis on the importance of the selection of vehicles with appropriate safety features including features such as front, side and curtain airbags where available, anti-lock brakes and cargo barriers (in the case of wagons). The guidelines could also create awareness of emerging safety features such as Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) that use information and communications technologies to provide improved safety solutions in the pre-crash and crash phases with a view to avoiding or reducing the severity of crashes.

Recommendation 20

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government introduce an ADR for the mandatory fitting of alcohol interlocks on all new vehicles.

Do not support

The Australian Government has no plans at this stage to introduce an Australian Design Rule (ADR) to mandate the fitting of alcohol interlocks in all new vehicles. Such a proposal is unlikely to gain widespread community support and there is insufficient evidence that it would meet the rigorous cost-benefit criteria necessary to establish the initiative as an ADR. However, the proposal will be kept under review. It is noted that alcohol interlock programmes are used in some Australian jurisdictions for recidivist drink drivers.

It is Australian Government policy that mandatory standards for new vehicles be subject to a stringent regulatory assessment, including consideration of cost-effectiveness, international harmonisation of vehicle standards and the existence of viable alternatives.

The costs of alcohol interlocks are substantial: as well as initial installation costs, they require regular calibration and impose a delay at the start of each trip. Available information suggests that other drink driving measures, including selective alcohol interlock programmes targeting high-risk alcohol offenders, provide a more cost-effective means of reducing alcohol-related trauma than mandating the use of interlocks on all new vehicles.

Recommendation 21

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government:

- immediately introduces an ADR providing for the fitting in all new cars of intrusive seat belt warning devices;
- directs the ATSB to conduct research into seat belt interlocks with a view to introducing an ADR by 2010.

Do not support

The Australian Government supports initiatives to encourage seat belt reminder systems in vehicles but does not at this stage support mandatory fitment of seat belt warning devices.

The issues associated with intrusive seat belt warning devices have been examined in a regulation impact statement (RIS). The RIS does not recommend regulation, on the basis of the positive response by vehicle manufacturers to provide intrusive alarms voluntarily and uncertainty over the effectiveness of the devices on the target group.

The Australian Government has reservations about the use of interlock systems, from a safety perspective.

Experience with seat belt interlock systems in the United States of America (during the 1970s) suggests that if a measure is considered to be too aggressive or intrusive, there is a greatly increased chance that people will go to the trouble of disconnecting it. There were also reported difficulties experienced during emergency situations such as drivers getting caught on railway tracks and not being able to start the vehicle. In 1974, the U.S. Congress withdrew the standard and outlawed any future federal requirement for interlocks.

The Australian Government plans to monitor the take-up and impact of intrusive warning devices before considering the need for a more aggressive approach.

Recommendation 22

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government introduce an ADR for the mandatory fitting of daytime running lights on all new vehicles.

Do not support

The Australian Government does not support this recommendation at this time.

The evidence on daytime running lamps indicates a potential for a safety benefit, but there is some uncertainty about the likely benefits and costs in Australian lighting conditions. Further studies are being conducted in Europe on this topic and the results will be reviewed with a view to preparing a regulation impact statement if prima facie evidence for proceeding with a case for an Australian Design Rule (ADR) is established.

Recommendation 23

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ask the Australian Transport Council to investigate the issue of fog lights and vehicle light fittings generally with a view to adopting ADRs which:

- prevent the fitting of unnecessarily powerful lights to any vehicle;
- ensure that all light fittings comply with appropriate safety standards.

Do not support

The Australian Government does not support this recommendation as it considers the proposals unnecessary.

The Australian Design Rules (ADRs) permit extra driving lamps, but these must be switched into the high beam circuit. The rationale for allowing extra driving lamps is that outback Australian conditions require more illumination than high beam headlamps in order to see kangaroos and other hazards in sufficient time to prevent a collision.

The Australian Road Rule relating to dipping of high beams is predicated on 200m separation between vehicles, which is appropriate if using high beams only. There may be a case to require driving lights to be dipped at a higher separation – say 400m. However, this is a matter for jurisdictions to consider.

