

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

Organisation: Road Safety Education Limited

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Submission

**To: Parliament of New South Wales
The Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety
(The NSW Staysafe Committee)**

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

From: Road Safety Education Limited

July 2025

Terms of Reference (ToR):

- Research and data on regional NSW-specific factors, characteristics and demographics of road crashes
- Effectiveness of current strategies and programs to reduce speeding, fatigue, drink and drug driving in regional NSW
- Proposed measures to reduce road trauma in regional NSW
- Implementation of relevant recommendations from the 2023 Performance Audit Report of the Auditor-General, entitled 'Regional Road Safety', dated 30 November 2023, and
- Any other related matters.

This document focuses on items b) and c) above, specifically the effectiveness of education as a preventative measure, and on the need for a greater level of investment in best practice education.

Our Credentials

Road Safety Education Limited (RSE) is a leading **not-for-profit organisation** with a mission of equipping young people to take lifelong responsible actions as drivers and passengers through best practise education. RSE is the provider of Ryda, an evidence led best practice program which has been delivered in New South Wales for over 24 years, and now extends across Australia and New Zealand.

Ryda is a whole-school approach road safety education program for senior secondary school students. It is developed under the guidance of the RSE Advisory Council consisting of globally recognised road safety researchers, educators and psychologists and is evaluated for effectiveness. Approximately 60,000 students from over 800 schools across Australia and New Zealand typically participate in Ryda each year. To date, over 850,000 students have participated in the Ryda program, making it the largest youth focussed road safety education program in Australia.

Throughout FY25, 17,663 students from 209 NSW schools participated in the Ryda program. The majority (55%) of NSW schools participating in Ryda are regional, although, with smaller cohort sizes, this represents around a third of students. Ensuring Ryda is affordable and accessible to those who need it is a key element of Ryda, with the allocation of subsidies and grants targeting specifically regional and disadvantaged school communities (utilising the Index of Community SocioEducational Advantage – ICSEA – values available for all schools).

	FY25 Ryda Participation and Delivery - NSW				
	Schools	Students	Average ICSEA	Disadvantaged schools	Workshops
Metropolitan	94	11,696	1083	17 (18%)	99
Regional	115	5,967	970	76 (66%)	51
Total	209	17,663	1025	83 (40%)	150

Participation in Ryda varies significantly throughout NSW. The map below shows all mainstream schools with Year 10 and/or 11 students (the target years for Ryda), as well as special schools. Where Ryda is delivered, there is a high rate of participation from schools. Ryda has traditionally relied on local volunteers and local funding, which has resulted in Ryda not being available in every regional community.

