

## **REDUCING TRAUMA ON LOCAL ROADS IN NSW**

**Organisation:** National Roads and Motorists' Association (NRMA)

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Staysafe (Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety)  
Mr David Hale  
Committee Manager  
Parliament House  
6 Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

To the Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety,

### **Reducing trauma on local roads in NSW**

The NRMA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into Reducing trauma on local roads in NSW.

The NRMA has been a strong advocate for road safety for 100 years and today represents more than 2.6 million Members. Since 1920, the NRMA has championed road safety improvements and initiatives, including seatbelts in cars, alcohol limits for drivers, random breath testing, high visibility policing, and greater investment in road infrastructure.

Road safety is an issue that affects the entire community. During 2019, 1,188 lives were lost on Australian roads, with 352 fatalities occurring in NSW.<sup>1</sup> It is estimated that the annual economic cost of road trauma in Australia is almost \$30 billion.<sup>2</sup>

These statistics are unacceptable given the impact crashes have on families, the community and the healthcare system.

### **Recommendations**

1. A properly costed and funded, long term plan for roads is needed to ensure that road conditions aren't allowed to deteriorate to levels that compromise safety or productivity.
2. Publicly available and easily accessible local road network crash data would assist in determining the number and type of crashes that occur on local roads, and where investment is needed the most.
3. Published road safety audit results would improve transparency and provide industry with an additional and important source of information to guide policy and advocacy.
4. The establishment of an independent committee to assist Transport for NSW consider prospective initiatives through the Community Road Safety Fund would provide a greater level of confidence in how fine revenue is allocated and the effectiveness of initiatives.
5. Equipping Joint Organisations with specialist engineering personnel would enable a more professional and holistic approach to road asset maintenance and upgrades across LGAs.

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<sup>1</sup> Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics (2019), *Road Deaths Australia*, December 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Automobile Association (2017), *Cost of Road Trauma in Australia*, September 2017.

## Local Roads

The total road network in NSW is approximately 184,859 kilometres, with around 80 per cent classified as 'Local Roads' – these roads are managed by councils. Councils also manage the land adjacent to all public roads other than freeways.

Many councils, particularly in regional NSW, have growing infrastructure backlogs. Analysis by the NRMA of council annual financial statements for 2016–17 shows that the local road infrastructure backlog increased to \$2.2 billion, with the regional council road infrastructure backlog increasing \$115 million to \$1.7 billion. This represents approximately 75 per cent of the total backlog.<sup>3</sup>

The unsatisfactory condition of road assets and reduced maintenance, along with limited asset management, highlighted an alarming trend of councils struggling to deliver acceptable road conditions.

### Road Trauma on Local Roads

There is a significant overrepresentation of crashes on regional and local roads.

The following table clearly highlights the disparity between metropolitan and country road fatalities, as well as the disparity between Australian states and territories.

Country/Area	Fatality Rate (per 100,000)	Year of record	Source
Australia	4.2	2018	BITRE Yearbook
- NSW	<b>4.35</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>TfNSW</b>
▪ Metro	<b>2.3</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>Towards Zero</b>
▪ Country	<b>10.3</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>Towards Zero</b>
- ACT	2.1	2018	BITRE Yearbook
- Northern Territory	17.0	2018	BITRE Yearbook
- Queensland	4.5	2018	BITRE Yearbook
- South Australia	4.3	2018	BITRE Yearbook
- Tasmania	6.1	2018	BITRE Yearbook
- Victoria	3.1	2018	BITRE Yearbook
- Western Australia	5.6	2018	BITRE Yearbook
Major cities	~3	2017	Infrastructure Australia
Inner regional areas	~10	2017	Infrastructure Australia
Outer regional areas	~14	2017	Infrastructure Australia
Remote areas	~18	2017	Infrastructure Australia
Very remote areas	~32	2017	Infrastructure Australia

Over the period 2013–17, the regional and local road network accounted for 68.9 per cent of all fatalities and 77.6 per cent of all injuries, costing the NSW economy \$3.9 billion. Regional communities shouldered the majority of this cost (\$2.6 billion).<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> NRMA (2019), *Funding Local Roads*, January 2019.

<sup>4</sup> NRMA (2019), *Funding Local Roads*, January 2019.





Using the NRMA's *Cost of Crashes* methodology,<sup>5</sup> the cost of fatalities and injuries on local roads alone over this period was nearly \$2.1 billion.

