

**Submission
No 33**

REDUCING TRAUMA ON LOCAL ROADS IN NSW

Organisation: Australian Road Research Board

Date Received: 20 March 2020

Our Ref:

Your Reference:

20 March 2020

The Hon. Lou Amato, MLC
Chair
Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety

Dear Sir,

Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety Inquiry – Reducing Trauma on Local Roads in NSW

For 60 years, the Australian Road Research Board (ARRB) has been Australia’s National Transport Research Organisation, delivering independent advice to Australia’s road agencies about road transport strategy, policy and best practice guidance to road practitioners in State and Local Government. Our role includes working with each of the three tiers of government to collect data and undertaking analysis about the performance of the nation’s road networks. Our guidance to practitioners has included all aspects of road safety strategy, policy and action and our experience working with local government gives particular relevance in responding to the terms of reference of this inquiry.

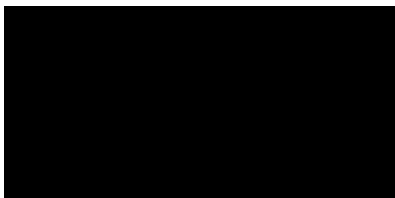
ARRB welcomes the opportunity to provide the Committee with input to this important area of inquiry.

It will not be possible for NSW to achieve its road safety vision of zero death and serious injury by 2056, without taking local government along on the journey. There are many opportunities to prevent road trauma on local roads, but there needs to be strong support from the State Government to encourage and develop the capability.

We hope that our submission provides the Committee some insight to the areas of Local Government road management that need important and necessary action.

Please do not hesitate to contact me [REDACTED] if you would like to arrange a time to meet and discuss any of the matters raised in our submission.

Yours Sincerely



David McTiernan
National Leader
Transport Safety

Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety Inquiry – Terms of Reference

An Inquiry into reducing road trauma on local roads in NSW was self-referred to the Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety on 13 November 2019. While the Inquiry is considering the broader scope of reducing trauma on local roads, the terms of reference for this inquiry outline specific reference to the following heads of consideration:

- The role of local roads in road safety and trauma
- The effectiveness of existing road safety planning requirements, including in other jurisdictions
- Opportunities for improving road safety planning and management on local roads, including through the Local Government Road Safety Program and Community Strategic Planning
- The role of local communities and their representatives in identifying and delivering road safety initiatives to reduce trauma on local roads
- Other relevant matters.

ARRB has structured its submission under these heads of consideration over the following pages and provides the information presented for the consideration of the Committee.

Introduction

Virtually every journey – to/from school, to/from work, to/from the shops, sporting events, the local park, a mate’s place down the street, starts and ends on a local road. Therefore, the opportunity for improving safety on local roads is as broad as it is important to the lives of everyone across NSW.

In taking on a review such as this it is important to remember that a journey on NSW local roads is far more than simply getting into the car; it will involve walking or riding a bike, it may be for commuting or simply for recreation – getting out and enjoying one’s community.

For the average person in the street there is little distinction between a local road and a State Road; the process for how a speed limit is determined, or a pothole being repaired, for a pedestrian crossing being provided, or for an intersection upgraded is just as likely to be Council’s ‘fault’ as it is to be the responsibility of the State Government.

Road safety for Local Government is a multi-faceted and ‘wicked problem’. It can be seen by many Councils as a case of ‘all care and no responsibility’; it will be considered a financial burden, placing already strained budgets under stress that means other services need to be reduced; and with limited specialty skills and staff resources, applying good practice is considered unachievable, even unnecessary.

As far as ARRB is concerned, there is no doubt that Local Government, in delivering road safety on its network, needs to change how it views the roles and responsibilities that it has to provide safer road transport infrastructure to their communities; but there also needs to be a change in how State (and National) Government work with Local Government to support councils and local communities to understand what needs to be done and how best to do it within the context of their local area.

The heads of consideration for this Inquiry touch on a number of key areas for Local Government road safety action. There are many more areas to consider than we have been able to cover in this submission, and we welcome the opportunity to discuss further some of them.

