



INTERIM SUBMISSION

Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities

INQUIRY INTO PROGRESS UNDER THE NATIONAL ROAD SAFETY STRATEGY 2011 – 2020

FEBRUARY 2018

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**The Australian Government's inquiry into progress under the
National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020**

Terms of Reference

- 1. Identify the key factors involved in the road crash death and serious injury trends including recent increases in 2015 and 2016.**
 - 2. Review the effectiveness of the National Road Safety Strategy (NRSS) 2011-2020 and supporting 2015-17 Action Plan, with particular reference to the increase in deaths and serious injuries from road crashes over the last two years.**
 - 3. Identify issues and priorities for consideration in development of a post-2020 national road safety strategy and 2018-2020 action plan, focusing on how Australia can recognise and move towards a safety road transport system which minimises harm to all users.**
 - 4. Advise on arrangements for the management of road safety and the NRSS, looking at best coordination and use of the capacity and contributions of all partners.**
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WALGA acknowledges the Australian Government and the Department of Infrastructure, Regional Development and Cities for the opportunity to provide input into the Inquiry. This response contains views, from a Local Government and community road safety perspective, on some of the challenges and opportunities for road safety going forward. Suggested considerations for the next National Road Safety Strategy are also included.

This interim submission has been prepared in consultation with the WALGA Infrastructure Policy Team¹. Policy teams provide advice on significant policy issues to the WALGA State Council which is the decision-making representative body of all Member Councils, who are responsible for sector-wide policy making and strategic planning on behalf of Local Government in Western Australia. It will be formally considered by the WALGA State Council at the next opportunity, which will be informed by the views of member Councils. Any amendments to this interim submission arising from these deliberations will be communicated as soon as possible.

In summary, we submit the following recommendations for road safety going forward:

- a. The next National Road Safety Strategy consider a road safety framework that allows for the complex mix of personal, social, economic and environmental factors that together affect the health of individuals and communities. A more holistic approach might also avoid some of the siloed action that has resulted from compartmentalising the safe system approach into cornerstones/pillars.***
- b. Align the next National Road Safety Strategy with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to link with global objectives.***

¹ Infrastructure Policy Team Members – President Cr Stephen Strange, President Cr Malcolm Cullen, Mayor Tracey Roberts, Cr Giovanni Italiano, Cr Chris Mitchell and Cr Julie Brown.

- c. **To better understand the gaps in implementation and to enhance accountability, the Strategy should define who can contribute to road safety then measure and monitor the capacity of each party.**
- d. **Demonstrate inclusivity by valuing all contributions and contributors to road safety.**
- e. **Identify and quantify the differences and gaps in road standards in order to understand the extent of the task required to bring the network up to safe system standard.**
- f. **Assess current standards to understand the underlying in-built tolerances for road crash injury.**
- g. **Develop a program that both supports innovation through funding of demonstration projects and encourages others by showcasing effective projects (e.g. national safe infrastructure awards).**
- h. **Initiate a program that supports affordable and accessible training in the application of safe system principles and standards for Local Government practitioners.**
- i. **Introduce a formal structure, instrument and processes that will enable regular and meaningful consultation and engagement with the Local Government sector.**
- j. **Avoid simplistic and dismissive approaches like applying lower speed zones in preference to investment in safer infrastructure. Instead support and encourage targeted speed limit reductions, always planned in consultation with Local Governments and where possible involve community road safety partnerships.**
- k. **Initiate a review of the road functional hierarchy and develop a system of lining, signing or other methods, so that when applied road users will instinctively know what behaviours and travel speed is consistent with the design and function of the road.**
- l. **Initiate research to identify and develop a more sophisticated safe-system aligned approach as an evolutionary step for the Black Spot program.**
- m. **Continue funding for the national Black Spot Program in the interim.**
- n. **Develop a means of monitoring the level and extent of implementation (process evaluation) to understand what effort achieves certain results and to identify the gaps in implementation.**
- o. **Work with the States and Territories to develop a method of collating data so that serious injury information is reportable for Australia.**
- p. **Facilitate accessible and timely sharing of relevant road crash data with Local Governments.**
- q. **Explore opportunities to develop and apply a systems-based methodology, similar to aviation industry investigations, to road crash investigations.**
- r. **Consideration be given to introducing Government policies that will encourage and support the accelerated renewal of the Australian vehicle fleet. This would take advantage of the significant advancements in active and passive features that offer increasing levels of protection for vehicle occupants and other road users.**
- s. **National leadership and political support to guide the planning and design now, of an inherently safe road transport system suited to the progressive introduction of increasing levels of autonomous vehicles.**

Background – WALGA’s involvement in road safety

WALGA works for Local Governments in Western Australia. As the peak industry body, WALGA advocates on behalf of 138 Local Governments and negotiates service agreements for the sector. WALGA is not a government department or agency.

