


**Submission
No 16**

REDUCING TRAUMA ON LOCAL ROADS IN NSW

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
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All opinions expressed herein are my personal opinion only.

I would like to address the inquiry into reducing trauma on local roads with a few points.

The first pertains to increases in hazards on local roads in recent years. While the problem of mobile phones is well known, another is the fashion for sports utility vehicles. These needlessly large, and often unneeded vehicles pose a greater safety hazard to vulnerable users than sedans. Their high fronts are more likely to divert pedestrians under the wheels – a worse outcome than going over the bonnet. In side impacts from cyclists and motorcyclists the low bonnet in particular and boot to a lesser extent of sedans meant that the rider might be thrown or side over – a less bad outcome than running into a vertical surface. Running into an SUV is like running into a wall. SUVs also obscure sightlines to and from other road users while offering both reduced visibility and an increased sense of invincibility to the driver, leading them to drive less safely. Measures to deter the unneeded purchase of these vehicles are needed to improve the safety of vulnerable road users.

The second pertains to high-speed rural roads and motorcycle safety.

In recent years it has become very fashionable to lower the speed limits on popular motorcycling roads in the name of ‘improving safety’, often then combined with very heavy-handed enforcement operations. This has been widely employed across the state, especially on the east coast passes and less-major roads in the Sydney region.

Despite this there has been no improvement in the number of motorcyclist deaths this decade. These speed limit reductions have a devastating impact on recreational motorcycling where they are implemented, the most infamous being that on the Oxley Highway where ridership has fallen by over half since the 100 km/h speed limit was lowered to 80 and overtaking forbidden on a 44km section. The original reference period for these reductions was 2008 to 2012 and saw one fatal accident, since the change in 2017 there has also been one fatal accident, no change. While it may be pointed out that there were five in the period to 2011-16 – which no-one is denying is terrible – there is scant evidence that any were due to speeding. The three cases where the traveling speed is available it is recorded as being 80, 70 and 60 km/h. None of these would have been prevented by any of the various speed limit reduction proposals. It is claimed that 67% of accidents on the road were caused by speeding – no proof if that includes the deaths, and indeed that 40% of motorcycle death and serious injury accidents are in the state as personally claimed on the highway safety page. Bernard Carlon from Transport for NSW claimed an even higher number (>50%) during the 2015 Staysafe inquiry into motorcycle safety.

This is to do with bad data and analysis practices, as pointed out by the Motorcycle Council of NSW during the 2015 inquiry. There is no differentiation between illegal speed (objective) and inappropriate speed for the conditions (subjective) and the criteria for including speed are very broad and elastic and can even be fulfilled when the motorcycle is stationary, let alone travelling the speed limit. This combined with attitudinal bias leads to speed being assumed where it may not have been a factor. Furthermore, it was stated uncontested 25% of police database entries are changed to ‘speed related’ when entered in the RMS database, little short of data fabrication. Overall the amount of motorcycle deaths caused by speeding is likely vastly overstated. For comparison the British *Vehicle Speed Compliance Statistics* released in 2019 for 2018 found in their attribution analysis that exceeding the speed limit was responsible for only 17.5% of deaths and 5.1% of all motorcycle accidents. This is due to far

more thorough and less biased analysis. Misattributing accidents to speed prevents the true causes, such as other rider errors or losing control attempting to avoid an animal while not impacting it, being known and prevents effective action against them. Also noted in the 2015 inquiry was that most road engineers have little understanding of motorcycle dynamics and requirements, hence the excessive weight placed on speeds in safety audits.

Speed limit reductions cause huge drops in rider numbers for a modest overall effect. While significant reductions are often claimed in academic studies these never consider rider numbers, often it would be found that the road was actually more dangerous per rider after the reduction. There are other measures that have similar or greater attributed reductions in rider casualties without causing a reduction in rider numbers, such as barrier treatments, shoulder sealing and clear zone creation (which both improves sightlines and reduces impact hazards). Indeed, the removal of roadside vegetation after Carrai East fire will certainly do more for rider safety on the Oxley Highway than any changes in speed limits.

These measures also maintain the recreational nature of the road, whereas lowering speed limits destroys it. It is time that the recreational value of roads was considered. The old canard about the supposedly small increase in travel time needs to be discarded. Motorcycle recreation is mainly experiential, and reducing the speed limit affects this far more than statistics can show, hence the drops in rider numbers. It is about the actual emotional quality of the ride, not merely getting from A to B as so many academics assume.

Barrier underrun protections are probably the most effective single motorcycle safety treatment, however they could be better with a bit more investment. Baker, Everleigh and Burrows showed in *A Crash Testing Evaluation of Motorcyclist Protection Systems for use on Steel W-Beam Safety Barriers* that the most commonly used design of protection is inadequate for a motorcyclist to survive a 60 km/h crash at a 25° angle – a very representative scenario for the very common off-curve lowside crashes - whereas other designs are. While having them is far better than nothing, they could be better again.

Lastly, the academics need to be called to account. They continue to advocate for the supposed veracity of the Swedish ‘Vision Zero’ scheme with its ultra-low speed limits. Despite these limits and probably the densest speed camera network of any country Sweden’s road safety progress has stagnated like Australia’s and the rest of Europe’s, and they recorded a remarkable 30% increase in deaths in 2018. Despite study after study showing supposedly large safety benefits from speed and speed limit reductions and enforcement campaigns – the latter supposedly carrying over the whole road network, especially when concealed – it is indisputable that the academic, ‘Safe Systems’ decade since 2010 has made the worst progress of any decade, and in every country that has adopted it. Academics simply cannot explain the large-scale patterns with their preferred theories. This is not surprising. Far from being unbiased, dispassionate observers most road safety academics are professional advocates producing research to conform their preferred view. They need to be treated more sceptically and held to account for the failure of their academic-inspired safety paradigm. Th academics are also ignorant of the personal effects of their schemes. They often do not value private transport and seem to have little experience on, say, country roads, hence their desire for 70-80 km/h limits which none of the actual road users want. Motorcycling is a complete mystery to many. While they may have a lot of statistical knowledge they have little understanding. They should be required to demonstrate that understanding before they are listened to.