

**Submission  
No 24**

**INTERVENTIONS TO REDUCE ROAD TRAUMA IN REGIONAL NSW CAUSED  
BY SPEEDING, FATIGUE, DRINK AND DRUG DRIVING**

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## **Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety (Staysafe)**

### **Interventions to reduce road trauma in regional NSW caused by speeding, fatigue, drink and drug driving**

Philip Laird, University of Wollongong, July 2025

This submission is a general one based on research conducted at the University of Wollongong. However, the views and research findings are the responsibility of the writer.

#### **1. Overall**

Given the NSW Auditor General's Report to Parliament "Regional road safety" of November 2023 identifying that most road deaths on NSW roads occur in regional NSW, and that road deaths on NSW have continued to increase in number at a rate faster than the rest Australia, the inquiry is considered to be timely,

The publication "Road Deaths Australia - June 2025" by the Bureau of Infrastructure and Transport Research Economics<sup>1</sup> notes, inter alia, in Table 2.3 a significant increase in road deaths on NSW roads from 287 in 2020-21 to 362 in 2024-25.

There is also a 6.8 increase from 2023-24 to 2024-25 from 339 to 362 deaths on NSW roads. During those 12 months the increase in Australia was 3.3 per cent.

As the above cited Auditor General's Report notes "One-third of the New South Wales population resides in regional areas, but two-thirds of the state's road crash fatalities take place on regional roads".

As a result, the average number of fatalities for every 100,000 of the population living in regional New South Wales is "approximately four times higher than the equivalent measure for Greater Sydney."

The Auditor General's Report notes on page 3 that some specific road safety initiatives targeted to regional areas have not been implemented or expanded; that some text has been removed; and, on page 4 "There is no consolidated, public reporting of what proportion of total road safety funding is directed to regional New South Wales each year."

This report also raises the question, what is Regional NSW, where on page 15, two definitions are given. This raises a question for the committee, which definition to be used for Regional NSW, and is it to include Newcastle and Wollongong?

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<sup>1</sup> <https://catalogue.data.infrastructure.gov.au/dataset/road-deaths-australia-monthly-bulletins>

## 1.1 The question of level crossings

TfNSW <sup>2</sup> notes that “There are more than 2700 road level crossings on operational lines on the NSW rail network, of which about 1300 are located on public roads. This excludes any level crossings in private rail yards and on non-operational rail lines. Level crossing collisions between trains and vehicles are a major road safety risk.”

Elsewhere<sup>3</sup>, TfNSW advises Between 2001 and 2021 there were 164 crashes at level crossings between trains and road vehicles in NSW, resulting in 16 fatalities and 26 serious injuries. More up to date information would be appreciated, and the increased use of new technology is commended to the Committee for its consideration.

This includes “**Advance Warning Sign** – The advance warning signs with orange ‘wig wag’ lights will flash if an approaching motorist is not slowing down to prepare to stop at the level crossing. The warning sign system uses solar and battery power to provide reliability and resilience in regional conditions.”

Some general comments on road safety are offered in Appendix A.

## 2. Condition of roads

Many regional roads (and railways) have been recently impacted by climate change related events and can affect road safety. Along with repairing flood damaged roads, Australia needs a new approach to roads and road pricing. The clear evidence from both Australia and overseas is that road congestion cannot be eased simply by building more roads.

A record outlay on roads by all levels of government of about \$38.64 billion was made in 2022-23.<sup>4</sup> Of this, \$11.2 billion was spent in NSW.

The amount of government money that is allocated to road projects occurs despite the lack of true user pays pricing for road use.

2.1 In 2009, the Henry Tax Review noted that “***Current road tax arrangements will not meet Australia's future transport challenges.***”

The Henry Tax Review made several pertinent recommendations for road pricing reform. These included

**Recommendation 61:** Governments should analyse the potential network-wide benefits and costs of introducing variable congestion pricing on existing tolled roads (or lanes), and consider extending existing technology across heavily congested parts of the road network. ...

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/projects/programs/level-crossing-safety>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/projects/programs/level-crossing-technology-trial>

<sup>4</sup> Bureau of Infrastructure Transport and Regional Economics

<https://www.bitre.gov.au/publications/2024/australian-infrastructure-and-transport-statistics-yearbook-2024>

**Recommendation 62:** The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) should accelerate the development of mass-distance-location pricing for heavy vehicles, to ensure that heavy vehicles pay for their specific marginal road-wear costs. ...

2.2. The need for reform in road pricing is long standing. By way of example, although not a major focus of the Harper 2015 Competition Policy Review, road pricing was considered. In part, the review noted in part that “... roads are the least reformed of all infrastructure sectors, with institutional arrangements around funding and provision remaining much the same as they were 20 years ago.”

The increasing use of electric vehicles is one reason for road pricing reform.

It is recognized that Australia does have a National Transport Commission. However, it would be good to see a policy paper put out by the NSW Government on the need for reform in road pricing.

### **3. Heavy Vehicle safety**

Given long standing trends that heavy trucks are over-represented in fatal road crashes and most of these occur in regional areas<sup>5</sup>, the Committee’s attention is invited to this area.

A further reason for giving attention to this issue is that in the 12 months ended September 2024, road deaths from crashes involving heavy vehicles on NSW roads increased to 33 from 30 in the preceding 12 months whilst in all of Australia, they had declined (from 103 to 82 in the 12 months ended September 2024).<sup>6</sup>

Heavy vehicle safety was given only limited attention in the recently released The Freight Policy Reform Independent Advisory Panel’s final paper, ‘Delivering freight policy reform in New South Wales’, which was endorsed by the NSW Government and was published on 6 June 2025.<sup>7</sup> Heavy vehicle safety was also given limited attention in the 2024 heavy vehicle access policy.

Investment in rail freight should be seen as an investment in road safety.

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<sup>5</sup> Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics (BITRE), *Heavy truck safety: crash analysis and trends*, BITRE, Canberra. 2016

<sup>6</sup> Road deaths in crashes involving heavy vehicles - quarterly bulletin, July – September 2024

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/operations/freight-hub/ports-and-maritime-administration-act-and-port-botany-landside-improvement-0>

## **APPENDIX Some thoughts on road safety**

### **1. People drive too far each year**

On average, many people drive for the best part of an hour a day.

### **2. People are encouraged to drive**

This is through our 'car culture', Australia's road pricing and taxation system and significant hidden subsidies to road vehicle use.

### **3. Many people drive too fast**

The drivers who are caught exceeding legal speed limits are simply 'the tip of the iceberg'.

### **4. How to control fatigue?**

This is a major challenge.

### **5. Do we need more dual carriageways?**

The popular answer is yes. However, they often induce more vehicles on the roads.

### **6. Do too many people have driver's licenses?**

Yes. The possession of a driver's license is viewed as a right rather than a privilege.

### **7. What about people who drive without licenses or when impaired by alcohol or other drugs?**

This is a real problem.

### **8. The cost of road crashes**

Is much higher than we think.

### **9. Heavy vehicle crashes**

Although not as severe a problem they were in the late 1980s, heavy trucks continue to be over-represented in fatal road crashes. Earlier research suggests to cost of these road crashes average of about 0.6 cents per net tonne km. If this cost was covered by fuel taxation alone, it could amount to 22 cents per litre.

### **10. Changing the culture**

This is a challenge, and it is suggested that the way the Federal and State Parliaments have tackled smoking can give some guidance.

As a start, some control should be exercised over the content of television advertisements for cars.