Local Governments in Western Australia involve 1,222 elected members and approximately 22,000 employees. In 2015-16 Local Governments managed assets worth more than \$45 billion and spent \$3.9 billion on important services for the communities of WA, with the majority (\$1 billion) directed towards transport and communications

In relation to road safety WALGA has delivered RoadWise, the Local Government and Community Road Safety Program in Western Australia, since 1994.

The RoadWise program engages and facilitates the participation of Local Governments and communities in addressing the social and economic burden of killed and serious injury (KSI) road crashes, through local action. Delivery of the RoadWise program is funded by the State Government and is supported by Local Governments with financial and in-kind contributions which enable local road safety action.

WALGA’s RoadWise involves a team of regional and metropolitan-based officers who work with a network of communities, building capacity for effective delivery of the WA road safety strategy at the local level and facilitating community support and participation in the safe system approach to road safety.

The community road safety network involves more than 5,870 individuals and sixty six active local road safety focused committees spread across urban, rural and remote regions of Western Australia². Collectively this network delivered more than 1,700 educational and promotional road safety activities in communities across Western Australia in 2016-17³ with a voluntary component valued at more than an estimated \$1.7 million⁴.

Guiding principles – the safe system approach

The safe system approach is considered world’s best practice, modelled on the strategies developed and applied by the best performing nations, such as Sweden’s Vision Zero and the Dutch Sustainable Safety.

This approach rather than relying on changing the behaviour of the driver or road user takes into account the fallibility of humans and recognises that much of the road safety problem is the result of people simply making mistakes.

The safe system approach seeks to manage the physical forces that people are exposed to in a crash by managing the interaction between road users, the road and roadsides, travel speeds and the vehicles involved.

² WALGA, *RoadWise Network Database*, January 2018.

³ WALGA, *RoadWise Program Achievements Report 2016-17*.

⁴ WA Local Government Association, Smithson, A., Pettet, T., *Estimating the value of contributions to community-level action for road safety*, <http://acrs.org.au/files/papers/arsc/2016/Smithson%2000208%20PR.pdf>.

WALGA supports the 'systems' concept but recommends consideration be given to the following in the developing the next National Road Safety Strategy:

- a. A road safety framework that allows for the complex mix of personal, social, economic and environmental factors that together affect the health of individuals and communities. A more holistic approach might also avoid some of the siloed action that has resulted from compartmentalising the safe system approach into cornerstones/pillars.**
- b. Align the next National Road Safety Strategy with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals to link with global objectives.**

'Shared responsibility' is a principle universally adopted in the National and other safe system-based road safety strategies. However, this principle appears to have two key flaws. First, shared responsibility implies equal capacity and second if responsibility is shared then accountability is likely to be eroded. WALGA recommends:

- c. To better understand the gaps in implementation and to enhance accountability, the Strategy should define who can contribute to road safety then measure and monitor the capacity of each party.**
- d. Demonstrate inclusivity by valuing all contributions and contributors to road safety.**

Local Governments' role in road safety

For the safe system approach to be fully and successfully implemented it is widely recognised that both system designers and system users have a role to play.

Under the safe system framework Local Governments have a strategic and operational role: as road and planning authorities, as fleet managers and in community development and local leadership.

However, Local Governments face a number of substantial challenges in managing large geographically diverse and dispersed networks of road and this is coupled with capacity constraints (limited funds, staff and training⁵) that limit expeditious safe system improvements.

Another challenge is the potentially widening gap in the safety performance between rural/remote and urban, and between national/state and local road networks. One major difficulty lies in applying cost effective transformations to a vast road network with low crash densities compared to interventions in urbanised areas and inter-city routes that have higher populations, traffic volumes and crash densities.

Austrroads report that Local Governments are responsible for managing around 82% of the road network in Australia where 52% of all casualty crashes and 40% of all road deaths occur. This means that driving on a local road involves an increased risk of being seriously injured that is 1.5 times higher than driving on a state road.⁶

⁵ WALGA, *Local Government Safe System Project Baseline Survey Results Report*, March 2010.

⁶ Austrroads, *Austrroads Research Report AP-R518-16, Safe System Roads for Local Government*, 2016.

