

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

**Organisation:** National Transport Research Organisation (NTRO)

**Date Received:** 25 July 2025

Our Ref: Opp-04191

25 July 2025

Greg Warren, MP  
Chair, Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety (Staysafe)  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Committee Chair Warren,

**Inquiry into Interventions to Reduce Road Trauma in Regional NSW Caused by Speeding, Fatigue, Drink and Drug Driving – NTRO Submission**

NTRO is pleased provide this submission to the Inquiry into road safety in regional New South Wales (NSW), with a particular focus on interventions to reduce road trauma caused by speeding, fatigue, and drink and drug driving.

The National Transport Research Organisation (NTRO) is provides independent expert guidance and advice to the nation's key decision makers about important transport challenges. As Australia's premier applied transport research organisation, our expertise is deeply bedded in road infrastructure and all the aspects that impact on a safe, sustainable, and resilient network.

NTRO is committed to planning, developing and delivering impactful road safety initiatives that support our national roadmap of reaching Vision Zero (zero deaths and serious injuries on our Australian roads) by 2050. We see the forming of this Inquiry, and its Terms of Reference, as an important contribution to NSW charting its path to zero, by addressing the persistent and disproportionate levels of road trauma experienced by communities living in and travelling through regional New South Wales.

**Background**

Road trauma remains a persistent challenge in regional NSW; although only one-third of the State's population resides in regional areas and note that the communities there account for nearly two-thirds of all road fatalities, a pattern that has remained unchanged for over a decade. In remote and very remote parts of the State, the risk of being killed in a crash is up to 11 times higher than that experienced amongst communities in metropolitan areas. This heightened burden of road trauma reflects a complex interplay of behavioural, environmental and systemic factors that demand a clear and multifaceted response.

Roads in regional NSW are often characterised by higher speed limits, are typically comprised of infrastructure that is not suitable for these outdated higher speed limits, are missing modern safety elements, in a relatively poor condition, and are not designed for the transport demands of modern communities; it is the case that travellers in regional NSW also face long travel distances between destinations and therefore face increased risk of driver fatigue.

It is well established that speed and speeding remains the most common contributing factor to the cause of fatal and serious injury crashes, followed by fatigue and drug and alcohol use. Despite efforts of both the NSW Police Force and Transport for NSW, regional areas experience a more limited presence of road safety-related enforcement than metropolitan areas, and there are longer response times by emergency services and reduced access to specialist trauma care facilities; adding to this is reduced access to safer vehicles and readily available alternate public transport options, that further compound the road safety risk to regional communities.

E: [info@ntro.org.au](mailto:info@ntro.org.au) | P: +61 3 9881 1555 | ABN: 68 004 620 651

W: [ntro.org.au](http://ntro.org.au) | 80A Turner St. Port Melbourne, VIC 3207

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Although there are many policies that have been introduced over the past two decades, they have not resulted in a substantially reduced share of road trauma in regional areas. The persistent nature of this problem indicates a critical need for sustained systemic action that moves beyond reactive responses of the past, such as black spot funding, toward a long-term, evidence-based risk management approach.

NTRO's position is that, to meaningfully reduce road trauma in regional NSW, there must be a move beyond individual behaviour-focused interventions and instead better achieve alignment with the Safe System approach to road safety. This requires meaningful, coordinated, regional-specific strategies that address the whole transport system including, but not limited to, road infrastructure, the management of speed, improved access to safer vehicles, and measures to address individual behaviours and community attitudes towards road safety.

It is important to recognise that human error is inevitable, but that death and serious injury on NSW roads is not. Our belief is that NSW will only see transformational improvements in safety outcomes in regional NSW when there is a clear commitment to evidence-based, system-wide interventions that are supported by long-term strategic planning across all elements of state and local government that is tailored to the needs and requirements of regional areas.

### Scope of Submission

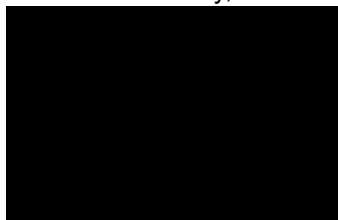
In support of this position, and in response to the Committee's Inquiry, this submission addresses the following Terms of Reference:

- (a) Research and data on regional NSW-specific factors, characteristics and demographics of road crashes.
- (b) Effectiveness of current strategies and programs to reduce speeding, fatigue, and drink and drug driving in regional NSW.
- (c) Proposed measures to reduce road trauma in regional NSW, guided by Safe System principles.
- (d) Implementation of relevant recommendations from the 2023 Performance Audit Report of the Auditor-General, *Regional Road Safety*.
- (e) Any other related matters that influence or inform road safety outcomes in regional areas.