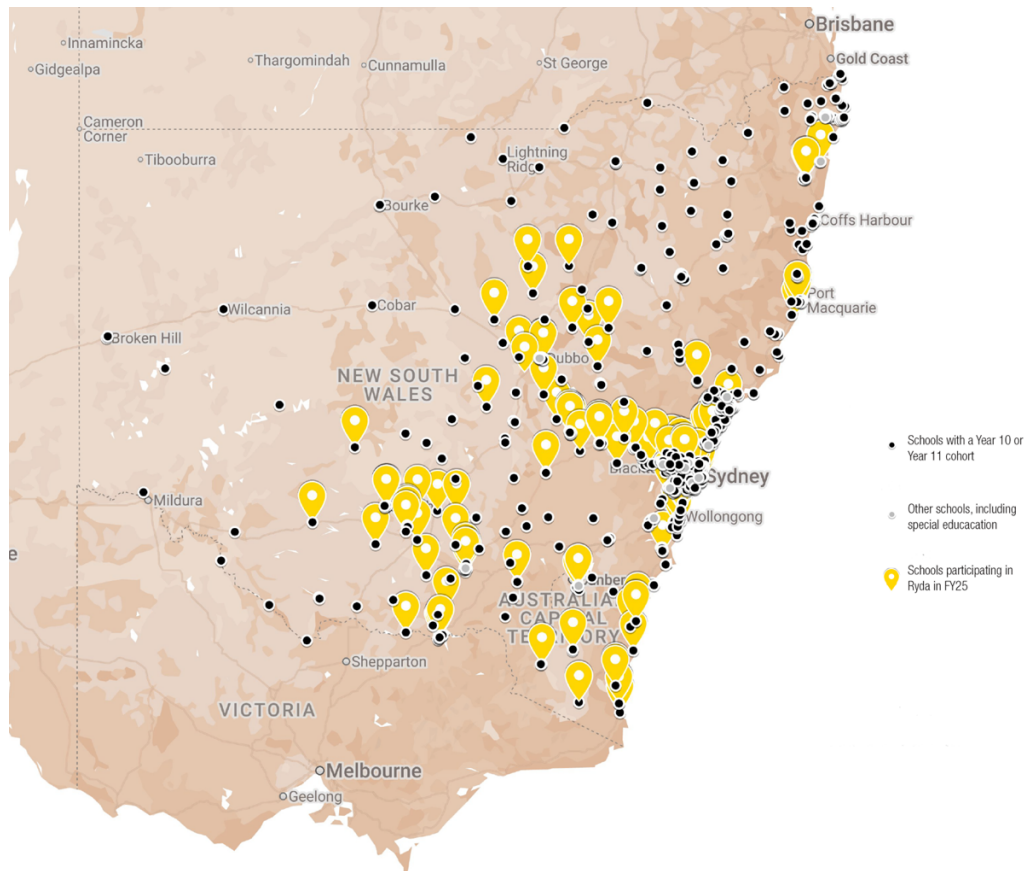


Figure 1: NSW Schools with Ryda participation in FY25

NSW Mainstream schools with a Year 10 and or 11 cohort

Region	Ryda Schools	Non-Ryda Schools	All schools	Participation Rate
Regional NSW	111	347	458	24%
Capital Region	16	19	35	46%
Central Coast	18	16	34	53%
Central West	19	23	42	45%
Coffs Harbour - Grafton	5	15	20	25%
Far West and Orana	12	24	36	33%
Hunter Valley (exc Newcastle)	1	30	31	3%
Illawarra	6	27	33	18%
Mid North Coast	3	29	32	9%
Murray	7	16	23	30%
New England and North West	0	40	40	0%
Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	1	37	38	3%
Richmond - Tweed	0	39	39	0%
Riverina	22	16	38	58%
Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven	1	16	17	6%
Sydney Metropolitan	95	359	454	21%
All Schools	206	706	912	23%

The Issue

Getting in a car as a young driver, or passenger of a young driver, is among the most dangerous things a person will ever do. This risk is amplified in regional NSW, where 72% of youth road fatalities, and 54% of serious injuries occur:

Youth Deaths and Serious Injuries - 2019-2023		Metro	Country	All NSW
Serious Injuries	Drivers	989	1126	2115
	Passengers	313	387	700
	All vehicle occupants	1302	1513	2815
	Percent of total	46%	54%	
Deaths	Drivers	33	104	137
	Passengers	22	38	60
	All vehicle occupants	55	142	197
	Percent of total	28%	72%	
Deaths and Serious Injuries	Drivers	1022	1230	2252
	Passengers	335	425	760
	All vehicle occupants	1357	1655	3012
	Percent of total	45%	55%	

The level of over-representation of regional youth vehicle occupant fatalities has fallen from 21% to 20% between 2015-2019 and 2020-2024. This fall has not been uniform, per the following table.

Regions	2015 to 2024 Youth driver and passenger fatalities			Youth as a percent	
	2015-2019	2020-2024	Change	2015-2019	2020-2024
Regional	198	152	-23%	21%	20%
Capital Region	9	23	156%	10%	25%
Central Coast	11	5	-55%	23%	14%
Central West	26	18	-31%	26%	19%
Coffs Harbour - Grafton	13	10	-23%	23%	27%
Far West and Orana	16	10	-38%	20%	18%
Hunter Valley exc Newcastle	21	11	-48%	26%	16%
Illawarra	7	5	-29%	26%	24%
Mid North Coast	18	6	-67%	21%	15%
Murray	14	13	-7%	28%	22%
New England and North West	22	21	-5%	24%	21%
Newcastle and Lake Macquarie	5	5	0%	13%	23%
Richmond - Tweed	8	9	13%	13%	23%
Riverina	18	13	-28%	28%	19%
Southern Highlands and Shoalhaven	10	3	-70%	19%	13%
Metropolitan Sydney	55	54	-2%	23%	27%
All NSW	253	206	-19%	22%	22%

This shows the importance of preventative measures across all regions in NSW. While there is no single solution to road trauma, throughout Australia, there is a correlation between the Ryda participation rate in local communities, and a fall in youth driver and passenger over-representation.

