

**Submission
No 44**

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

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Submission to the Parliamentary Inquiry

Interventions to Reduce Road Trauma in Regional NSW Caused by Speeding, Fatigue, Drink and Drug Driving

By Cr David Porter

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Introduction

My name is David Porter, I am a second-term councillor for the Bega Valley on the NSW South Coast. I sit on the traffic committee and the South East Australian Transport Strategy, I wish to submit a response to the Parliamentary inquiry on: Interventions to reduce road trauma in regional NSW caused by speeding, fatigue, drink and drug driving

Response to the Terms of Reference

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

Transport for NSW's data collection and presentation show strong confirmation bias, prioritising government agendas over genuine road safety solutions.

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

Transport for NSW's speed-based approach to rural road safety oversimplifies a complex issue. Unlike urban settings, rural accidents have multifaceted causes, and lower-speed crashes haven't reduced harm. In Bega Valley, fatalities surged from 1.4 to 43.78 per 100,000 after TfNSW's speed zoning policy, proving it ineffective and disastrous.

C) Proposed measures to reduce road trauma in regional NSW

Australia's road safety policy must adopt a holistic Safe Systems approach with genuine local input, rejecting Transport for NSW's authoritarian, urban-centric quick fixes. Empower Local Councils and independent traffic committees to implement tailored safety strategies, including speed zone management, with mandatory community consultation.

Expected Outcomes:

Enhanced local ownership of safety initiatives.

Sustainable Safe Systems alignment.

Improved trust between TfNSW, councils, and communities.

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

The Audit document's recommendations are solid but insufficient. In Australia, elected officials form the government's foundation, yet Transport for NSW often dominates traffic committees, sidelines local input on road safety, and uses a low-level employee to maintain control while feigning local involvement. The recommendations need strengthening to ensure genuine local management of road safety, including speed zone decisions.

e) Any other related matters.

This paper will also discuss important road treatments like tactile edges and effective barriers as well as driver education, proven road safety measures that are being sidelined while Transport focuses on speed.

I will now address the Terms of Reference in Detail

INTRODUCTION

TfNSW's Audit report asserts speed as the primary crash cause in NSW, a claim contradicted by Bega Valley's experience, where poorly collected data obscures true crash factors like fatigue. TfNSW's speed-focused approach, ignoring global Safe Systems' holistic framework, has failed. Crashes labeled "speed-related" often involve run-off-road incidents better addressed by road treatments (e.g., tactile edges) than speed limits.

Transport for NSW (TfNSW) claims speed is the primary cause of crashes in NSW, promoting this through costly media campaigns. This submission supports the parliamentary inquiry, arguing TfNSW misapplies Safe Systems by enforcing urban-centric speed policies on rural roads, using biased data, leading to a surge in Bega Valley fatalities (from 1.4 to 43.78 per 100,000 in 2025) since speed zoning changes were made..

TfNSW's speed-focused approach ignores underinvestment in rural infrastructure and driver education, both proven to reduce road trauma (NRMA, May 2025). The Audit report incorrectly claims council partnerships; TfNSW blocks consultation, using councils to push its narrative. Despite lower speed limits, rural fatalities have risen sharply, yet TfNSW doubles down.

Key Issues

- Confirmation Bias Data: TfNSW's simplistic data does not represent true causes in Rural accidents.
- Urban-Centric Policies: Speed reductions work in urban areas but fail on rural roads, where long distances at low speed increase fatigue and inattention.
- No Consultation: TfNSW refuses council and community input, violating its own Speed Zoning Standard, eroding trust.
- Infrastructure Neglect: Rural roads lack investment, worsening safety for high-movement travel.

Research and data on regional NSW-specific factors, characteristics and demographics of road crashes

Transport for NSW (TfNSW) claims data proves lower speeds reduce crashes, but their crash data lacks transparency and shows confirmation bias, as noted by the Australian Financial Review (Feb 12, 2024) calling it "secret crash data." Federal Minister Catherine King has tied future road funding to improved data collection, highlighting the issue.

Critique of TfNSW Data Practices

TfNSW's data oversimplifies rural crash causes, ignoring cumulative factors like fatigue. A May 17, 2025, fatal head-on crash in Kiah, NSW, where Martin and Cynthia Walker died, was recorded as "fatigue" after the driver fell asleep in a 100 km/h zone. TfNSW may blame the speed limit or lack of lane separation, but fails to note the driver's 1.5-hour drive on recently lowered speed zones, causing monotonous driving and increased fatigue. Without these reductions, the couple would have reached home safely.

But this data will fail to recognise:

- Martin had just driven for almost 1.5 hours on roads where recently speed limit reduced and increased fatigue
- Martin had driven that route hundreds of times, but the speed reduction meant over an hour of monotonous driving
- Had the speed zone not been implemented, Martin and Cynthia would have already reached their home in Wonboyn.

Data collected at Rural accidents is of great concern. Ticking a box that says "speed-related" is vague and inconsistently applied. Worse, it lumps together behaviours that differ significantly in risk and causation.

Does "SPEED RELATED" mean:

- Exceeding the speed limit
- Driving under the speed limit but too fast for conditions.
- Minor exceedances.
- The amount of damage looks like the car was going fast.
- Dangerous hoon or reckless driving.
- And critically, no accounting for other contributing factors.

