

**Submission  
No 32**

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

**Organisation:** BusNSW

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## **Inquiry into reducing trauma on local roads in NSW**

**20 March 2020**

### **1. Introduction**

BusNSW is the peak body for the NSW private bus and coach industry. Our members provide essential services and provide a key interface with the travelling public. BusNSW's mission is to foster the efficient and sustainable growth of public transport in NSW, and so promote the benefits of bus travel.

Buses play a vital role in delivering public transport in NSW and carry around 332 million passengers per year, including almost 580,000 students travelling to and from school each day. More passengers are carried by bus in NSW than by any other mode including rail.

BusNSW members provide bus services under Transport for NSW contracts in Sydney metropolitan and outer-metropolitan areas, and in NSW rural and regional areas. They also provide "non-contracted" services in the long distance, tourist and charter sector.

BusNSW supports the principles of Towards Zero – an integrated "safety" systems approach that advocates initiatives for safer roads, traffic speeds, people and vehicles being implemented concurrently. BusNSW works with Transport for NSW (TfNSW) and its Centre for Road Safety to develop practical solutions to reduce death and serious injury on NSW roads.

BusNSW actively promotes the annual "Bus Safety Week" and "Be Bus Aware" campaigns and encourages its members to spread the safety message to drivers, customers and the community. BusNSW also supports the "Slow Down to 40 when Lights Flash" campaign and the "Coffee with a Cop" program, in partnership with NSW Police, as an effective way to promote local road safety issues. At the national level, the association supports the National Road Safety Week, an initiative of the Safer Australian Roads and Highways (SARAH) Group.

BusNSW understands that the focus of the Joint Standing Committee's Inquiry is to look at the role of local roads in road safety and trauma, the effectiveness of existing road safety planning requirements, opportunities for improving road safety planning and management, and the role of local communities in identifying and delivering safety initiatives, as well as other relevant matters.

Outlined below are BusNSW's comments in response to each of the Committee's Terms of Reference.

## **2. The role of local roads in road safety and trauma**

Local roads provide a network for communities who utilise a variety of transport modes, including buses and cars to access work, education, community services and social activities. The ability of local roads to facilitate traffic flow and to avoid congestion assists in reducing driver stress and the potential for accidents and trauma. However, it appears many local roads do not meet current design principles and, due to increases in population, are catering for far greater volumes of traffic than they were originally designed for.

Two thirds of fatalities occur on country roads and the fatality rate on country roads is four times higher than on urban roads. School buses and regular (route) bus services compete for space on local roads and this impacts the safe operation of those services. Given the number of passengers that buses carry, a bus related incident is likely to be a major safety concern. However, many current road safety initiatives focus on cars, with buses largely forgotten.

Rural and Regional school buses play a vital role in providing access for students to undertake education. These buses are often required to set down and pick up children on roads that are signposted with a speed limit up to 100kph. There is a need to create greater community awareness around the safety of children using services on these roads as currently there is little compliance from other road users to “Slow down to 40 when Lights Flash”.

Local roads on which buses transport public passengers are often poor, particularly in rural and regional areas. Part of the reason is that local councils have responsibility for developing and maintaining most local roads. Any improvements to roads by local councils, including for basic road maintenance such as fixing potholes, repairing gutters and repainting faded traffic lines, often compete with other council funding priorities.

The lack of basic bus stop infrastructure on local roads, such as indented bus stopping areas, shelters, signage, and access to and from bus stops (including wheelchair access) is of critical safety importance. These issues warrant urgent attention in order to safeguard bus passengers and reduce the risk of bus and pedestrian accidents. BusNSW believes that there is an opportunity for local government to conduct an audit of all bus stops on local roads in NSW to determine where an upgrade may benefit the safety of passengers and other road users.

Local roads also have a role to play in managing driver fatigue. The provision of rest areas with adequate lighting, shelters and toilets allow all road users to take breaks which assists in avoiding fatigue-related accidents.

## **3. The effectiveness of existing road safety planning requirements, including in other jurisdictions**

BusNSW supports the “safe systems” approach to improving road safety, however there is often little acknowledgement among council of the role that buses play within their local communities. Moreover, the engagement of local bus operators on local road safety issues, varies widely between councils. Not all councils have a designated Road Safety Officer and it is often unclear to local bus operators which area of council has management for road safety concerns.

BusNSW believes there is a need to include within the current Local Government Road Safety Program Guidelines, a mandatory requirement to consult with local bus operators when

planning, designing or improving roads. In that context, road safety planning should include, as a minimum, an assessment of:

- access and egress for buses
- bus and passenger infrastructure criteria
- access for passengers with disabilities
- safety at bus stops
- passenger information
- road signage (including 40 kph when lights flash signs)
- appropriate barriers to protect passengers and pedestrians (this could be at school interchanges or at the roadside to stop children and passengers from crossing the road after alighting)

The provision of “kiss and ride” zones for parents dropping off or picking up school children, and the delineation of bus and car parking are also factors that should be considered as part of local road safety planning.