The ADRs require that fog lamps must be independently switched to provide additional penetrating power for use in reduced visibility conditions. The ADRs already prescribe a beam pattern for fog lamps and specify a horizontal cut-off to minimise glare to on-coming traffic. The ADR also specifies mounting arrangements to ensure proper aiming of the beam. However, the alignment of front fog lamps needs to be maintained during service and needs to be enforced through roadworthiness inspection regimes.

The Australian Road Rules prohibit the use of any lamp that would dazzle other road users.

All lighting equipment on new vehicles has to comply with the relevant ADRs. The States and Territories are responsible for regulating the use of vehicles which includes ensuring the aftermarket products comply with the relevant ADRs.

Recommendation 24

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government:

- ask the Australian Transport Council to introduce ADRs for rollover protection in passenger vehicles and four wheel drives; and
- fund ANCAP testing of rollover propensity and crashworthiness of passenger vehicles and four wheel drives.

Do not support

In the mid 1990s the Federal Department of Transport carried out a study into whether the United States passenger car roof crush resistance standard would be appropriate for Australia. The study found there would be minimal benefits as the standard was a simple test which applies a gradually increasing load to the roof of the test vehicle until the load reaches one and a half times the weight of the vehicle. To pass the test the deformation caused to the roof structure must not exceed 127 mm. The study found that rollover crashes are complex events and this simple test would not confer significant benefits. Furthermore, a survey of existing passenger cars revealed that most would pass the roof crush test.

The mechanisms causing injuries in rollover crashes are not well understood. There is a lack of a suitable dummy that adequately simulates human behaviour in rollover crashes and a lack of injury criteria to assess rollover protection.

The most advanced work on rollover protection has been conducted in the United States, and has focussed on measures to prevent rollovers rather than trying to protect the occupants of vehicles involved in rollover crashes. In Australia, the vehicle industry has agreed to provide consumer information with the sale of all off-road vehicles to advise drivers and passengers about the risks of rollover in vehicles with a high centre of gravity. The form of the consumer information is to be agreed with the Minister for Transport and Regional Services.

Funding for research would need to be considered in the context of other competing priorities (see response to Recommendation 18).

Recommendation 25

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government:

- ask the Australian Transport Council to introduce ADRs for reversing alarms and cameras; and
- fund ANCAP testing of reversing alarms and cameras.

Do not support

The Australian Government does not support this recommendation as it relates to further regulatory action; however, it does support the increasing inclusion by manufacturers and owners of devices to reduce the risk of reversing accidents.

The Committee discussed the issue of audible reversing alarms to warn pedestrians and other vehicles that the vehicle is reversing.

Research commissioned by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau in April 2002 revealed that most reversing accidents involved small children (toddlers) and it is unlikely that external audible alarms would be of any benefit for this group. It was also felt that these alarms may attract rather than repel small children, resulting in a negative safety impact.

The report also noted that large four wheel drives were over-represented in driveway deaths and so the group most affected is families with small children with large four wheel drives. While the report identified some vehicle countermeasures such as cameras, the emphasis was on urgent public awareness targeted at families with small children, possibly through child care centres to reach the intended audience quickly.

If vehicle countermeasures are contemplated, an Australian Design Rule (ADR) is not likely to be cost-effective and, as such devices are available in the after-market, a better strategy would be to encourage the target group to fit these devices. This approach would have an immediate effect, whereas an ADR would take about 15 to 20 years to penetrate the whole vehicle fleet.

In relation to the funding of ANCAP testing of alarms and cameras, the Australian Government does not see what would be gained by this approach and in any event it should be assessed against competing priorities for research (see response to Recommendation 18).

Recommendation 26

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government urge the Australian Transport Council to commission research into the problem of vehicle compatibility as a matter of priority with a view to identifying specific countermeasures to be applied in the next National Road Safety Action Plan and beyond.

Support

The Australian Government supports this recommendation and notes that it is already on the work programme.