Youth road trauma is both horrific and unacceptable. Lives are lost, futures are ruined and families are put through never-ending distress. The special challenges and increased risk on our regional roads is well documented in the public domain and known to the Government. Solutions, unique to issues facing drivers and passengers on our regional roads must be found in order for the Government to reach its target of zero road trauma.

Our Submission

We seek to address elements of the Terms of Reference as they relate to the cognitive development of young road users by drawing on our singular experience as the leading, and only, national road safety educator of youth in Australia.

This specifically focuses on b) Effectiveness of current strategies and programs to reduce speeding, fatigue, drink and drug driving in regional NSW, and c) Proposed measures to reduce road trauma in regional NSW.

Background

The NSW Government's Local Government Road Safety Program, the terms of which expired in June 2025, provides funding for behavioural and safe system road safety projects. Specifically, this includes *"funding educational and behavioural engagement projects to address demonstrated local road safety priority issues"*¹ rather than on infrastructure.

This is in keeping with the Safe System approach, which addresses road trauma through the lens of safer:

- Roads (that is, infrastructural improvements)
- Vehicles (technical and legislative improvements to vehicle safety features)
- Speeds (setting speeds that are appropriate to the environment)
- People (all road users).

It is this last element that addresses behavioural causes for road crashes and road trauma – fatigue, speeding, driving under the influence, distractions, improper use of seatbelts – the "fatal five."

To date, just over half of all NSW regional councils participate in this program, leaving some communities underserved with under serviced.

But even when local councils do participate, and have local Road Safety Officers, these RSO's do not generally feel empowered to support Ryda, due to guideline ambiguity on RSOs role in school-based road safety educational programs. (see linked footnote for more information).

RSE believe that all schools should have access to education partnerships they can trust, and that are proven, to meet Government's best practice guidelines and help them co-design their classroom learning, using road safety as an authentic context.

There is a strong correlation between regions that experience high rates of road trauma per capita and socioeconomic disadvantage, meaning that those areas where the need for road safety education is critical are also those where the capacity for user-payment for that education is lowest and cost of delivery often higher. This highlights the need for an additional investment in road safety education for regional areas.

Our submission includes that the NSW government should support only those programs that comply with the government's published guidelines² while actively discouraging those that don't. This is especially important given that schools have limited time in a crowded senior school calendar and that time should be directed to where students will receive the best benefit – in other words from programs that comply with the government's best practice guidelines.

The role of best practice education in the Safe System

RSE's education model complements the Safe System by equipping young people with the knowledge, motivation, and practical tools to make safer decisions as drivers and passengers. Importantly:

- Young people are at a formative stage when driving behaviours are being established.
- Research demonstrates long-term benefits of early education interventions in shaping safe road use.
- Education reinforces enforcement, infrastructure, and vehicle safety messages.

High-quality, evidence-based education empowers youth to make better driving choices, take personal responsibility, and develop strategies that reduce both crash frequency and severity. RSE delivers best practice programmes that align with the GLS, supporting both safer road users and improved return on safety investment.

¹ Under item 6.1.2. <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/system/files/media/documents/2024/local-government-road-safety-program-guidelines-2024-25.pdf>

² <https://education.nsw.gov.au/teaching-and-learning/curriculum/road-safety-education/teaching-and-learning>

The key risk areas for young road users are speeding, impairments (alcohol, drugs and medications), seatbelts, fatigue and distractions. Evidence recognises that young people need time and experience to develop cognitive thinking skills, are at higher risk when driving with peer passengers and need social resilience and mitigation strategies to eliminate distractions and manage risk.