NTRO looks forward to hearing the outcome of the Committee's review of submissions and its deliberations on the issues raised. We would be pleased to provide further input about this important issue in-person if the Committee believes this would add value to its consideration of the matters we have raised.

Please do not hesitate to contact me via email, at [REDACTED] should the Committee wish to seek any further information from NTRO.

Yours sincerely,



**David McTiernan**

**National Leader – Transport Safety**

**National Transport Research Organisation**

## NTRO RESPONSE TO THE INQUIRY'S TERMS OF REFERENCE

### **(a) Research and data on regional NSW-specific factors, characteristics and demographics of road crashes.**

NTRO concur with the Audit Office's conclusion that regional NSW continues to bear a disproportionate burden of road trauma and agree that a more evidence-informed, risk-based approach is critical to delivering road safety outcomes. Our direct experience delivering road safety initiatives such as road safety audits, detailed investigations of road crashes, and supporting regional councils in the development of road safety strategies and Network Safety Plans (NSP) confirms that road trauma in these areas is not only more frequent, but also more likely to result in greater severity outcomes. We note that these are driven by factors including high-speed travel and a limited application of road safety infrastructure across the network.

NTRO has been fundamental in developing the Network Safety Plans (NSP) concept; NSPs are strategic, evidence-based, action oriented plans designed to help road managers, primarily local councils, to identify road safety risk across their networks, and to prioritise practical, affordable, fit-for-purpose road infrastructure improvements to mitigate risk and reduce road trauma. Rather than relying upon crash history, NSPs incorporate both historical crash data and a predictive risk assessment methodologies such as AusRAP and ANRAM to identify high-risk sites and advise on improvements before harm occurs. NTRO believe this approach is especially important in regional areas, where risk is often dispersed across low- to mid-level trafficked rural roads that have high speed limits but which fail to be identified as a road safety concern until after a tragedy has occurred.

Despite decades of policy efforts, the proportion of fatalities occurring in regional NSW has remained high, with nearly two-thirds of deaths taking place in areas that make up just one-third of the state's population. This sustained and disproportionate impact on regional communities highlights the limitation of a reactive approach such as black spot programs to direct investment in road infrastructure to reduce trauma; NTRO advocates for proactive, systemic action to address the current imbalance in road safety performance between regional and metropolitan NSW.

To better guide investment and safety outcomes, we believe that analysis of regional crash data must better reflect the experiences of vulnerable cohorts particularly young drivers, First Nations communities, older adults and those facing social and geographic disadvantage.

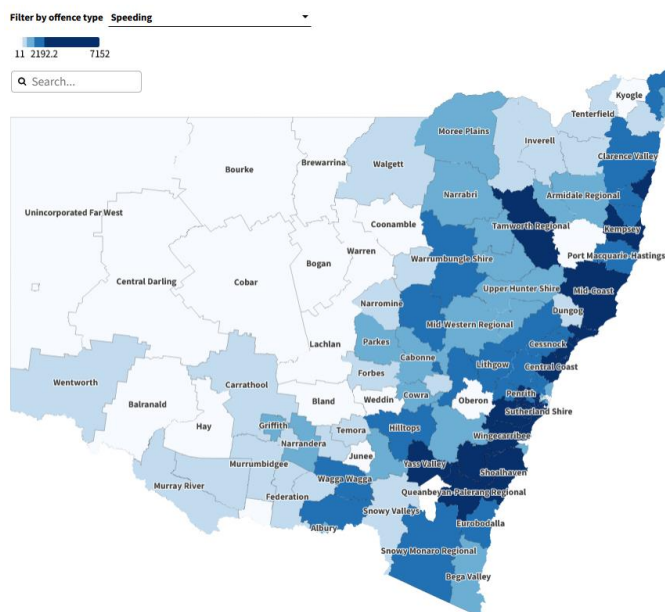
A Safe System approach depends not just on more data, but on smarter analysis of data that anticipates risk and enables decision-makers to prevent harm.