The role of local roads in road safety and trauma

The Inquiry into the National Road Safety Strategy 2011 – 2020 (2018) found that *‘Local government, despite owning the majority of all Australian roads, is not sufficiently engaged or resourced to deliver road safety. Local government is in an unenviable position, being dependent on state legislation for its authority and revenue; limited in its ability to commit to sustained road safety outcomes in its areas; and with a significant proportion of fatalities occurring on its roads.’*

While speaking in a National context, the points made are all applicable to the situation for Local Government in NSW.

NSW local councils are, presently, **the** road authority for all local and regional roads in their respective local government areas (LGAs); this excludes publicly accessible roads that service national parks and reserves, classified State Roads and other privately operated roads, fire trails etc. With a road network across the State of almost 186,350 km, data presented by NSW IPWEA indicates that NSW local government is responsible for almost 89% of this network, approximately 165,350 km of sealed and unsealed public roads.

While local government is responsible for the overwhelming majority of roads in NSW, it is the case that the State Road network carries the bulk of the vehicle traffic, commonly measured as vehicle kilometres travelled (VKT). Therefore, a look at the raw numbers will show that the majority of road crashes, and by extension

the majority of fatal and serious injuries occur on the State Road network, an estimated 60%¹. It would be reasonable to conclude, therefore, on a raw numbers basis, that the focus of the State's road safety action should be the busier State Road network since this would give the greatest return for the investment required.

However, an examination of crash numbers and the lower VKT on local roads highlights that, with approximately 40% of FSI crashes happening on the council managed network, local roads represent a far greater relative risk to road users than the State Road network.

Key elements of this higher-risk profile include factors such as speed limits, the lack of fundamental crash prevention and severity reduction measures, the age of the infrastructure and 'designs' not meeting modern criteria. This is particularly the case in regional NSW where rural roads tend to have high speed limits signposted (often the default 100 km/h) that have no design relationship to the real and quantifiable risk presented to road users by the road infrastructure.

The current NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012 – 2021 and the supporting Road Safety Plan 2021 sets out a means 'for moving (NSW) Towards Zero trauma', a key outcome of the Future Transport 2056 strategy adopted by the NSW Government.

Therefore, the role of local roads in road safety and road trauma is a central one; NSW cannot achieve zero without addressing road safety on local roads.

The effectiveness of existing road safety planning requirements, including in other jurisdictions

Legislative and regulatory requirements of the Acts that NSW Local Government operate under, for example the Local Government Act 1993, Environment Planning and Assessment Act 1979, and the Roads Act 1993, lack explicit and implied roles and responsibilities for road safety.

There is no requirement in the integrated planning and reporting framework for Councils to have road safety in their community strategic plan or any other strategic plan they may develop. Highlighting the entrenched nature of the problem of getting road safety treated as a key priority, the IPWEA's *2017 Road Asset Benchmarking Report* identified that just 34% of the 121 responding Councils had in place a road safety plan.

As a result, the 128 NSW councils adopt a highly variable approach toward the delivery of road safety, and this often relies upon an individual 'champion' within the organisation to drive change. While there are some examples of councils with a solid commitment, they are considered to be the exception, and even these Councils will lack an embedded approach that harnesses the whole organisation to contribute to road safety action.

The legislative approach in Victoria is quite different; Victoria's [Road Management Act 2004](#) has explicit references to the role and responsibility of road authorities (including Local Government) for ensuring road safety is a core consideration. From the outset the object of the Act is to establish '*a system for the management of safe and efficient public roads that best meet the needs and priorities of State and local communities*', followed by an outline of management principles as '*the minimisation of road safety hazards*', defining the general functions and powers '*to manage traffic on roads in a manner that enhances the safe and efficient operation of roads*', and '*take steps as are reasonably practicable to ensure the structural integrity and safety of public roads in accordance with this Act*'; there is a clear statement of the

¹ Figures estimated from crash data on the TfNSW, Centre for Road Safety 'Interactive crash statistics' website

responsibility for exercising of functions and powers *‘that the public road network and infrastructure are as safe for users as is reasonably practicable’*.

Beyond the ‘normal’ levels of investment in road infrastructure such as routine maintenance and road upgrades largely to improve capacity, road safety planning by NSW local government is a voluntary activity driven by a compliance with ‘standards²’, since there is no legislated requirement to do more.