To support the vision of zero road deaths and serious injuries, best-practice education programs that provide a road safety intervention addressing all the key risk areas and focussing on developing higher order skills and critical thinking are essential. Further, programs must be designed to support a whole school approach to learning – learning that is ongoing and embedded in the curriculum, reflected in school policies and communicated to, and supported, by the wider community (parents, school partners, etc).

The school environment is a rare and fleeting opportunity for young people to set goals and build strategies alongside the friends they will most likely be riding with, as drivers or highly influential passengers. The whole school approach of extended learning and ongoing conversations creates a positive road safety culture for generations to come.

Infrastructure helps to protect us from our mistakes. Education helps us make fewer mistakes

What does best practice in road safety education look like?³

What Works?	What Doesn't Work?
Small groups catering for individual/personalised learning needs.	Presentation of information to large groups of students.
Explicit, age appropriate, contextually relevant and appropriately challenging content.	One size fits all approaches.
Targeting risk behaviour.	Fear and shock tactics/focus on trauma and long-term consequences.
Supporting the curriculum with the ability to co-design resources.	Not allowing for each student's voice to be heard.
Delivered across time (whole school/year approach).	One-off approaches/one day events.
Evaluated for impact.	A focus on vehicle emergency handling skills.
	Promotion of early licensure.

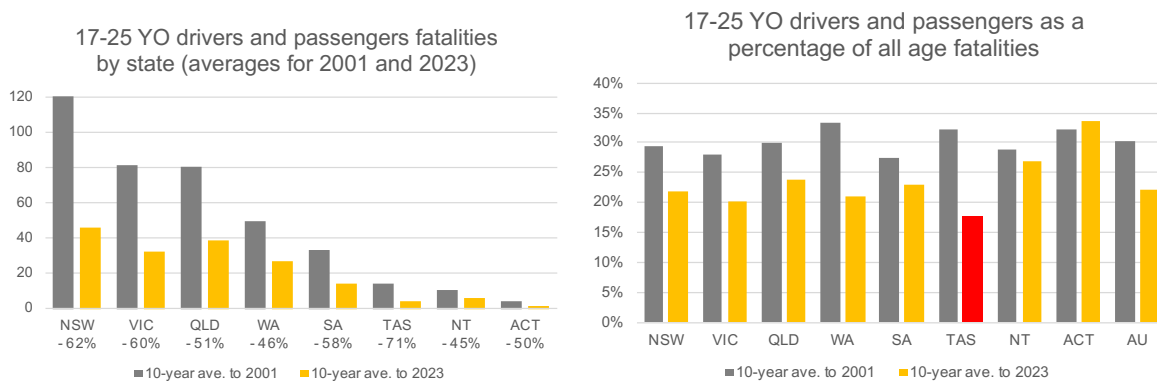
Evidence of the impact of best practice: A case study in Tasmania

RSE has identified a correlation between the high levels of participation in Ryda in Tasmania since 2006 with a commensurate drop in the over-representation of young driver and passenger fatalities.

Youths, in overall numbers, and as a percentage of total driver and passenger fatalities have fallen significantly since 2001, demonstrating some progress in addressing the over-representation of young drivers and passengers in road trauma statistics.⁴

³ These include [SDERA Guidelines](#) for best practice and Queensland's [Good Practice Guidelines](#) on Road Safety Education

⁴ https://www.bitre.gov.au/statistics/safety/fatal_road_crash_database filtered to 17-25 age group, with a rolling 10-year average applied to better account for one-off yearly fluctuations in road fatalities.



The size of the fall in youth driver and passenger fatalities varies from state to state, from 71% in Tasmania to 45% in the Northern Territory. Similarly, Tasmania has seen the biggest fall in the percentage of total fatalities being youths.

In the past 21 years, Tasmania has transformed from having the highest level of overrepresentation of youth driver and passenger fatalities in Australia to the lowest:

Youths as a percentage of total driver and passenger fatalities		
	1992-2001	2014-2023
Tasmania	32.2%	17.6%
Australia	30.2%	22.1%

What these charts point to is that not only is the number of youth fatalities falling, which could be attributed to general road safety initiatives such as safer roads, safer cars and safer speeds, but the falling percentage of fatalities being youths points to initiatives specifically targeting young drivers and their passengers. This includes the graduated learning system, tougher restrictions on novice drivers and the enforcement of those restrictions, and education programs that target attitudes to road use and decision-making – of which RSE/Ryda is the leading and only national exponent in ANZ. ***The Tasmanian Government fully funds Ryda student attendance which also counts towards logbook hours for learner drivers.***

Best Practice Saves Young Lives – Longitudinal DRIVE study

DRIVE study of a program similar to Ryda identified a 24% reduction in crashes of participants.