Vehicle breakdowns are a hazard that need road planning consideration. While breakdowns can occur in all motor vehicles, the hazards associated with bus breakdowns, where the vehicle is usually carrying public passengers and often schoolchildren, can be significant. There are many factors that need to be considered with bus breakdown including:

- Stopping and Parking the Bus and Breakdown Assistance Vehicle
- Breakdown Location: Road Conditions, Geography and Vehicle Visibility
- Oncoming Traffic and Isolation of Vehicle
- Deciding on Passenger Evacuation
- Breakdown Communications
- Access to and From the Bus
- Advance Warning including Lights and Placement of Warning Triangles
- Waiting for Assistance
- Transfer of Passengers
- Rectifying and Repairing Vehicle On Road
- Towing and Removing Vehicle from The Road
- Debris and Clean-up

BusNSW believes that engagement and partnership with the bus industry is one of the most effective ways of instituting changes to local road safety. Consultation with local bus operators represents an opportunity to tap into a wealth of local knowledge, with the ability to influence a large number of drivers, passengers, schools and parents.

Buses should be also considered in local government emergency plans to ensure that buses can assist in evacuating people from natural disasters (such as the recent NSW bushfires). These plans should address emergency safety requirements, including “link road” strategies to identify access and exit routes to vulnerable areas and locations such as schools. Communication protocols between government and the private sector should also be developed.

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

As outlined above, BusNSW believes that the local bus operator should be involved in road safety planning, as well as being informed of issues relating to the management of local roads. The location of bus stops and the introduction of new bus routes and other initiatives should form part of any strategic planning process for the local community. Planning and assessment of bus access and infrastructure should also be part of the council development application process.

There is a need to upgrade infrastructure at many bus stops on local roads with consistent engineering controls including access to the bus stop, shelter, lighting and signage. BusNSW believes that bus stop infrastructure should be a funded road safety project within the Local Government Road Safety Program.

Currently there is a lot of accident and safety data available, however better sharing of data may provide better outcomes. For example, safety issues logged with Transport for NSW via the Bus Incident Management Database and other systems, could be reviewed and shared with local councils and bus operators in other areas to improve safety and plan for future infrastructure.

In Rural and Regional areas, bus stops are often “informal” and are determined according to where students reside in a given year. Such stops are generally created by the bus operator and are subject to a risk assessment. This safety assessment is required to reference the *Informal School Bus Stop Guide* published by the Centre for Road Safety, however bus operators often receive little assistance in what is essentially a road safety planning exercise. BusNSW considers that this process can be improved and would support the mandatory involvement of local councils in this safety assessment process.

Policing and compliance of cars that fail to slow down to 40 km/h when lights flash (particularly on high speed rural roads), combined with the need to keep cars out of school bus bays would further assist with safety by changing the culture of drivers around buses and schools.

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

Local communities often hold key information on safety issues in their area and are usually passionate about assisting road planning authorities to find solutions to safety concerns. Communities can also influence safer local behaviour. Consultation with these communities and their representatives should form part of any local government road policy or plan. There should be a consistent and simple process for the local community to provide feedback to council and other stakeholders on local road safety matters.

This feedback should then be subject to appropriate review and response, with the process documented within the appropriate strategic plan. The use of technology, including initiatives such as crowdsourcing, may facilitate faster problem solving.

Parents and Citizens committees exist within most school communities. Consideration should be given to engaging these committees to facilitate road safety initiatives. Of particular interest to the bus industry are the issues of driver distraction within the bus and the need for parents

to be educated to meet their children on the same side of the road as the bus. These hazards contribute significantly to road incidents and accidents.

Information and education on bus safety should be provided to local communities with a coordinated and consistent message throughout NSW. BusNSW would recommend that local government place a stronger emphasis on the material developed for the TfNSW "Safety Town" website. The dissemination of this information, in conjunction with engagement with the local bus operator, would assist the community to better embrace safety messages. In particular, information regarding the safety of school children boarding and alighting from the bus should be a mandatory requirement within the guidelines.

## 6. Other relevant matters

The future of electric buses should be considered as part of the current Inquiry since it provides both an opportunity and a risk to road safety and trauma. There is an opportunity to improve safety through the implementation of new bus and bus stop infrastructure, however the introduction of electric buses may require community safety strategies to cater for the reduction in noise between older diesel technology and the new electric technology, and the particular safety hazards that this creates.

Technology, including *Autonomous Emergency Braking* and *Telematics*, will also play a greater role in road safety in the future, and any incentives to fast track this technology in buses should be encouraged. Mobility as a Service (MaaS) including on-demand services should also be a consideration of the current Inquiry, since the future of integrated transport will drive different passenger behaviours and require different types of infrastructure.

In summary, BusNSW supports initiatives that create safer roads, speeds, people and vehicles. Current initiatives such as the Government's Safer Roads Program should be expanded to include specific public transport considerations. Priority for better education regarding public transport safety, the use of new vehicle technology and improved consultation with the industry provides an opportunity to reduce trauma on local roads in NSW.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this important review. If you would like to discuss these comments in more detail, please do not hesitate to contact me on [REDACTED]

Regards,  
Matt Threlkeld  
Executive Director, BusNSW  
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