

Secretary: *Paul Rebula*  
**INQUIRY INTO NATIONAL ROAD SAFETY**  
 17 OCT 2003  
 TRANSPORT AND REGIONAL SERVICES COMMITTEE  
 HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
 PARLIAMENT HOUSE  
 CANBERRA ACT 2600

Paul Rebula

Dear Committee Member,

I felt it important to contribute a submission to this particular inquiry. Like most people in Australia, motor vehicles affect my life in some way, and, surrounded as I am by busy roads and news of road accidents, I am very concerned about road safety.

I have looked at The National Road Safety Strategy 2001 – 2010 (the strategy) and the 2003 2004 Action Plan referred to in the terms of reference, and would like to make a few related comments and suggestions. I should point out that I do not represent an organisation and am not involved in the transport industry or road safety field.

#### 1. REVIEW.

I think the strategy (including the action plan) is comprehensive and that the strategic objectives are quite realistic. There has already been, from what I see, reasonable progress towards achieving some of these objectives but the continuing high number of road accidents, injuries, and fatalities makes it obvious this is a difficult and on-going project.

#### **Improve road user behaviour**

##### Education

Government advertising campaigns are constant, professionally produced, and, I feel, quite persuasive. Popular television programs based on knowing the road rules, good driving skills, and accident investigation seem a good way to encourage sensible behaviour and get drivers to at least think about road safety.

#### **Improve the safety of roads**

Speaking of those parts of Brisbane and SE QLD I am familiar with, I can see the transport authorities are working hard to improve road safety including reducing private vehicle use by upgrading and promoting public transport. Considering the population increase and number of motor vehicles this would not be easy. It is good to see more thoughtfully designed roads including pedestrian refuges and safety zones, traffic calming, and bikeways. Public transport goes to most parts of Brisbane and is frequent even on weekends, and reasonably inexpensive. Government authorities in SE Qld are actively promoting public transport by upgrading their fleets, improving their timetables, and introducing fare incentives together with streamlined and integrated ticketing.

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Unfortunately these improvements, particularly pedestrian safety, are still absent in parts of Brisbane (even the Central Business District) and less evident in surrounding areas. For example, people I work with who live in the adjacent Pine Rivers Shire (really a northern extension of Brisbane) complain about the poor condition of their local roads and lack of local public transport on weekends and public holidays.

Continuing on from this observation, I can see that the extensive and rapidly developing suburban hinterlands of popular coastal cities like the Gold and Sunshine Coast present road safety dangers. These arise from reasonable heavy and fast moving traffic, which includes a substantial number of visitors and retirees, and the fact that some local roads are not yet suitable for suburban levels of traffic. Public transport on the Gold Coast is reasonably good and adequate on the Sunshine Coast, but I think it is safe to say that most local travel is by private motor vehicle. The heavy dependence on private vehicles in these areas makes driving more stressful and reduces safety.

### 2. IDENTIFY ANY ADDITIONAL MEASURES

#### **Improve road user behaviour**

##### Driver Training and licensing

Licence renewals. As a way to refresh and update drivers' knowledge of the road rules, applicants for licence renewals could be required to complete a short (multiple choice) written test. A licence would only be renewed if the applicant provided the correct answer to all questions. The test would not be supervised and could be done away from the testing centre in the applicant's own time. The applicant would be encouraged to research the road rules and provided with a free road-rules handbook from which the questions would be drawn. This approach would not be designed to deny licences, although this could still happen.

Four-wheel drive (4WD) licence endorsement. This could be introduced to discourage unnecessary use, and ensure drivers understood and could competently handle 4WD vehicles in all conditions. The standard car (2WD) test would be extended to include 'off-road' driving. People who successfully completed the test would have their licence endorsed accordingly and be allowed to drive a 4WD in addition to a standard car. Existing licence holders would also need this endorsement, but could wait until their licence was due for renewal.