The 13-year DRIVE study (2003-2016),⁵ which followed a NSW Health Program similar to Ryda in design, but limited in scope compared with Ryda, represents one of the strongest pieces of Australian research available, and demonstrates best-practice education methods work in reducing crash risk and severity – and the skills learned are embedded over time.

The Study showed the students who took part in a resilience program in Year 11 were much less likely to have a crash in their early years behind the wheel.

Participants were 24 per cent less likely to have had any crash and 42 per cent less likely to crash in darkness than non-participants.

⁵ <https://www.scimex.org/newsfeed/resilience-training-for-young-drivers-reduces-long-term-crash-risk>

How Best Practice is Reflected in Ryda

Through personalised, best practice education, Ryda seeks to lay the foundation for a lifetime of safe road use at the critical time when young people start to learn to drive or ride as passengers of new drivers. At the program level, three key elements work hand-in-hand:

Design	Efficacy	Accessibility
Evidence-based, personalised, explicit, resilience-based, interactive and targeting causes of risk behaviour	Evaluated for impact, mapped against proven best practice principals, regularly reviewed and updated	Embedded at a community level to create a culture of change, accessible and affordable for all

At the school level, Ryda supports a whole school approach, through the lens of:

Curriculum	Culture	Community
Supporting teachers to embed road safety content with multiple touch points into the curriculum framework	Encouraging best-practice road safety education throughout the school body and modelling positive road use behaviour by teachers and peers to empower better decisions on the road	Consulting, collaborating and engaging with parents, care-givers and community members helping them understand their role in making roads safer for all road users

The Ryda program, as a whole school approach to road safety education, incorporates the following:

- **Ryda workshop:** Engaging and interactive group-based coverage of topics provide the lens through which students explore risk and build resilience across key risk areas
- **Teacher support:** Dedicated portal with over 50 resources for teachers across a range of curriculum areas, opportunities to co-design materials and fully assessed and trackable Ryda online learning courses via a learning management system
- **Parent and caregiver support:** The Drive Coach webinar and face-to-face formats for parents, supported by a range of online resources, provides everything they need to know to prepare and coach their child for better decisions as a novice driver or passenger. Drive Coach is currently being trialled in regional NSW, QLD and Victoria.
- **Student and peer support:** A comprehensive toolkit for students and student councils to encourage participation in student-led road safety activities within their school and community is in development.

Ryda Workshops

Ryda has been the flagship program for RSE since its launch in 2001. Updated every year, under the guidance of an international Advisory Council, based on a review of current best practice as well as feedback from teachers, students and our highly trained facilitators, in 2025 RSE launched Ryda version 6.0.

School bookings trigger a discovery period where we gather information about student experience, curriculum learning and special considerations. We use this information to tailor workshop conversations and classroom resources.

Ryda features a highly engaging and memorable one-day workshop which front-loads students' understanding of road safety. The workshop sessions are designed to be held in small classroom sized groups (approximately 25 students) and are led by a team of trained facilitators including Police, driving instructors and other community sector specialists.

Core Ryda topics are:

- **Speed & Stopping:** Understanding the relationship between speed and stopping and investigating vehicle safety features. The workshop session sees students working with driving instructors and experiencing the relationship between speed and stopping distance through practical observation of a series of braking demonstrations.
- **The I In Drive:** Students explore how personality impacts risk on the road. During the workshop they use a personality quiz, as a tool to analyse risky situations and practice speaking up through role play.
- **Road Choices:** Students look at key risk areas for young drivers and passengers, including fatigue, distractions and impairment, and gain an understanding of the legal and financial ramifications of poor road choices. The workshop session is routinely led by a Police Officer.
- **Mind Matters:** Exploring mindstate as a road safety risk factor. At the workshop, students work in teams to devise strategies to manage mindstate, using a number of scenarios and music playlists as a backdrop to the conversations.

