

Submission to National Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to have input into the Strategy through one of the online briefing sessions and via this submission.

My name is Rosalie Dows. I am a retired teacher. I sincerely believe that education in its various forms is the way to solve the majority of problems of this world.

In August 2016 our son was killed, through no fault of his own, in a head-on collision whilst driving to work.

The driver who killed our son had had a long history of mental illness and had lost all hope for a future for himself. All his actions suggest he was not planning to return from his drive that day. He crossed into our son's lane at high speed, and was not wearing a seatbelt. He was not currently licensed and took his mother's car, without her knowledge, while she was out. Due to a blind crest on that road our son had only about two seconds to react to avoid the collision. Our son had no chance. Both drivers were killed. Both drivers were in their early 40's. Since then, I have been engaged in drawing attention to what I perceive contributed to our son's death – primarily mental health and road safety.

Regional Roads Victoria really listened to us, and within their budget and time constraints, really tried to make road improvements at the location of our son's death. Those improvements (even though not all that I would have liked to happen), included sealed road shoulders, crash barriers installed and wide centre line with double rumble strips at centre line and rumble strips at road edges. It is now more than 4 ½ years since our son was killed. To my knowledge, that section of road has not seen any further collisions.

Since losing our son, we have become involved in Road Safe North East and Road Trauma Support Services Victoria (RTSSV). I am a Volunteer Speaker for Road Trauma Awareness Seminars – trying to make a positive change to 'the brain behind the wheel'.

I take every opportunity I can to influence road safety policy or create awareness of the devastation of road trauma. My husband and I attended the Shepparton Road Safety Workshop in May 2019 re Towards Zero – safer vehicles, Safer roads, safer environment and safer users. I have worked with Regional Roads Victoria in an effort to make a specific road safer for all users (than was the case for our son). Because of what has happened personally to our family I am very aware of the complexities involved in trying to make a difference. There are a lot of very fine people trying to make a difference which is excellent. However, people are the main cause of death and injury on our roads and because people are the major cause of death and injury, we all need to give 'the people behind the wheel' issue more attention in the road safety strategy process.

The Strategy at a glance is Movement and Place. I would like to see a focus on '**People, Movement and Place**'. People are the common factor in our absolute need for everything to do with road safety. Road Trauma is devastating and far reaching. The lasting impact of road trauma is felt by the people in our communities.

It is recognised that 95% of all collisions, happen because of the human element through choices or actions made by the driver. This aspect of the road safety equation is perhaps the most difficult to address. As an educator I believe empowering people through educational activities to become 'more road safety conscious' is the best way to teach road safety.

Not everyone learns in the same way. Some need to see, others do through actions and others need to hear while still others need all forms (see, do and hear) of learning to have the chance to retain the information. Therefore a variety of learning experiences must be considered for teaching road safety and driver safety issues.

Through simulated or focused activities (and technologies) drivers (and other community members, including children) can learn road safety responsibilities, and the consequences of poor choices and actions, within a controlled environment and under instruction. Continuing to address better education of drivers must be an ongoing part of the National Road Safety Strategy. The community also need to be brought into the equation as each driver can be, or is influenced by their network of family/friends and workmates/associates.

Information dissemination needs to be open, transparent and factual. Data needs to be collected and collated from across all organisations who make policy about, advocate for or care for the victims of road trauma. Interviews of the victims themselves can be very informative also. I assure you that those directly impacted by road trauma will have thought long and hard about what happened and why, and what needs to change. The experts on road trauma are those with lived experience of the effects. Road crash statistics also needs to record the truth of the problem. It is known that those who are deemed to be suicidal at the time of the crash are recorded in a separate list of data. All deaths and injuries need to be brought together in one complete and detailed set of data so the 'big picture' can start to be dealt with. The complete picture needs to include the Coronial reporting too, even for sensitive cases. Change can occur when we know the full extent of the problems we are dealing with. Towards Zero will not happen unless we are courageous enough to face the full reality of the problem – 95% of all collisions are the result of poor decisions and actions by people – The Human Factor

Recreational driving sports and challenges at a club level or such as 'Life Be In It' driving skill development series activities could assist young 'hoons' to let off steam in a controlled environment which may take the need out of them to use our roads in a dangerous way. Such activities would need to be supported by skilled instructors so the 'hoon' mentality can be tempered and redirected. Such activities would need to be available at a cost participants can afford.