### **(b) Effectiveness of current strategies and programs to reduce speeding, fatigue and drink and drug driving in regional NSW.**

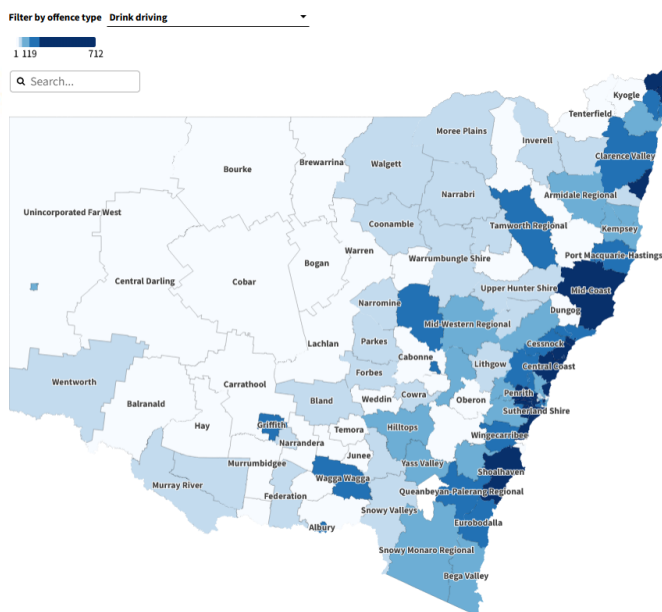
#### **The prevalence of targeted driving offences in NSW**

From April 2024 to March 2025, the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) revealed that there were more than 182,000 speeding offences, nearly 23,000 drug-driving incidents and close to 13,000 drink-driving charges statewide. Most of this is reported as concentrated in regional areas including the Mid Coast, Tamworth and Wagga Wagga. The figures from BOCSAR, as illustrated below, highlight the persistence of high-risk driving behaviours and underlining the need for a review of current programs in regional NSW.

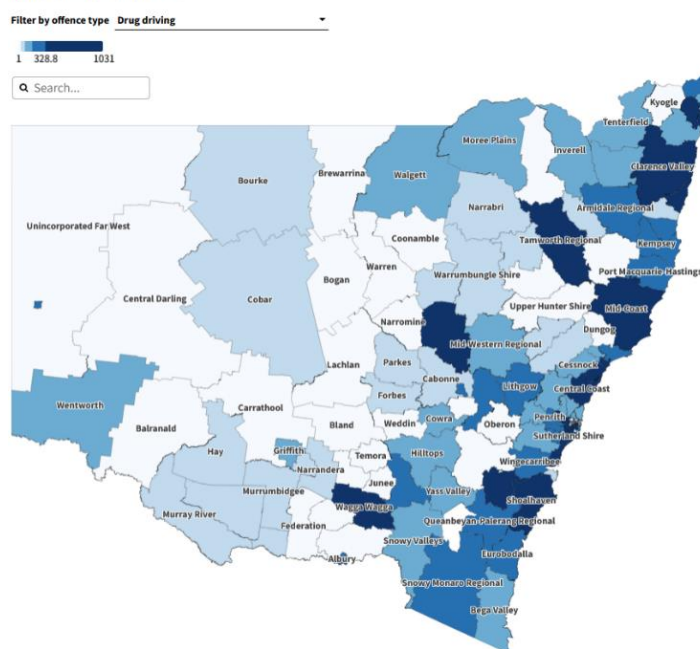
**Chart 3a. Number of people proceeded against for driving offences by LGA**  
April 2024 to March 2025



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April 2024 to March 2025



Source: [Driving offences data file](#) • Note: 'Other method of proceeding' includes infringement notices (fines) and a small number of court diversions. For more information on specific offence types, click on the source link to download the source data.

(Source: NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, 2025)

Speeding, and the resulting road trauma across regional NSW, stems from both community/driver attitude and limitations with the existing road infrastructure.

Many roads in regional areas retain default high-speed limits that are poorly aligned with the physical conditions, traffic volumes, and roadside environments. These limits are rarely reviewed, and administrative arrangements for managing roads mean councils often have limited input to speed zoning decisions.

While NTRO is not advocating that local councils be granted speed limit setting authority, we do believe that local councils should play a more active role in prioritising reviews and deliberations on speed limits on roads within their local government areas. It is the case that local councils are best placed to understand the unique

E: [info@ntro.org.au](mailto:info@ntro.org.au) | P: +61 3 9881 1555 | ABN: 68 004 620 651

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conditions of their road networks, the planning of new development, and the expectations of their communities. These are valuable elements in setting the right speed to the right road and will help ensure speed limit settings are matched to the level of risk, rather than applied as a blanket default.