- **Drive SOS:** Students look at the road from the perspective of other road users, gaining an understanding of their challenges and learning how to “Drive So Others Survive”. The workshop session includes a gamified video challenge and peripheral vision experiments.
- **Crash Investigators:** Students gain an understanding of the Safe System approach and use it to form personal strategies for safe road use. At the workshop, they investigate a real-life crash, interviewing a live-experience survivor to identify contributing crash factors and recommendations for improvements.

Attending the workshop with their year group provides students a unique opportunity to set road safety goals and build strategies alongside their friends, who they will most likely be riding with as drivers or highly influential passengers.

The costs associated with the governance of RSE – developing, producing and reviewing workshop content, planning and managing workshop days, and delivering workshops is highly subsidised, by our partners, corporate and community and by governments which variously and in some instances fully subsidise the program fee.

The need for funding

RSE believes in the cost-effective implementation of best practice road safety education. As road trauma is a community challenge, it takes a community response, and Ryda draws on a unique partnership between State and Local Governments, Corporations (our partners as well as other supporters), Community (especially Rotary, who provide 1000s of volunteer hours to support Ryda delivery), and School communities.

Costing on average \$75 per student to deliver Ryda throughout Australia, we utilise the funding we currently receive to subsidise participation so that no regional school pays more than \$15 per student to participate in the program. This proven model utilises all the funding support currently received from TfNSW's Centre for Road Safety.

Additional funding would allow for more regional communities to receive life-saving education, utilising RSE's capacity to expand the delivery model. This has been proven throughout Australia, where we have been able to reach communities from Weipa in Far North Queensland to King Island in Tasmania and Yorke Peninsula in South Australia.

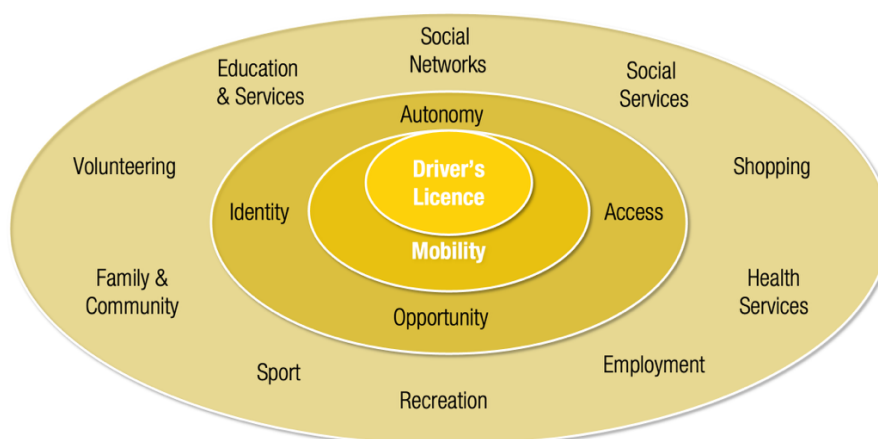
Concluding remarks

While overall trends in regional road trauma, especially youth road trauma, have been heading in the right direction, more needs to be done to build on what works. Responses need to be evidence-led, drawing on data and evolving best practice.

Preventative measures that focus on road user behaviour, especially those relating to the key risk areas of speeding, fatigue and impairment need to focus on long term behavioural change. This in turn, requires an acceptance of positive normative behaviour throughout regional communities. And this can only be done through educational programs, rather than more punitive measures such as increased enforcement.

Provisional Licence holders under 25 years old make up less than 6% of NSW drivers, but over 35% of those who have had their licence suspended due to demerit points. Objectives need to not only keep road users safe, but mobile, especially in regional NSW, where independent mobility through a drivers licence provides access to employment, educational, social, health and other key networks:

Safe Driving and Mobility: Broader Implications beyond reducing road trauma



Kickbusch, 2008

Investments made by the NSW Government in best practice road safety education can be multiplied through the support of corporate and local community partners. RSE is uniquely positioned to facilitate access to best practice road safety education into every regional community in NSW.