Vehicle compatibility is a complex issue and is the subject of an international research programme. The Australian Government's vehicle standards research programme includes a component of vehicle compatibility research to feed into the wider research programme under the auspices of the International Harmonised Research Activities.

Recommendation 27

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government bring the tariff on four wheel drive vehicles into line with the tariff on other imported cars, with genuine primary producers and others who have a legitimate need for four wheel drive capability receiving tariff exemption.

Do not support

In 2002, the Productivity Commission considered the tariff on four wheel drive vehicles as part of its review of assistance arrangements for the automotive industry. In line with the Commission's recommendations, the Government decided to continue on the current path to reducing tariff levels on all passenger motor vehicles, rather than increase the tariff level on one class of vehicles such as four wheel drives. Advances in vehicle design are making new vehicles safer and more environmentally friendly than the older vehicles on our roads, and tariff reductions reduce the cost of replacing older vehicles with new vehicles.

It should also be noted that on 1 January 2005 the general tariff was reduced to 10 per cent, reducing the gap with four wheel drive vehicles to 5 per cent.

Recommendation 28

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government work with its State and Territory counterparts to prohibit the use of non-compliant bull-bars, except under specific exemption, and to remove all vehicles from the road that fail to comply with such prohibition.

Support

The Australian Government is willing to work with the States and Territories to ensure that only compliant bull-bars are fitted to new vehicles.

Vehicles that are supplied new to the market with bull-bars may only be supplied where the vehicle meets all applicable Australian Design Rules (ADRs) with the bull-bar attached (i.e. where the bull-bar is 'compliant').

Enforcement of in-service 'compliance' is the responsibility of the State and Territory governments. Accordingly, if a bull-bar is attached to a vehicle 'after market' it is a matter for the relevant jurisdiction to determine whether the vehicle may be registered. There is a recently developed Australian Standard for bull-bars which could be considered as the basis for allowing after-market registration.

It was agreed at a meeting of the National Road Safety Strategy Panel in August 2004 that jurisdictions should review the sanctions available for driving a vehicle with a non-compliant bull-bar. The Australian Transport Safety Bureau prepared a paper that was presented to the National Road Safety Strategy Panel in February 2005 to scope the problem and consider all the relevant issues. The Panel agreed to refer the matter to the Australian Motor Vehicle Certification Board (AMVCB) for further advice. AMVCB representatives agreed that, within their own jurisdictions, they would apply the profile requirements of the Australian Standard on bull-bars fitted to vehicles at first registration. There may be some differences between jurisdictions because of different retrospective requirements.

Recommendation 29

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ask the Australian Transport Council to investigate the design of speedometers with a view to bringing them into line with actual speed limits.

Do not support

The Australian Government does not support the recommendation at this time. The Australian Design Rule (ADR) for speedometers has recently been reviewed and aligned with the relevant United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) international regulation. It requires that the speedometer is capable of reading the maximum speed that the vehicle is capable of travelling.

The Australian Transport Council is currently considering a proposal to limit the top speed shown on speedometers.

Recommendation 30

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government introduce new ADRs covering seat belts, improved cabin strength and underrun protection in heavy vehicles.

Support in principle

The Australian Government supports this recommendation in principle, subject to a rigorous assessment of the benefits of regulatory action.

The issue of seat belts in heavy vehicles is scheduled to be examined by the Department of Transport and Regional Services in 2005.

The Department will also investigate options for improved cabin strength for heavy vehicles in 2005. A previous examination in 1996 could not find significant benefits, as most vehicles would have complied with available regulations without modifications. Also, the numbers of fatalities attributable to failure of the cabin structure were not high enough to be cost-beneficial.

Updated crash data will be examined to ascertain whether there has been a change in the number of fatalities where cabin strength was an issue. The cost-benefit analysis will be revisited as part of this exercise.

A Regulation Impact Statement canvassing the case for heavy vehicle underrun protection is being prepared and will be released for public comment in 2005.