##### Education and enforcement

Advertising. Using legislation and other means – eg policy and tendering – government authorities must stop or strongly discourage the motor vehicle and advertising industries using high speed to glamorise their vehicles. While I see from the 2003/4 plan that the industry is developing a Code of Conduct, high speed still lingers as a feature of some TV advertisements. Advertisements should always show vehicles driven at a safe speed and with general care and attention. Furthermore, the driving situations depicted must be typical and display no more than the vehicle's capacity when driven by an 'average' (as opposed to a stunt or professional) driver. The Code of Conduct is a good step, however, incorporating it into laws that include penalties or censorship for breaches, would give it real weight. All road users should be able to contribute to this code.

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Employers – transport industry. Through legislation and policy, governments must pressure employers not to demand unreasonable driving schedules. Industrial Relations Commissions should only certify agreements or awards that guarantee rest breaks for drivers and ensure that they are always fit and alert. Government policy should be to deny contracts to operators who do not, directly or indirectly, practice road safety including the elimination of the circumstances leading to driver fatigue.

Fatigue and heavy transport. Regular rest breaks must become an accepted part of the job for long distance drivers (truck, coach, couriers, etc). Education is an important way to achieve this, but economic pressures will always be there, particularly for self-employed drivers. Some financial incentives might therefore help.

For example, free meals, beverages, discounted fuel, and accommodation at certain roadhouses along major truck and coach routes might encourage drivers to break their journey. On a trial basis, interested roadhouse operators might be invited to apply for a government grant to cover the full commercial cost of such a scheme. Within limits successful operators would agree in writing to provide discounted fuel, free accommodation, and healthy generous meals for the duration of the trial. Alternatively, the scheme could be administered by issuing a book of time-limited vouchers to drivers with their registration receipt. The scheme would be monitored and continued if successful. Measures of its success might include the number of drivers stopping and a comparison of the 'before' and 'after' accident statistics for the road concerned.

### **Improve the safety of roads**

'Black-spot' programme. As part of this program, the Australian Government Department of Transport and Regional Services (the department) could establish a central 'black-spot' or hazard notification centre.

All road users (including pedestrians and cyclists) would be encouraged to nominate hazardous locations or circumstances to the centre via a GPO address, web-site or 1800 number. This would be as simple as possible with paperwork being optional. The centre's web-site would be 'user friendly' - mostly involving responding to preset questions with preset multiple choice answers, such as the exact location, nature of the hazard, who is at risk, degree of danger, and number of injuries / fatalities (personal estimate or exact details, if known). Alternatively, forms with the same questions and postage paid envelopes would be widely available. The results would be public and readily available via the web-site, publications, and other media.

The purpose of this direct and ready interaction with road users would be to gather an extensive and up-to-date database of hazards in order for the department to initiate action to remedy the problems identified. Publication of this data should assure the public that the authorities had been informed which would hopefully lead to action.

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Separate carriage-ways for heavy transport. On major heavy transport routes, particularly busy and hazardous sections, trucks and coaches could be diverted on to separate roads. Depending on the terrain, these would mostly be adjacent to existing roads but completely separate, rather than just designated lanes on the one road. This would be somewhat like the bus-ways concept in Brisbane.

### **Improve vehicle compatibility and occupant protection**

Advertising – 4 wheel drive vehicles should be advertised as rural and 'off-road' vehicles.

Bull bars – illegal for all motor vehicles mostly garaged in cities and large towns with the exception of vehicles genuinely in transit to an approved rural area. Manufacturers should not be permitted to include bull bars as standard features.

### **Use technology to reduce human error**

Automatic braking systems for heavy transport vehicles – report seen on DW (German news program). At a certain distance, trucks would automatically brake, ensuring they did not collide with the vehicle in front. (Hopefully such a system is on the way for cars).

Mobile phones – develop phones that did not operate while the motor was running unless they were specifically 'hands-off' sets.

Speeding alarms – new cars should be manufactured with alarms that sound when the vehicle reaches or exceeds 115 kph. The alarm would be a statutory requirement unable to be turned off, difficult to remove, and sufficiently loud and unpleasant to compel the driver to slow down. This idea comes from building evacuation sirens, which are designed to get the occupants' attention and make them leave.