While there is often a spotlight on freeway, state road and regional road crash statistics and safety, the highest percentage of fatalities and injuries (minor, moderate and serious) occur across the local road network.

It should be noted that while the NRMA can rely on sound assumptions to present meaningful crash data pertaining to the local road network, data availability and ease of access are barriers to collating useful information to guide future policy and programs associated with safety.

Publicly available and easily accessible local road network crash data would assist in determining the number and type of crashes that occur on local roads, and where investment is needed the most.

### ***Funding Local Road Backlogs***

In 2019 through *Funding Local Roads* (**ANNEXURE 1**), the NRMA proposed reforms aimed at bringing the local road network across NSW up to an acceptable standard to improve road safety.

At a state level, these reforms included recategorising strategic regional roads to 'State Roads'; increasing resourcing and engineering capacity in the regions; and revitalising the regional and local road network through funding.

In response to the NRMA's proposed reforms, the NSW Government committed more than \$1 billion to help clear the council roads maintenance backlog, replace NSW's worst timber bridges, and reclaim up to 15,000 kilometres of council-owned regional roads.

The NRMA supports the delivery of critical infrastructure, including critical road infrastructure, through Restart NSW, the Regional Growth Fund and the Snowy Hydro Legacy Fund. Increased funding for programs such as Fixing Local Roads and Fixing Country Bridges ultimately support road safety through improved quality infrastructure.

While the NSW Government's funding commitment will help to lift the standard and condition rating of roads across the state, more needs to be done to ensure that funding is sustainable to further improve road conditions and combat fatalities and serious injuries on NSW roads.

Funding for regional and local roads ultimately needs to be sustainable. Without an effective, long term funding and maintenance plan, pressure on these roads will continue to intensify, jeopardising safety and asset productivity.

The NSW Government's \$1 billion commitment to help clear the roads maintenance backlog is a short term funding measure that should be aimed at roads classified by councils as 'poor' or worse.

While this is a major step in the right direction that will improve the condition of the network, a properly costed and funded, long term plan for roads is needed to ensure that road conditions aren't allowed to deteriorate to levels that compromise safety or productivity.

Substandard or deteriorated roads will not properly accommodate existing passenger and freight movements, yet alone deliver for future population and services growth.

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<sup>5</sup> NRMA (2017), *The Cost of Crashes: An Analysis of Lives Lost and Injuries on NSW Roads*, May 2017.



The development of a long term funding and maintenance plan should include all levels of government and industry stakeholders, and acknowledge that the road funding system in its current form consists of disparate funds and grants. While state and local governments are primarily responsible for road construction and maintenance, the Australian Government also contributes through various programs, which are funded as part of the annual budget process.

## **Local Government**

The NRMA's *Funding Local Roads* report was based on the rationale that a long-term strategy and effective funding plan for regional and local roads would improve the liveability of communities through enhanced safety and increased productivity.

With roads deemed a prime facilitator of economic activity, it is essential that the network is maintained at an optimal condition to maximise access and useability to support future growth.

In its *2017 Road Management Report*, the Institute of Public Works and Engineering Australia (IPWEA) suggests that councils will face increasing risk exposure if funding and asset management practices remain in their current form. The NRMA has long highlighted the importance of sustainable road networks and supports the report's recommendations relating to improved council asset management and financial planning.

### ***Road Classifications***

Through *Funding Local Roads*, the NRMA proposed recategorising strategic regional roads to state roads to shift responsibility for funding and maintenance to the NSW Government to allow councils to concentrate on maintaining a smaller pool of roads while minimising the need to apply for road funding through NSW Treasury.

Recategorising roads to the state enables the NSW Government to leverage economies of scale and bring forward upgrades and maintenance works that otherwise would not be possible through local government given revenue and funding constraints.

This initiative was proposed in addition to other funding reforms so as not to diminish existing road funding sources, effectively improving the financial capacity of councils to fund or maintain roads.

It should be highlighted that the NRMA does not support a reduction in federal or state grant funding to councils as a result of recategorising roads.

Alongside *Funding Local Roads*, the NRMA launched 'Rate Your Road' – a survey that allowed people to have their say on the state of roads in NSW. At the survey's conclusion, more than 23,000 people nominated close to 10,000 roads, providing input on congestion, condition and safety. This response ensured the survey was the largest transport survey in the state's history.