In the Findings tabled recently by the Royal Commission into the Victorian Mental Health System, it was found there is a 'missing middle' (within the adult age range – 26-60) where services and support for those suffering mental ill-health was sadly lacking. That 'missing middle', I believe, can also be found in the strategies now employed for Road Safety. Drivers in the 'missing middle' – aged 26-60+, are very prominent in road collision statistics too. Questions need to be asked as to why! Why is this age range involved in risky behaviours and increased chance of collisions with possible results of death and /or debilitating injuries? This age range includes mainly experienced drivers. However this age range can be dealing with complex life situations outside of driving and which may be contributing to poor driving decisions – family pressures such as financial, marital, family court, divorce, workplace pressures and commitments etc etc. This age range also includes many self employed people and those who travel our roads for a living. It is so important that anyone driving is in a good mental space while behind the wheel. Anger, frustration, marital, legal or financial worries could contribute to distractions of the mind away from the job at hand which is the act of driving a vehicle. The ability to drive and go from place to place is a great privilege in our society, but if the driver is not in a good mental state (as was the case of the driver who killed our son, as well as himself) then that driver's vehicle becomes a potential weapon. I believe more awareness

needs to be focussed on drivers being in a good mental state when driving and at present; this area is virtually not addressed at all.

I do feel that change is happening to address the ‘Vulnerable Road Users’ in our communities. Now we need to address the issue of vulnerable road users (bikes, motor cycles and pedestrians) also considering other road users too. The reality here, especially in the regional areas, is that narrow roads were never designed for both traffic loads and sharing with eg. multiple slow bike riders demanding their rights. The design of roads needs to be improved and/or cyclists encouraged to use the developing network of cycle paths. Penalties should be in place where cycle paths are not being used and cyclists choose the road instead – deliberately holding up other traffic.

Talking road safety is never going to be enough for some drivers and must include penalties, other education strategies (such as Road Trauma Awareness Seminars, community service in road trauma facilities (under supervision), removal of privileges, destruction of vehicles, etc etc. I am personally very pleased to see the penalties for repeat driving offenses being tightened up. Some drivers sadly will never ‘get it’ until they are personally impacted.

The current generation of parents, alongside overuse of rules/laws and regulations by governments at all levels, have caused at least one generation of ‘cushioned’ children to grow up and become adult drivers. These ‘cushioned’ adults generally appear not to understand the process of actions, responsibilities and consequences. It is always someone else’s fault for what happened (especially if the outcome was a negative one). The children grow up and have children and the cycle repeats. Children are growing up without appropriate life coping strategies or the ability to face the consequences for their choices/actions.

All of the community needs to be involved in supporting road safety - it is a whole of community issue. Road safety issues need to be openly discussed and addressed. The community would include all levels of government, all ages of citizens, all abilities, all included cultures, police, ambulance, SES, fire brigades, service organisations, doctors, hospitals, workplaces, all levels of education, sporting groups, neighbourhood centres. By getting the whole of community involved, the ‘human’ part of road safety should have a better support network around each driver, hopefully paying attention to each other for everyone’s benefit. The inclusion/involvement of all of the community is respectful and will give impact in its action. I am hopeful that more respect within the community will have a positive impact on road safety, by reduction in aggressive driving and driver intimidation, more consideration of others when driving, and more awareness of others on the road.

Please consider the content of this submission. Thank you for your time. My best wishes to you as you work through this extremely important process.

Yours sincerely

Rosalie Dows

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