

**Submission
No 9**

REDUCING TRAUMA ON LOCAL ROADS IN NSW

Organisation: Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council

Date Received: 2 February 2020

2 February 2020

The Hon Lou Amato MLC
The Committee Chair
Joint Committee on Road Safety
Parliament House, Macquarie Street
Sydney, NSW 2000

Dear Mr Amato,

Submission to Inquiry into reducing trauma on local roads in NSW

I am writing to lodge a submission for your inquiry into reducing trauma on local roads in NSW, based on road safety evidence from the local government area Queanbeyan-Palerang Region Council (QPRC) and experience as their Road Safety Officer (RSO) since 2015; addressing the specific terms of reference.

The role of local roads in road safety and trauma – noting the reference from the Inquiry’s media release ‘Unfortunately local roads have a higher percentage of fatalities and serious injuries than state roads’

QPRC covers 5,319 km², which features around 1,600km of roads including 763km of unsealed roads and remaining 851km sealed in various formats. The State Road network in QPRC is around 10% of the roads (160km) including Federal Highway, The Kings Highway and link roads around Queanbeyan of Sutton Road, Yass Road, Lanyon Drive and Canberra Avenue.

Reviewing crash statistics provided by the NSW government on the Transport for NSW Centre for Road Safety webpage, QPRC local managed roads do not experience a higher percentage of fatalities and serious injuries (FSI) than state roads. While local roads make up 87% of QPRC road network, they only make up 25% of fatality crashes and 43% of serious injury crashes from 2013-2018. In total only 40% of FSI crashes occurred on the 87% QPRC local road network from 2013-2018.

Whereas state managed roads are over-represented in QPRC road trauma for example comprising only 10% of QPRC road network but responsible for 50% of fatality crashes from 2013-2018.

When reviewing FSI crashes on local roads in QPRC, especially country roads outside the urban areas, speed is the top contributing factor. An analysis of FSI crashes from 2013-2017 found speed was a contributing factor to 59% of crashes on local country roads. Reviewing serious injuries on QPRC network highlights factors involved in crashes including male drivers, single vehicle crashes, country roads, 100km/h speed limit roads, over-representation of motorcycle crashes (23% FSI crashes) and poor weather.

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Effectiveness of existing road safety planning requirements, including in other jurisdiction.

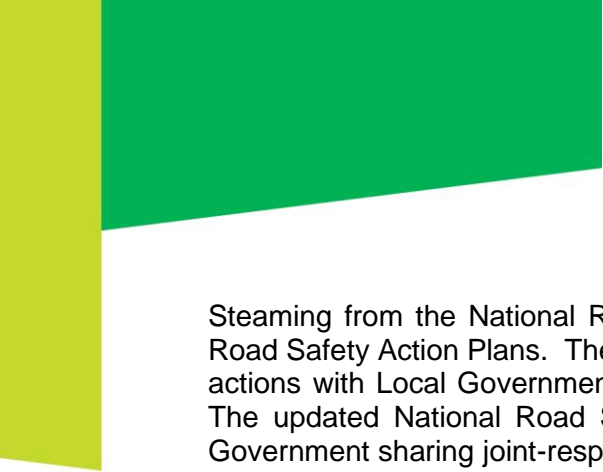
In January 2020 Austroads released a research report titled 'Local Government Road Safety Management Guide'. In justifying the need for a separate guide specifically aimed at Local Government the guide notes that much of the road safety guidance available to the industry to date has not been directly relevant to local government. Given this admittance it's difficult to further discuss the effectiveness of road safety planning requirements for local roads and may highlight the challenges that have been faced.

Road Safety Planning can be seen at a Federal level with the National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020 that aims to reduce FSI by at least 30% by end of 2020. This type of road safety planning filters down to state jurisdiction plans and is reflected in NSW with their Road Safety Plan 2021. NSW's Plan equally adopts targets for NSW roads of reducing fatalities by 30% by 2021 and has seen the implementation of the aspirational goals of reaching zero by 2056 with the Toward Zero approach.