Recommendation 31

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government request the Australian Transport Council to:

- devise standards for truck rest areas;
- establish a program of works based on those standards; and
- immediately commence a program for establishing temporary truck rest areas based on interim measures such as standardised coloured reflector stops.

Support in principle

The Australian Government supports this recommendation in principle and is prepared to request the Australian Transport Council to devise standards for truck rest areas, with cognisance to be given to the work of the National Transport Commission in this regard.

The Australian Government will encourage jurisdictions to commence or continue trials in the interim.

The Australian Government has announced its funding priorities under its major road investment programme for the next five years. The available funding is fully committed and the Australian Government does not intend to establish a separate programme for the construction of truck rest areas, but will work with the States and Territories to ensure that proper provision of rest areas is made in the upgrading projects to be funded by the Australian Government.

Recommendation 32

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government request the Australian Transport Council to:

- start a program of research into leakage of fumes from coolant, oil and exhaust into truck cabins;
- report on the effects this leakage has on drivers;
- incorporate this issue and any solutions into the National Heavy Vehicle Safety Plan 2006 – 2008;
- develop maintenance schedules that incorporate checks for leakage of fumes into cabins; and
- assess the feasibility of installing carbon monoxide detectors into truck cabins.

Support in principle

The Australian Government considers that these matters should be referred to the National Transport Commission.

The Department of Transport and Regional services carried out an analysis in 2001, and the results were presented to a committee of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) as a draft proposal for an international regulation which would set a performance standard for monitoring air quality in the cabin of a vehicle. The study focused mainly on preventing suicide, but also suggested that such a regulation would have spin-off benefits in the area of fatigue management.

The Australian proposal was not adopted, on the grounds that regulators had scarce resources which should be directed at protecting the innocent rather than those who deliberately chose to harm themselves. The main justification for the regulation was on the basis of suicide prevention with cabin air monitoring representing a secondary benefit. The data could not support a proposed regulation based solely on cabin air monitoring. It is not known whether a fresh investigation will turn up any new data that would justify such a proposal.

Recommendation 33

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government liaise with the National Transport Commission and industry bodies to establish and implement training strategies for the road transport industry.

Support in principle

The Australian Government is committed to working collaboratively with the National Transport Commission, industry associations such as the Australian Logistics Council, and other stakeholders where appropriate, on the training needs of the road transport industry.

Driving Australia's Future – A Report and Action Plan Addressing the Skill Needs of the Road Freight Transport Industry (August 2003) was a collaborative Government and industry project generated through the National Skills Shortages Strategy under the education portfolio. This report identified strategies to remedy the skills shortages within the road freight transport industry.

A key project arising from this report is the development of an Internet-based resource, primarily to identify training options and their availability for the road transport industry. The website is also expected to provide similar information across the transport and logistics sector. This project has received Australian Government funding through the education portfolio. Transport and Distribution Training Australia are administering the project, and the Department of Transport and Regional Services and the Department of Education, Science and Training are represented on the project Steering Committee.

Recommendation 34

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ask the National Transport Commission to develop a nationally consistent system of regulation and accreditation for the road passenger transport industry with a view to its implementation by the States and Territories.

Support in principle

This is primarily a matter for the National Transport Commission in consultation with the States and Territories. The Australian Government will refer the matter to the National Transport Commission for consideration and appropriate action.

Recommendation 35

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government take steps to reduce the age of the bus fleet by:

- restricting the age of buses that can be imported for other than collectable or vintage purposes to under 15 years of age, unless substantially rebuilt or modified vehicles comply with agreed accreditation safety standards; and

- providing tax incentives to replace older buses in the form of a five year effective life depreciation rate.

Support in principle

On 7 February 2005, the Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, the Hon Jim Lloyd MP, announced planned changes to the arrangement that allows vehicles that are 15 years or older to be imported without restriction. The effect of these changes will be that buses built after 1 January 1989 will have to be imported under the Registered Automotive Workshop Scheme and comply with the requirements of that scheme. These requirements include modification and testing to meet the Australian Design Rules (ADRs) applicable at the date of the vehicle's original manufacture.