Findings from Austroads attribute the higher risk to some of the features of the local road network, including a lower road standard in general and behavioural issues associated with the more diverse mix of road users on local roads.

As a part of the effort to achieve the long-term vision of the NRSS that “no person should be killed or seriously injured on Australia’s roads”⁷ it has been assumed by some, that to transform the road network applying safe system principles will require improvements, from the currently accepted minimum standard to the safe system standard or quality. In reality large parts of the aging road network do not yet meet the current minimum standards and therefore the effort and investment to achieve safe system standard roads is likely to be a substantial under-estimate.

WALGA recommends a review the current standards, including the underlying principles, applied to road construction and maintenance, to:

- e. Identify and quantify the differences and gaps in road standards in order to understand the extent of the task required to bring the network up to safe system standard.***
- f. Assess current standards to understand the underlying in-built tolerances for road crash injury.***
- g. Develop a program that both supports innovation through funding of demonstration projects and encourages others by showcasing effective projects (e.g. national safe infrastructure awards).***

Together with the gap in road standards described above, gaps in knowledge, skills and resources for the safe system approach continue to exist. From the results of a study in 2010-11⁸ of Local Governments’ capacity to contribute there was a clearly expressed need for additional funds, staff and training in the practical application of the safe system approach. There has been only limited enabling support of this kind for the Local Government sector since then.

- h. Initiate a program that supports affordable and accessible training in the application of safe system principles and standards for Local Government practitioners.***

National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020

WALGA recognizes the Australian Government’s commitment to and leadership in developing, coordinating and monitoring the National Road Safety Strategy 2011 – 2020. In noting the achievements reported in November 2017⁹ WALGA acknowledges the efforts of all jurisdictions. In particular, we applaud the collective efforts that have resulted in:

- an 18.7% reduction in the rate of deaths (from 6.6 to 5.4 per 100,000) since the start of this National Road Safety Strategy, and
- the encouraging improvements in the safety performance indicators for crashes involving: single vehicles; young drivers and motorcycle riders; alcohol impaired driving and riding; heavy vehicles; the use of seat belts; cyclists.

⁷ Australian Transport Council, *National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020*, May 2011.

⁸ WALGA, *Local Government Safe System Project Baseline Survey Results Report*, March 2010.

⁹ National Road Safety Strategy, *Implementation status report*, November 2017.

However it is a significant concern that similar safety gains have not been achieved for crashes involving:

- regional roads
- head-on crashes
- older drivers and motorcycle riders
- motorcyclists, and
- pedestrians.

WALGA notes that while Local Governments are explicitly identified in the National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020 our sphere of government is almost completely ignored in the National Road Safety Action Plan 2015-2017, except in relation to reduced speed zones¹⁰.

The goal of the National Road Safety Strategy is to reduce Australia's annual number of road deaths and serious injuries by at least 30 per cent by 2020. This means that if nothing changes for the local road network where approximately 50% of serious crashes occur then there would need to be double the improvement on just the 18% of the road network managed by the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments.

This will lead to a further widening of the gap in safety performance between state and local road networks. For a nation-wide approach going forward it will be important to recognise the role and contributions of Local Governments if Australia is to work towards a safe road transport system.

i. Introduce a formal structure, instrument¹¹ and processes that will enable regular and meaningful consultation and engagement with the Local Government sector.

Furthermore, simplistic and siloed 'solutions' like lowering speed limits on the local road network whilst prioritising investment (as specified in the National Road Safety Action Plan 2017 - 2019) for safe system infrastructure on the national, state and territory road networks is unacceptable.

The Local Government sector in Western Australia is opposed to blanket speed limit reductions. In our experience this is unpopular, difficult to enforce and unlikely to be accepted by local communities, especially given that almost all road travel starts and ends on a Local Government managed road. In rural Western Australia the local road connection, sometimes referred to as the "last mile" may be hundreds of kilometres long. Some Local Governments have no State or National roads within their jurisdiction.

WALGA does acknowledge, however, that speed management is a crucial aspect in reducing death and serious injuries. In our experience targeted (e.g. where there are high volumes of pedestrian or other vulnerable road user traffic) lowering of speed limits planned in consultation with the relevant Local Government, to take advantage of local knowledge, progressively applied will be more effective.

Local community road safety partnerships also assist in generating community demand and support for lower speed zones. The RoadWise network has successfully advocated, at the local level, for speed limit reductions in selected areas.