To date, efforts to embed road safety into local councils has centred around the NSW Local Government Road Safety Program, which provides part funding for the employ of Road Safety Officers (RSOs) in participating councils³. This funding has always been a relatively short term arrangement, initially starting as a three year rolling program, before being reduced to an annual commitment for a period between ~2010 and 2018; the program now has State commitment until 2021. RSOs funded under the LGRSP are typically employed as frontline staff rather than at management levels; their focus is community education and awareness campaigns with internal engagement determined by the support and commitment of each Council.

As a result, RSOs are significantly constrained, although it does occur, in their ability to influence a Council’s strategic planning process to embed road safety into its core business activity, or to shape the delivery of infrastructure programs, council policy, development control plans, development consent conditioning, etc.

With no declared role or responsibility for road safety embedded in legislation, the effectiveness of the current road safety planning requirements for NSW Local Government is limited and falls behind that adopted by other jurisdictions.

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

For over 20 years the NSW IPWEA have led the engagement of local government engineers and engineering managers in road safety via support for the NSW Local Government Road Safety Program and RSOs placed in Councils. This support largely involved linking Council engineers with the RSOs funded by the LGRSP; IPWEA facilitated this by providing RSO with a forum and professional network and developed resources for Councils such as a guide/template for preparing a council road safety strategy/plan.

Since its inception in the 1990s, the LGRSP has not changed in its format or focus; it remains a model for part funding RSOs in councils that choose to participate, and it remains focused on the education and awareness-side of the road safety equation. In very rare instances, RSOs have developed in their professional careers to take on other positions within a Council, working in more senior roles, which can afford them some degree of influence in the consideration of road safety within Council functions.

The operating model for local government road safety as it currently operates is fundamentally flawed; improvement of Councils gaining traction in road safety action and performance will require a greater investment by the NSW Government to support them. This support needs to extend beyond just the current funding of education/awareness programs and a Black Spot approach to road infrastructure improvements. There needs to be a greater emphasis on local government accepting road safety as a core business activity; there needs to be the development of a greater awareness amongst elected officials and senior management about the role and responsibility of Councils for road safety to ensure the deliver a sustained,

² Australia does not have road design standards and practitioner guidelines referenced by practitioners are typically minimum requirements that do not guarantee a safe road design.

³ There are approximately 77 full and part time RSOs working in NSW, some covering more than one Council; with amalgamation, some Councils ended up with more than one RSO resource.

whole-of-Council approach to the elimination of fatal and serious injury trauma. This may need to be by legislative means if necessary, but there also needs to be a better understanding of the role and the potential role of the RSO; as important as it has been for over 20 years, the Local Government RSO needs to grow and become an influencer within Councils and across the whole of Local Government; RSOs and their program can no longer be seen by Councillors and senior managers as a community liaison role, as a 'nice to have' position; there needs to be a real funded commitment by the Councils and an involvement across the organisation to embed road safety into Council strategic management plans and policies, with annual reporting on progress of delivery.

It will always be the case that a majority of councils lack sufficient funding to deliver all the services demanded by their community; it is a constraint that all levels of Government must deal with. However, road safety should not be an option; the impact of road trauma on the Australian community exceeds \$30B annually; the NSW share of this is upwards of \$7B to 8B each year; in simplified terms, with 40% of NSW FSI crashes occurring on Local Government roads, there is an economic impact between \$2.8B and \$3.2B annually.

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

Local Government operates at the community level; they are directly, and on a daily basis, dealing with local people about local issues affecting their local communities. The responsibility of Local Government for the management and delivery of a safe and efficient road transport network, as well as the wide range of other services that a council provides via direct delivery, funding or other support, is integral to ensuring the success and vibrancy of local towns and villages, and ultimately a sense of community.

For these reasons the local community is an important part of developing road safety initiatives by Local Government.

As much as the improvement of road infrastructure will reduce risk and improve road safety, this is only part of the equation. Delivery of a Safe System requires a change in road user behaviour to help close the gap remaining after road infrastructure improvements address embedded hazards. This is perhaps more important on local roads as the ability to fund 4- and 5-Star roads is much more constrained than may otherwise be possible for much of the State Road network.