Adopting specific targets for reducing fatalities has not been a practice encouraged for local government in their road safety planning. Austroads in their Guide to Road Safety Part 4: Local Government and Community Road Safety actually encourages local governments to steer away from evaluating outcomes of local road safety programs in terms of crash reductions and goes so far as to suggest it's generally not possible to evaluate local road safety programs in terms of crash reductions. The reason stated for the limitation is that it's difficult to determine the exact contributing role of local road safety programs play in relation to more general campaigns eg state or national campaigns involving police enforcement, backed by advertising.

Working in LGRSP in NSW for eight years it is my experience that there has never been encouragement from State or Federal Governments to have road safety planning at a local government level feature specific targets for reducing FSI crashes. When I've asked about the disconnect and why reduction targets are absent for NSW local government planning, I've been told it's too lofty an ambition for local government who aren't funded well enough to achieve such targets. It remains unclear how local governments start to work towards zero and contribute to the National and State reduction targets if adopting reduction targets for local roads in road safety planning is not encouraged and supported by the industry.

Road Safety planning for Local Governments has been encouraged recently in NSW with the publication by NSW IPWEA of the third edition of 'A Guide to Developing Council Road Safety Strategic Plans.' Copies of this document were sent in October 2019 to Mayors and General Managers that were promptly forwarded to Road Safety Officer. While this document notes National and NSW State Road Safety Strategies with specified targets for reducing trauma the guide is silent on targets being included for Local Government Strategic Plans. This guide also warns against evaluating at local level on crash reduction stating 'It is unwise to have high expectations of significant changes in crash incidences at the local level due to vagaries of chance when dealing with small numbers.' Again, it's unclear how zero is to be achieved if NSW local governments are omitted and discouraged from the practice of setting goals and reduction targets in their road safety planning.




Steaming from the National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020 there were two National Road Safety Action Plans. The National Road Safety Action Plan 2015-2017 featured 19 actions with Local Government only listed as sharing a joint-responsibility in 2 actions. The updated National Road Safety Action Plan 2018-2020 has 9 Actions with Local Government sharing joint-responsibility in 4 actions including the top action item which is to 'Review speed limits on high risk regional and remote roads in consultation with the community'. Local Government were added to the National Action Plan to be jointly responsible for reviewing speed limits on rural and regional roads but in NSW this responsibility sits firmly with the NSW State Government. There is an entrenched culture among staff working on roads in local government that the State Government is solely responsible for setting speed limits and runs programs such as Speed Camera programs, Speed Enforcement and Speed consultation/zoning.

The NSW Road Safety Plan 2021 incorporated Action Item 1 into their Priority Area 'Saving Lives on Country Roads' with the plan stating to address trauma on country roads the NSW Government will 'Identify high risk roads and, in consultation with the community, review travel speeds where there are limited road safety features protecting people if there is a crash'. In adopting the National Action Item NSW Government Plan remains silent on the role local government will be playing in this critical function identified to tackle reducing trauma. I've repeatedly asked NSW State Government staff what role local government is to play for this action item and no definitive answer has ever been provided leaving NSW local government's joint responsibility in National Action Plan unclear and limited in capacity to deliver. The discrepancies between National and State Action Plans regarding the Local Government's responsibility does not foster or encourage NSW local governments to play a role with this vital action item. I'm not suggesting NSW local governments should be given the responsibility of setting speed limits, but they do have tools to assist in reviewing speed limits and have the best access to their community to consult and assist in implementation and compliance of speed limits. But their ability to participate and help with this action item is being hindered by discrepancy between National and State Plans and lack of direction and systematic approach to involving local governments in this action item.

Opportunities for improving road safety planning and management on local roads, including through the Local Government Road Safety Program and Community Strategic Planning

Queanbeyan City Council (QCC) was an early adopter of the Local Government Road Safety Program (LGRSP) being the first Council to join the program in the Southern Region. QCC received a plaque from RTA in 2007 in recognition of Council's decade of commitment to the LGRSP and still proudly displays the plaque. While in the program QCC has always employed a full-time Road Safety Officer (RSO) and has actively promoted the program with neighbouring Councils going so far as to create a proposal to jointly fund an RSO with a neighbouring Council not participating in the program. QCC merged with Palerang Council in 2016 to form QPRC which has seen the LGRSP expand into the former-Palerang Council area. It is perhaps in this former-Council area that did not participate in the LGRSP, that the benefits of the program are best evident and have been realised.