NTRO is firmly of the view that integrating local understanding will support reforming default speed limits, especially on rural roads and enable councils to play a stronger role in local speed management as a risk management approach; it will also better engage local communities and shape their approach to speed and contributions to reducing road trauma.

#### NSW approach to speed enforcement

While encouraging temporary compliance in the immediate vicinity of the installation, the use of warning signs in advance of fixed, average, and mobile speed cameras has been shown, by research and practice, to reduce their effectiveness as a means providing a general deterrence; this impacts the ability of government to deliver a sustained, network wide change in driver speed behaviour and contributes to increased road trauma. This is especially a concern in regional areas where the presence of speed enforcement, via both automated and active police presence, is considerably less concentrated than occurs in metropolitan areas.

The effectiveness of current automated speed enforcement is further limited by their selective coverage. Until recently, NSW was the only jurisdiction where point-to-point speed camera enforcement was restricted to heavy vehicles, only. While the recent decision to include all vehicles in point-to-point speed camera enforcement is welcome, this is being applied in an extremely limited application and pitched to motorists as a trial. Global and Australian national experience has clearly demonstrated the value of this mode of speed management to improve compliance and reduce road trauma at locations where it is adopted.

While NSW has been a leader in road safety through the adoption of innovative technology, the gaps in policy and application point to a need for more integrated, risk-based approaches that better align enforcement and infrastructure strategies to deliver road safety outcomes.

#### NSW approach to fatigue and drink/drug driving

Fatigue related crashes remain a major concern across regional corridors. While public awareness campaigns are common, the physical infrastructure to support driver rest is often inadequate. While there is a network of rest areas established along key state routes, they have traditionally been designed for heavy vehicle operators and are few and far between along secondary routes. Less formal rest areas may be provided along routes, but these often lack facilities that encourage drivers to stop and they are often inaccessible, unsuitable, or unattractive to caravaners and drivers of light vehicles.

NSW highways offer high quality connections between major centres and interstate destinations, but addressing driver fatigue requires a more inclusive and integrated approach, providing safe, convenient and appropriately spaced rest opportunities for all road users.

Drink and drug driving also persist in regional communities and is often associated with deeper cultural and contextual factors, meaning enforcement alone is not enough to reduce road trauma from these contributing factors. The lack of viable alternative transport options can mean that alcohol and drug affected people have no alternative but to risk driving; improved connectivity to accessible transport options, along with targeted local strategies raising renewed and increased awareness of the effect of drinking and drug use on road safety should be considered.

#### (c) Proposed measures to reduce road trauma in regional NSW

NTRO support a greater investment in system-level interventions; the Safe System approach was adopted in Australia in 2005 and despite successes overseas and locally, there remains a significant gap in its understanding and application by road and development planning practitioners at state and local government levels, and amongst private industry practitioners. It is also the case that the Safe System approach and its core principles are not 'socialised' amongst the wider community, leading to a lack of support for more holistic action by governments. As a result, road user behaviours like speeding and driving while fatigued or under the influence of alcohol or drugs is not recognised amongst the community as a system failure and therefore primary response is for increased enforcement, which is a response that cannot be everywhere.



## Speed

Speed management remains one of the most important levers for reducing both the likelihood and severity of crashes. NTRO urge action in the following areas:

- Adopting a right speed for the right road approach. The default speed limit regime is a flawed approach that is too simplistic and runs counter to ensuring safety on NSW roads; it embeds high risk on a majority of roads in regional NSW since no proper assessment of speed limits is required where a road falls within either the 50 km/h or 100 km/h default speed limit definitions. A change in the default speed limit regime to better align with Safe System speeds would deliver immediate benefits in lower risk to all road users and reduced road trauma. Where the community seeks a return to higher speed limits along defined roads, there should then be a positive onus of review involving an assessment of road safety risk, and where considered acceptable, then a higher speed limit could be applied.
- Revisit the approach to mobile speed camera operations, particularly the continued use of advance warning signs. As stated previously, the presence of warning signage in advance of camera enforcement sites reduces the general deterrent effect of an otherwise potentially credible enforcement arrangement. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration's evaluations from South Australia and countries like the UK, US and Canada show that unsigned speed enforcement, especially when paired with consistent public messaging can significantly improve driver compliance, not just at enforcement sites but across broader road networks. Research has found that speed safety cameras (SSCs) can reduce crashes by 20-37%, with even greater benefits available from fixed and point-to-point systems. These systems help maintain consistent speeds over longer distances, reducing dangerous speed variations on all roads. NSW's current approach is considered to limit these safety benefits by making enforcement predictable.
- NTRO support an expansion of the application of point-to-point speed cameras to all vehicle types without delay. NSW remains the only Australian jurisdiction selectively applying this mode of enforcement (with the exception at current trial sites). The experience of this technology in other jurisdictions and across the world is that it is overwhelmingly effective in managing speed and reducing road trauma. With a well-established network of point-to-point cameras across major routes, this change can be seamlessly adopted and requires no further trial as it aligns with established best practice.
- Beyond enforcement, there should be increased education and community engagement about speed and the impact on road trauma; there is already a growing support at the local community level for reduced speed limits where our communities live, work and play; further awareness amongst the community will see further support for speed limit reforms on NSW roads. But NTRO caution that campaigns should steer away from individual blame and focus instead on community attitudes, on system design, vehicle safety and enforcement.

## Fatigue

Although public messaging around fatigue has been consistent, the infrastructure needed to support safe and accessible rest areas remains inadequate. Long travel distances, limited transport options and a lack of inclusive rest areas all combine to increase risk.

NTRO recommend a greater investment in rest area infrastructure, designed to accommodate all road users in our regional areas, including caravans, passenger vehicles and heavy vehicles. There needs to be improved planning of rest areas based on key freight and tourism routes and the provision of timely behavioural prompts, to help normalise rest breaks and reduce fatigue related incidents.

## Alcohol and Drug Driving

For alcohol and drug driving, NTRO note that enforcement on its own is unlikely to shift the consistent patterns of risky behaviour, particularly in regional communities where public transport is limited and social disadvantage is more pronounced. We support further behavioural interventions and community-based programs that address the root causes of impaired driving and offer safer alternatives such as community transport services.

#### **(d) Implementation of relevant recommendations from the 2023 Performance Audit Report of the Auditor-General, entitled 'Regional Road Safety', dated 30 November 2023**

NTRO agree with the recommendations made in the 2023 Audit Report and echo the call for a dedicated Regional Road Safety Implementation Plan.

NTRO supports the development of region-specific trauma reduction targets and accountability frameworks, as well as more transparent and consolidated reporting of investment and outcomes in regional road safety.

In our work with local councils we have seen the value that network risk assessments and the preparation and adoption of NSPs can have to deliver road safety on local road networks.

The NSW Government should provide greater assistance to local councils to improve both capability and capacity for road safety actions that compliment and are integrated with state-wide strategies and funding streams, including the Community Road Safety Fund (CRSF). NTRO encourage Transport for NSW to enhance its collaboration with regional councils, particularly in reviewing speed limits and implementing safer road infrastructure.

Consideration should be given to formalising regional advisory committees to support this process and ensure decisions reflect local knowledge and lived experience.

#### **(e) Any other related matters that influence or inform road safety outcomes in regional areas**

As noted in the Background section of our submission, reducing road trauma in regional NSW cannot be achieved through behavioural change or infrastructure solutions alone. A truly effective response must integrate both, and more, recognising how development planning, road design, enforcement and systemic context shape the choices people make behind the wheel. A system-wide strategy must encompass infrastructure investment, funding reform and improved local government capacity. The recent reduction in the state's road safety program funding from \$540 million to \$518 million risks undermining progress, particularly when local government funding remains unchanged despite increased expectations for greater local community delivery.

In our view, Network Safety Plans, when properly implemented, can enable local government, particularly in regional areas, to identify high-risk roads and apply for funding with stronger evidence of road safety risk and the benefits that can be derived with investment support. However, without stable funding and training pathways, many councils struggle to execute these plans.

NTRO recommend the NSW Government invest in long-term capacity building that includes all regional councils through training and information collaboration programs, through shared technical resources, and the establishment of dedicated road safety officer or coordinator roles to ensure no council is left behind.

More broadly, we support the ongoing expansion of proactive risk assessment tools such as AusRAP to guide investment and speed limit setting. We also support greater transparency in how funds are allocated and used across regions, which would build public trust and allow community stakeholders to better understand and engage in local road safety issues.