The involvement of local communities will also improve the identification and prioritisation of issues unique to each community. While there are many common road safety problems and a formula approach can be applied to many solutions, there will be specific concerns (and responses) in a small regional community that are different to a regional centre, and perhaps 'poles apart' from those in metropolitan areas.

Experience shows that engaging local communities in road safety planning and delivery creates a greater sense of ownership of the problem, and investment in the solution. Perhaps a shortcoming of the road safety approach of the past is that the community has not been well and widely integrated into the development of solutions. This is changing, and it can make a program more sustainable and influence more people to address the underlying issue.

An example of a local program that has been sustained over a long period of time because it is community led is the *Drives for Learners* initiative. A program initially developed in the Southern Highlands, it spread to the Macarthur Region and beyond to support young learner drivers gaining access time behind the wheel and across a variety of road environments. This initiative engaged local groups such as Rotary and is still going after more than 15 years.

Other relevant matters

As mentioned in the introduction, the scope of issues that need attention for improving planning, preparation and delivery of road safety by NSW Local Government are many and varied. Some additional areas that warrant closer consideration, but are perhaps outside the scope of this inquiry, are listed outlined below:

- Council commitment to road safety

Greater awareness is required amongst elected officials and senior management of Safe Systems principles and the appropriate responses and the mechanisms available within current funding programs. With this, appropriate training and resources can be allocated to optimise delivery of change in Council and on-ground road safety outcomes.

- Local Government capability and capacity to deliver road safety outcomes

There is a limited level of expertise and training amongst local government practitioners; Council engineers and planning staff tend to work across broad areas rather than specialise, particularly in regional councils. Consequently there is not the scope to utilise the expert tools that are available to enhance a Council's ability to identify road safety issues and develop appropriate road safety responses, whether they are enhanced conditions of consent, targeted road safety work programs, or the preparation of competitive funding applications to State and Federal grant programs.

Many councils lack practical tools such as quality GIS, road safety risk assessment methods, or simple crash data analysis methods to aid them in identifying road safety issues on their networks. In smaller councils this is often compounded by a lack of available personnel who can provide the necessary focus on road safety issues.

- Entrenched Black Spot (reactive) view of road safety action

While the Black Spot program has been very successful in eliminating locations of high crash occurrence, it is an approach that is backward-looking; it is a program that derives success (i.e. funding) from crashes occurring and looks at locations (or short lengths of road) rather than encouraging a systemic network and preventative approach to treating crash risk.

TfNSW has, in no small way, sought to reshape NSW support of road safety by embedding elements of risk management and the Safe System approach into funding applications. However, caught in a loop contributed to by a lack of staff, expertise and tools, Councils are often not equipped to take advantage of the proactive funding model that may be available to them. The Federal Black Spot Program is, perhaps, therefore considered a more attractive or simpler means of attracting funding.

- Connected and Autonomous Vehicle (CAV) technology

The technology for reducing the effect of road user behaviour on crash causation is coming to Australian roads, but Local Government is not well positioned to evaluate the impact this will have on their road infrastructure or their capacity to provide for it. As a result, the benefit of potentially lifesaving infrastructure-based measures will not be realised on local road networks. While this technology is still in its early stages of development, there remains time for Local Government to look more critically at what may lay ahead in terms of cost, design, renewal, and maintenance.

CONTACT US

David McTiernan

National Leader

Transport Safety



ARRB.COM.AU



YOUR NATIONAL TRANSPORT RESEARCH ORGANISATION



VIC | 80a Turner St, Port Melbourne, 3207 VIC, Australia | +61 3 9881 1555
 NSW | 36 – 42 Chippen Street, Chippendale, NSW 2008, Australia | +61 2 9282 4444
 QLD | 21 McLachlan St, Fortitude Valley, QLD 4006, Australia | +61 7 3260 3500
 SA | Level 1, Featherstone Place Adelaide, SA 5000, Australia | +61 8 8235 3300
 WA | 191 Carr Place, Leederville, WA 6007, Australia | +61 8 9227 3000
arrb.com.au | ABN 68 004 620 651