Speed inhibitors – The speed capacity of new cars, motor cycles, and trucks could be limited – say 130 kph for cars, 120kph for motor cycles, and 110kph for trucks and coaches. Assuming alarms were installed, the driver would know the limit was near.

### **Improve equity among road users**

Pedestrians - In their interaction with motor vehicles, pedestrians are the most vulnerable group of road users. This might be improved by:

Pedestrian crossings – a brief and unequivocal written instruction to drivers incorporated with the current yellow signs – STOP FOR PEDESTRIANS.

Traffic lights and turning vehicles – signals and structures designed to allow all pedestrians sufficient time and exclusive access to the road so they can safely cross. Road rules, signs and markings in these situations must make it clear that pedestrians have the right of way.

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Visitors from countries with left-hand drive need to be alerted that the traffic here travels in the opposite direction. Brochures distributed to passengers on in-coming ships and flights should include this warning. Signs at pedestrian crossings, particularly those across one-way roads, should show the direction to look for traffic. Signs in other languages in tourist areas might help.

Peak hour crowds – Pedestrians and drivers take serious risks to keep to their schedules. At the same time, some footpaths and pedestrian refuges are too narrow or awkward to safely accommodate crowds. This combined with the frenetic road traffic at peak times makes these situations even more perilous. Some key roads in busy central business districts, near industrial plants, schools, etc should be closed to traffic at busy times with the exception of authorised public transport buses and trams. More underpasses, bridges, and barriers at strategic points are needed to keep pedestrians and vehicles safely apart.

### **Improve trauma. Medical and retrieval services**

First-aid kits – new cars should include a basic kit with simple laminated instruction cards that include useful telephone numbers.

Highway airstrips – A network of basic airstrips adjacent to highways in rural and remote areas at strategic intervals, might reduce the time taken to transfer accident victims to hospital by allowing earlier transfers from land to aerial ambulances.

### **Encourage alternatives to motor vehicle use**

Season tickets - Government employers could set an example to other employers by including public transport 'season-tickets' in their wage and salary packages. Season tickets may include travel on weekends and public holidays and thereby encourage employees to also use public transport at these times.

### **3. IDENTIFY FACTORS THAT MAY BE IMPEDING PROGRESS IN REDUCING ROAD TRAUMA, AND SUGGEST HOW THESE COULD BE ADDRESSED**

High performance vehicles. Manufacturing and importing high performance vehicles does not help reduce road trauma. The power, high speed and acceleration some vehicles offer is dangerous and not necessary on any Australian road. The solution is to legislate for safe and economic motor vehicles (including heavy transport) – safety and economy should be the principal objectives of such laws. I doubt if education campaigns, codes of conduct, and public pressure are sufficient on their own.

Emphasis on road transport and private motor vehicles. By necessity or choice, road transport is the principal means of travel for most Australians. The road system is generally sound but has serious weaknesses and seems to just keep pace with traffic volume. I suggest the road safety strategy place even more emphasis on encouraging people away from private vehicle travel and do this by providing good public transport. This approach is advancing in most Australian cities but seldom extends to non-metropolitan areas where some of the worst road accidents seem to occur. Initiating or reinstating intra and inter town rail or light rail services in regional areas is expensive, but would take pressure off rural roads and improve their safety.

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When assessing road safety and public transport proposals, governments must weigh the initial effort and expense against the long-term consequences of inaction. These bodies must consider the personal and economic losses arising from road accidents. Economic losses include the cost of emergency services, medical, hospital, rehabilitation, long-term nursing care, labour shortfalls, insurance and legal expenses. Within reason, imaginative ideas should be encouraged rather than stifled by administrative inertia and arguments about funding. Road safety avoids injuries and saves lives and is therefore just as important as national security and health and, while it need not cost as much, money spent here is a wise long-term investment.

Yours faithfully,



Paul Rebula,  
15 October 2003