In three years since amalgamation former-Palerang area has benefitted from two successful implementations of black-spot treatments to value of \$700,000 and has had road network reviewed for further black spot treatments with submissions to value of \$700,000 lodged for future works. Road safety behavioural programs have been expanded for residents into Bungendore, Braidwood, Araluen, Majors Creek and Captains Flat townships including programs addressing speed, drink drive, fatigue, young drivers, older drivers, motorcycle riders, bus safety, Kings Highway specific programs and school zone safety. They have benefitted from road safety engagements with their businesses, services and resident such as work with Aged Care clubs, Men's sheds, Driver Reviver, Pre-schools, resident associations and coordinated enforcement and education efforts on their roads. The school zones in former Palerang have received safety upgrades and implementation of new safety treatments to improve safe arrival and departures at schools. While school communities have received road safety education about school zones. QPRC road network is serviced by bus companies with some of the largest networks of rural bus stops. One of the major benefits of the LGRSP in this context saw the RSO working with local bus operators when NSW Government released their guide to informal school bus stops to produce a checklist to assist bus companies assess their large network of informal rural bus stops. Road projects have featured collaborative efforts with bus companies to improve rural bus stops and incorporate better bus stop facilities and remove unsafe informal bus stops as road upgrades are implemented.

As result of the amalgamation QPRC needed to create a new Community Strategic Plan to reflect the new Council area. Through this process the RSO made a submission to have Safe Systems incorporated into Council's Strategic Plan and the submission was considered and adopted. Strategies about Council's road network refer to being a safe system and these are linked to Council's Road Safety planning and reflected in Council's Delivery Program (4-year plan) and Annual Operational Plans.

The LGRSP is managed between NSW State Government and NSW local governments through a Program Funding Agreement (PFA). In 2014 the agreement was updated and a requirement was introduced that participating Councils needed to create a three-year Road Safety Action Plan (2014-2017). This requirement was introduced rather quickly for Councils in 2014 with minimal planning or allowance of lead time to adapt from a one-year program to a three-year action plan program. There was little consideration given to how the new three-year action plan would link in with Council's existing integrated planning and after six years this is still the case. Minimal guidance is provided to RSOs by the State Government of how the required three-year action plan can link with Council's Road Safety Strategic Plan (if they have one).

QPRC will be seeing the completion of its second three-year Road Safety Action Plan (2017-2020) in June 2020. One of the intentions with the introduction of the three-year plan was to permit road safety programs to be planned, budgeted and implemented by Councils over three-year period. This enabled projects to mature over a period time and had the opportunity to see realised benefits and impacts in road safety programs that could be measured over a timeframe rather than dismissing impacts due to the small numbers or short time frames (which is the practice noted in second answer). Unfortunately, it has not been the experience that the Action Plan has been implemented as per the intentions and projects aren't resources and budgeted by NSW Government over three-year period. Road Safety project funding and reporting is still occurring on an annual basis and the database used by NSW Government to record Council's road safety projects does not



support projects implemented over multiple years. QPRC has requested on a number of occasions for the strategy of three-year Action Plan to be reviewed. With local government road safety action plans finishing in June 2020 it is an opportune time to review their function. State and Federal Governments are also due to update their Road Safety Plans with current plans ending 2020 and 2021. Requiring Councils to commence another three-year Action Plan in July 2020 when Federal and State Government Strategies are about to be renewed their Plans highlights the disconnect that has been occurring between the road safety planning between jurisdictions.

There is capacity through the LGRSP to link Road Safety Action Plans into Council's Integrated Planning Processes. Council has 4-year Delivery Programs and 1-year operating plans. Local Government Road Safety Projects are currently run on an annual basis and the Road Safety Action Plan could be expanded to match the 4-year Delivery Program.