In addition, the Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads has written to State and Territory Transport Ministers seeking support for a proposal that imported heavy vehicles and buses that are to be used in commercial operations should meet the ADRs applicable at the time of importation.

On 12 August 2004 the Australian Government announced it would introduce a statutory cap to the effective life of transport vehicles, including buses. Under the cap, buses purchased after 1 January 2005 will have depreciation effective life capped at 7.5 years. This cap will help ensure efficiencies, improved safety and better environmental outcomes offered by new equipment are realised through industry investing in a modern road freight transport fleet.

Recommendation 36

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ask the Australian Transport Council to develop and implement national strategies for:

- Motorcycle safety;
- Cyclists; and
- Pedestrians.

Do not support

The Australian Government does not support this recommendation and considers that the development of separate national road safety strategies for individual road user groups will not lead to improved safety outcomes that could not be better achieved through other measures.

It notes, however, that the Australian Transport Council has endorsed *Australian Cycling - A National Strategy 1999-2004* that addresses all aspects of bicycle use, including safety. This strategy is currently being updated.

The National Road Safety Strategy 2001 to 2010 is designed to be an overarching framework which complements the strategic road safety plans of State, Territory and local governments and other stakeholders in road safety. Two-year Action Plans under the Strategy include initiatives in the broad areas of speed management, road infrastructure, alcohol, drugs, and fatigue, where there are opportunities for significant improvement that will benefit all road users. Detailed strategies are formulated at the State and Territory level to suit local circumstances.

While specific actions addressing some road user groups have been included in Action Plans, the Action Plan for 2005 and 2006 makes the general point:

> *Measures targeting specific groups are not necessarily the most important means of improving safety outcomes for group members. For example, the major factor in the dramatic reduction in pedestrian fatalities that occurred between 1989 (501 fatalities) and 2003 (231 fatalities) was a marginal reduction in urban travel speeds (largely associated with the introduction of speed camera programmes and traffic calming measures), rather than any measure that targeted pedestrian safety directly.*

Recommendation 37

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ask the Australian Transport Council to develop and implement a national youth road safety strategy and action plan.

Do not support

As noted by the Committee, Austroads produced a youth road safety strategy at the request of the Australian Transport Council in 2000. This document comprises a set of recommended strategies for addressing youth road safety issues, which remain relevant. It is available to assist State and Territory governments in the development of their policies and programmes for improving the safety of young drivers.

In December 2004 the former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services, the Hon John Anderson MP, together with the New South Wales and Victorian Governments, announced a trial of a special education course for drivers after they receive their P-plates.

The course will provide novice drivers with an understanding of their own limitations and an insight into how they can reduce the risks they face on the road.

The trial is the first step in the Australian Government's election promise to work with the States and Territories to set up a compulsory national education scheme for P-plate drivers.

Recommendation 38

The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ask the Australian Transport Council to evaluate the Driving With A Difference Program at the University of Western Sydney, with a view to its implementation nationwide.

Do not support

The Australian Government has announced that it would work with the States and Territories in implementing a compulsory national driver education scheme.

The marked over-representation of young novice drivers in road fatality and injury statistics prompted the former Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services, the Hon John Anderson MP, to propose a national programme of post-licence driver education at the Australian Transport Council meeting on 23 May 2003. In October 2003, the Standing Committee on Transport considered an Austroads report, reviewing promising results from a new driver development programme in Finland. The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) subsequently commissioned development of a best-practice curriculum for a novice (P plate) driver development programme.

The next step is for a major trial, supported by industry, to be undertaken and evaluated. The vehicle industry has offered to contribute up to $1 million towards the cost of a trial and the Australian Government, through the ATSB, has contributed $3 million. Further funding has been committed by the NSW and Victorian Governments, the Insurance Australia Group and the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria, to enable trials to proceed in 2006. The total cost of the trials is expected to be around $10 million.

The response to Recommendation 37 refers to the announcement of the above-mentioned trial.

The ATSB has consulted with Dr Sarah Redshaw who developed the *Driving with a Difference* programme.