¹⁰ Transport and Infrastructure Council, *National Road Safety Action Plan 2015 – 2017*, November 2014, p. 7

¹¹ For example: the *State and Local Government Agreement, August 2017*, between the Western Australian Government, Local Government Professionals and WALGA.

Progressing changes that will facilitate the implementation of self-explaining roads may also hasten the beneficial lowering of traffic travel speeds across the entire road network.

- j. Avoid simplistic and dismissive approaches like applying lower speed zones in preference to investment in safer infrastructure. Instead support and encourage targeted speed limit reductions, always planned in consultation with Local Governments and where possible involve community road safety partnerships.***
- k. Initiate a review of the road functional hierarchy and develop a system of lining, signing or other methods, so that when applied road users will instinctively know what behaviours and travel speed is consistent with the design and function of the road.***

In relation to investment in road infrastructure WALGA seeks continued safety-focused funding for the local road network.

The Australian Government's Black Spot program is highly regarded by Local Governments. It remains the only national safety-focused source of funding for local roads and though greatly valued there may be opportunities to develop the criteria and methodology in an evolutionary manner to better support not only the reactive treatment of crash site/lengths but also proactive mass action type treatments, ie beyond Benefit Cost Ratios to Safe System Transformations. For example model-based methods such as the Empirical Bayes statistical method (Portugal) cited by Meuleners and Fraser¹² as "state-of-the-art".

Future reviews of the program should also consider how differentiation of the criteria, methodology or even an alternate program might more appropriately address the gap in safety performance on rural and remote roads, for example funding for low cost treatments such as lines and signs (taken for granted in large urban centres) to help bring rural and remote roads closer to the current (minimum) standard.

- l. Initiate research to identify and develop a more sophisticated safe-system aligned approach as an evolutionary step for the Black Spot program.***
- m. Continue funding for the national Black Spot Program in the interim.***

Other – data, vehicles and technology

Some other opportunities for national leadership relate to data, vehicles and technology. We recommend consideration be given to the full range of the issue within the many aspects of road safety. This section offers suggestions that we believe belong in the national realm:

The challenges and opportunities that exist in road safety today mostly relate to our ability to effectively deliver. Implementing the safe system approach (through interventions designed to ensure safe road users, travelling at safe speeds on safe roads and in safe vehicles) remains our best chance of significantly and sustainably addressing the social and economic cost of road injury and death. Significant increased investment, shifts in thinking (eg beyond current standards) and better coordination will be necessary to ultimately achieve a safe system.

Data collection, analysis, monitoring and reporting is an important activity supporting the implementation of road safety strategies. Intelligence from different sources might also usefully inform road safety strategies in future, for example road crash investigations

¹² Meuleners L, and Fraser M, *Review of the WA State Black Spot Program: a literature review of Australian and International Black Spot Programs*, June 2008.

undertaken by multidisciplinary teams that analyse the underlying cause of the contributing factors.

It is also interesting to note that the goal of the National Road Safety Strategy (NRSS) includes serious injury yet this measure appears to remain elusive.

In relation to data, we make the following suggested actions:

- n. Develop a means of monitoring the level and extent of implementation (process evaluation) to understand what effort achieves certain results and to identify the gaps in implementation.***
- o. Work with the States and Territories to develop a method of collating data so that serious injury information is reportable for Australia.***
- p. Facilitate accessible and timely sharing of relevant road crash data with Local Governments.***
- q. Explore opportunities to develop and apply a systems-based methodology, similar to aviation industry investigations, to road crash investigations.***

With the relatively slow turnover of the Australian vehicle fleet (in 2016 the average age was 10.1 years, up from 10.0 at NRSS baseline¹³) it takes a long time for new vehicle safety technology to spread. Given the potential for an estimated 25% reduction in death and serious injury¹⁴, we suggest:

- r. Consideration be given to introducing Government policies that will encourage and support the accelerated renewal of the Australian vehicle fleet. This would take advantage of the significant advancements in active and passive features that offer increasing levels of protection for vehicle occupants and other road users.***

There is much talk about the approaching age of driverless vehicles. The assumed safety benefits of these technologies may be overly inflated, particularly during the transitional stages. We believe there is an opportunity for:

- s. National leadership and political support to guide the planning and design now, of an inherently safe road transport system suited to the progressive introduction of increasing levels of autonomous vehicles.***

¹³ <http://roadsafety.gov.au/performance/spis.aspx>

¹⁴ <https://www.rsc.wa.gov.au/Documents/Strategies/ors-towards-zero-strategy.aspx> , 42.