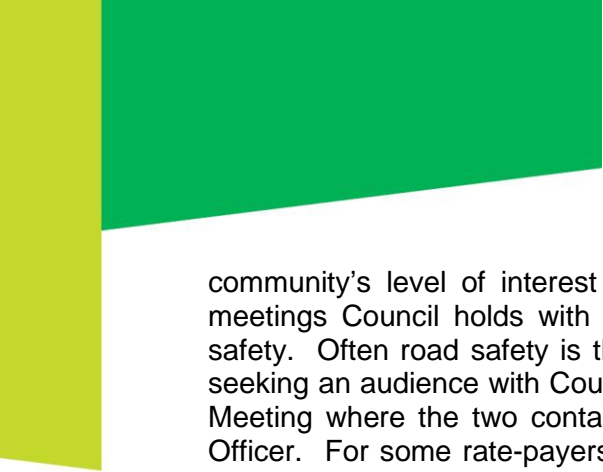
NSW IPWEA suggest road safety is incorporated into Council's Integrated Planning through the creation of a Road Safety Strategic Plan. The Third edition of their 'Guide to Developing a Council Road Safety Strategic Plan' notes the requirement by NSW Government for a three-year Road Safety Action Plan by Council for participation in LGRSP but provides no further reference as to how these action plans could be incorporated into Council's proposed Road Safety Strategic Plan. If Councils are to be encouraged to have Road Safety Strategic Plans then road safety efforts can be optimised if Councils adopt the Federal and State practice of linking Road Safety Strategic Plans and Road Safety Action Plans and both documents work in tandem.

QPRC's participation in the LGRSP has fostered additional spending and resourcing by Council of road safety. For every \$1 NSW Government grant QPRC in road safety project funding QPRC has been investing \$2 in delivering road safety in the community. A dedicated resource working on road safety at a Council level ensures there is ownership in road safety occurring at Council and provides the link for road safety between Council and State Government.

In the eight years I've worked in the LGRSP I've found road safety officers to be passionate and dedicated workers who champion road safety at Council and in their communities. They have been advocates of the safe system approach and are often the sole employees at Council embracing safe systems and teaching the safe system approach to fellow Council employees. QPRC Management have stated safe systems has spread into Council through the LGRSP and the RSO. QPRC has a project in the LGRSP to investigate further incorporating Safe System Assessments into their practices and introducing a Road Safety Audit Policy that would further incorporate road safety into local road management. We are working towards survivable speeds for all road users being a considered factored in management of our road network.

The role of local communities and their representatives in identifying and delivering road safety initiatives to reduce trauma on local roads

Working as an RSO in local government involves daily interactions with the public about road safety. Members of the public express genuine concern about road safety for their community and many go to great efforts to contact Council to discuss their concerns. The



community's level of interest in road safety is reflected at the six-monthly town hall meetings Council holds with the community which always feature questions on road safety. Often road safety is the subject matter for requests from community groups in seeking an audience with Council and there's been examples of Rate Payer Association Meeting where the two contacts requested to attend are the Mayor and Road Safety Officer. For some rate-payers, roads are the main service Council provides and these residents will often demonstrate a keen interest in road safety.

Often community contact with Council is prompted by an incident, near miss or a fine and has involved a threat to family or the community so the contact can be emotional. Often community members approach Council with a solution rather than the problem. The solution isn't always best practice in road safety or based on evidence. For example, residents living on a 10km road near Bungendore recently requested a point-to-point camera for their 10km local road to manage speeding and litter - a solution that is normally implemented on Federal Highway.

Speed is the most popular reason residents will contact Council with the solution request being speed reduction, speed hump or speed enforcement. Speeds being too fast for a road, especially unsealed roads and urban roads is commonly raised with Council. Residents will note that speeding has been observed or experienced (a crash or burn-out/hooning behaviour). Resident's speed reduction requests can at times be unrealistic for the road and not consistent with NSW Speed Zoning Guideline. For example, speed reductions for 100km/h roads can be received with suggestions of reducing speed limit to 60km/h. One of the most frequent speed requests we receive is to speed limit unsealed roads due to unsafe driving. With an unsealed network of 753km residents encounter motorist driving at the default rural limit (100km/h) and they note the difficulties caused with varying interpretation by motorist of the "Drive to conditions" requirement. Unsealed roads with school bus runs and rural and region school bus routes also receive safety complaints and can lack policy and funding to provide definite answers.