The NRMA expects to release a further report on local roads in 2020 containing valuable survey insights which may assist in determining what roads should be considered for recategorisation.

### ***Resourcing and Engineering***

Councils throughout NSW are not properly equipped to monitor and develop asset management plans to optimise the delivery of core infrastructure services. Inadequate information and a lack of expertise in assessing existing asset performance is hindering the ability of many councils to develop business cases to access existing funding pools, making future planning difficult.





While in-house engineers can reduce the costs associated with tendering and procurement, existing council budgets have precluded accessing this expertise or professional services.

Through the pooling of resources and the aggregation of asset performance data, however, councils have an opportunity to create economies of scale to improve their assessment and business case development capabilities to assist with funding proposals.

With legal powers that can assist councils to work collaboratively and more efficiently, the creation of 13 Joint Organisation entities in 2018 presents an opportunity to resource-share and address the asset prioritisation and funding limitations previously experienced by individual councils.

Equipping Joint Organisations with specialist engineering personnel would enable a more professional and holistic approach to road asset maintenance and upgrades across LGAs.

### **Data Linkage**

The NRMA acknowledges the significant work that has occurred in NSW where Transport for NSW has identified the number of serious injuries from crashes on public roads by linking data from NSW Health, the State Insurance Regulatory Authority, Insurance & Care NSW and the NSW Police Force.

Through the data linkage project, serious injuries comprise both matched and unmatched data. Matched data indicates a hospitalisation has been verified and linked to a police report.

With 55 per cent of incidents or crashes matched, 45 per cent remain unmatched. This data anomaly means that only half the picture is visible when determining trends and causes of serious injuries.

Reliable, accessible and consistent data is critical in order for government and to determine the main causes, locations and remedies to address trends in the road toll. In addition to further progressing the data linkage project, the NRMA strongly supports a consistent, national system to measure serious road crashes.

### **Road Safety Audits**

Austroads, recognised as a leading road network research and advisory organisation, provides guidance on the design, construction and management of the road network and its associated infrastructure to road transport and traffic agencies across Australia and New Zealand. This includes guidance on road safety audits and road safety principles at a national level.

While Austroads guides generally present a wide-ranging foundation for road planning, safety practices and design principles, NSW has developed supplements to Austroads guides<sup>6</sup> to address specific state issues, and also published state guidelines for road safety audit practices.<sup>7</sup>

The NRMA acknowledges the importance of state-specific supplements to Austroad guides, but maintains the view that these supplements must be underpinned by minimum safety standards as prescribed by Austroads. This approach to infrastructure planning is critical to ensure that new and upgraded road infrastructure adheres to consistent and accepted minimum safety standards.

In addition to road planning and upgrades, road safety audits are critical to a safe systems approach to road safety and can present evidence to road transport and traffic agencies to guide investment and safety initiatives.

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<sup>6</sup> Transport for NSW (2017), *Supplements to Austroads Guides*, December 2017 ([www.rms.nsw.gov.au/business-industry/partners-suppliers/document-types/supplements-austroads-guides/index.html](http://www.rms.nsw.gov.au/business-industry/partners-suppliers/document-types/supplements-austroads-guides/index.html))

<sup>7</sup> NSW Centre for Road Safety (2011), *Guidelines for Road Safety Audit Practices*, July 2011.



One of the possible shortfalls of the audit process is that results are rarely published or made publicly available. Published road safety audit results would improve transparency and provide industry with an additional and important source of information to guide policy and advocacy.

### **Community Road Safety Fund**

In November 2011, the NRMA tabled a petition of 13,500 signatures in the Parliament of NSW in support of the hypothecation of fine revenue from driving offences to fund road safety.

The Community Road Safety Fund (CRSF) was subsequently announced in June 2012 to improve road safety and make fine revenue allocations more transparent.

While the CRSF has enabled the creation and progression of a number of important initiatives and programs since 2013, the NRMA believes its administration could be made more transparent.

The establishment of an independent committee to assist Transport for NSW consider prospective initiatives would provide a greater level of confidence in how fine revenue is allocated and the effectiveness of initiatives. Annual and openly available reporting of the CRSF's activities would further improve transparency.

The NRMA is committed to road safety, including across the local road network, and will continue to work with government and industry to reduce the road toll.

Should the Committee require any further information, please contact [REDACTED]

Yours faithfully

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