Community members demonstrate the capacity to be champions for road safety and advocate for their needs and promote road safety changes. One recent example was an elderly gentleman who had a long history with a road, organised a hand-written petition with his 25 neighbours requesting a speed zone reduction. Council's RSO review of traffic counter data, crash history and road inspection confirmed the speed limit request was reasonable. When the speed limit was approved by State Government, Council organised a thank you visit with the resident, a photo with the local pre-school (located on the road) for the local paper and being the ex-football captain of the town's football team helped model and promote the reduced speed limit to younger male members of the community.

Local communities often feature established community groups and communication networks that make it easy for them to implement messages and programs and reach intended audiences. School communities and P&C are a good example. One excellent initiative in QPRC comes from Queanbeyan East Public School. This school is located on the busy state road (Yass Road) and many pupils attending the school live in residential areas on the other side of another state managed road (The Kings Highway). There is no controlled crossing (pedestrian or signal) for students to cross The Kings Highway (4 lane road) and many students live too close to receive bus passes. The School and Council have been lobbying State Government for a crossing facility and recent changes to Active Transport (that will not be funding stand-alone crossing only projects) have made it more

difficult for a crossing project to be implemented. The P&C managed a project last year applying for funding through Council's Community Grants to fund 20 school bus passes for students where it was felt unsafe for them to walk to school.

While there is capacity within local communities, community groups are often reliant on volunteers and volunteering can be unreliable on long-term basis. Road Safety initiatives implemented in local communities by community groups would have a stronger chance of success if they had local government support/endorsement and were incorporated into Council wide Road Safety Strategies ensuring they were best practice and evidence-based approaches. Road Safety projects implemented by local communities would also assist in fostering a general road safety culture in the community.

Social media has also been observed as a useful tool utilised by local communities in building a community approach to road safety. For examples local communities often host resident face-book pages and use these pages to post about road safety concerns for the benefit of others in the community. I've observed resident face-book pages warning of crashes, road delays, congestion, animal activity, poor road safety behaviour and bus stop safety.

Other matters

- When the PFA for LGRSP was updated in 2014, annual project funding for Council's road safety projects moved to a competitive process. Funding for road safety projects is evaluated annually and business cases are required to be submitted annually for continued funding. I appreciate a competitive process may ensure a higher quality of project delivery resulting in funding resourced by need, but it's unclear if the introduction of a competitive funding process has had any impact on sharing of knowledge between Councils and Regions about road safety projects and seen any reduction in cooperation.
- NSW Government requires road safety projects to be recorded by NSW Councils in a Road Safety Database. This database would be an excellent resource about road safety projects and results implemented by NSW Local Councils. The database is currently designed where projects can only be viewed by the Council involved in the project. There is potential for Councils not participating in LGRSP or when a new RSO commences to learn about projects by modifying access in the database.
- NSW Road Safety Progress Report 2017 reported during 2016-2017 a total of 288 projects were completed through the LGRSP with 77 participating councils. The NSW Road Safety Progress Report 2018 noted in 2017-2018 215 projects were delivered under the LGRSP. In Australia this would be the largest body of road safety work implemented at local government level. The information about all the projects and the results is stored by the NSW Government in the Road Safety database. It's unclear if this information is used by NSW Government to review road safety conducted by local government, to improve policy and research, to improve campaigns and state wide projects or to learn further and improve what is being implemented for local roads.

- Best practice in road safety is trending away from reactive programs (blackspot treatments) and moving towards proactive approaches (safety system assessments of road networks to identify and eliminate crash risks). QPRC has realised road safety and cost benefits from incorporating road safety into many practices in Council and involving road safety earlier in the process. In recent restructure after amalgamation the RSO position was placed in the Design team working with road designers, engineers and town planners to implement safe system road safety treatments in early phases of projects. There are more areas that could benefit in Council with incorporating road safety earlier into processes that would see road safety ingrained in standard operating procedures and enhance road safety outcomes for the community.
- Council has also experienced challenges with NSW State initiatives implemented in the local government area that have introduced road safety risks highlighting there are also opportunities to incorporate safe systems approach into these initiatives earlier to manage the crash risks.

Thank you for accepting our submission. Should you have any further questions about the submission please contact Council's Road Safety Officer, Ms Joanne Wilson-Ridley on [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely

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Joanne Wilson-Ridley
Road Safety Officer
Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council