One thing is sure, "Speed Related" does not create a direct link to the cause of the accident.

The posted speed limit may only directly relate to one of these, yet all are bundled under the same term, distorting the data and justifying further speed limit reductions but not improving road safety. In many cases, changing the speed limit to support inaccurate data can and does have a negative effect.

Transport for NSW makes disingenuous claims in their advertising, like "*casual speeding is the greatest cause of road trauma on NSW roads*" and "*exceeding the speed limit by 5k/ph doubles your chance of having an accident*" how can these claims have any credibility when that level of data does not exist and is it urban or rural data?

Recommendations

- Mandate transparent, comprehensive crash data collection, capturing cumulative factors like fatigue and monotony.
- Revise "speed-related" classifications to differentiate behaviors and include non-speed factors.
- Involve local councils in data analysis to ensure rural-specific insights guide policy.

Effectiveness of current strategies and programs to reduce speeding, fatigue, drink and drug driving in regional NSW

Safe Systems Misapplication

Safe Systems, developed in Sweden (1996), succeeds in smaller nations with extensive freeways and public transport, unlike Australia's rural roads. Its multifaceted approach—roads, vehicles, users, speed, and planning—emphasizes road design, signage, and driver education. TfNSW's focus on

speed overlooks human factors like fatigue, critical in rural areas where drivers travel long distances without infrastructure support. For example, Bega Valley residents drive Sweden-equivalent distances to access retail, with no freeways or public transport.

SPEED ALONE IS THE BLUNT INSTRUMENT OF POOR ROAD SAFETY POLICY ON RURAL ROADS

TfNSW's crash data is two-dimensional, point-of-impact-based, suited for urban crashes involving obstacles but not rural crashes driven by fatigue or inattention. The Australian College of Road Safety (2016) and NSW 2020 Road Safety Report promote speed reductions for urban settings, ignoring rural realities. TfNSW's urban-centric policies, like suggesting cycling for long rural trips, show a disconnect from rural needs.

In 2024, Transport for NSW (TfNSW) implemented a speed reduction campaign in Bega Valley, nearly eliminating 100 km/h zones on high-movement rural roads. As a Local Traffic Committee member, I warned that these changes would increase driver fatigue, inattention, and frustration—key rural crash factors. Despite a petition from over 1,000 residents, TfNSW ignored concerns, resulting in a 2,000% rise in road fatalities in the first half of 2025, with head-on collisions linked to fatigue and inattention surging.

Driver Education Gap

Driver education, a Safe Systems pillar, is neglected. Rural young drivers, trained under conservative speed limits, lack practical experience for high-movement roads, compromising decision-making. My children, trained in high-speed car control, completed P-plates incident-free, underscoring education's value.

Critique of TfNSW Policy

TfNSW's speed-centric approach misapplies the global Safe Systems framework, designed for urban and freeway-heavy environments, not Australia's vast rural road networks. This policy has led to:

- Increased fatigue, causing more head-on crashes.
- Vehicles traveling closer due to speeds below the road's natural flow.
- Heightened inattention, frustration, and dangerous overtaking.
- "Highway hypnosis" from monotonous driving.
- 20% more vehicles on roads due to longer travel times.
- Rerouting to unsafe roads like Brown Mountain, increasing accidents.

Proposed measures to reduce road trauma in regional NSW

Understanding the Cumulative Effects of Driving on Rural Roads

Driving long distances on Australian rural roads, often under monotonous conditions, significantly contributes to driver fatigue, a major cause of crashes. The Monash University Accident Research Centre highlights that fatigue arises not only from extended driving but also from factors like monotony, even in shorter trips. Research, including “The Relationship Between Drivers’ Cognitive Fatigue and Speed Variability During Monotonous Daytime Driving,” confirms that monotonous driving reduces driver engagement, increasing fatigue, inattention, and distraction, such as phone use, which are primary rural crash causes.

Transport for NSW (TfNSW) often minimises the impact of speed reductions, claiming they add only a few minutes to travel time. However, in Bega Valley, these changes have increased weekly drive times by up to 2.5 hours for some residents, elevating fatigue, frustration, and crash risk due to more vehicles on the road and less family time, which adds mental strain. TfNSW acknowledges fatigue’s severity—equating 17 hours awake to a 0.05 BAC and noting fatigue-related crashes are three times more likely to be fatal—but their speed reductions exacerbate it.

Infrastructure Deficiencies

The NSW 2020 Road Safety Report reveals two-thirds of road fatalities occur on rural roads, with 82% of victims being rural residents. Despite TfNSW’s five-year focus on rural safety, fatalities have risen, yet the 2025/26 budget allocates no funds for Bega Valley road upgrades, despite a 1,000% fatality increase. Public transport is also inadequate, with only one daily bus to Canberra, forcing residents to drive long distances. TfNSW’s urban-centric policies and funding prioritize urban congestion relief over rural safety, neglecting critical infrastructure needs.

Lack of Consultation

Safe Systems requires collaboration with stakeholders, including communities, as per TfNSW’s Speed Zoning Standard (Principle 6). However, TfNSW refuses local consultation, ignoring Bega Valley’s concerns. A TfNSW representative dismissed Traffic Committee objections, stating, “While people keep speeding, we’ll keep lowering speed limits,” reflecting emotional rather than evidence-based decisions. A low-level employee, 50% funded by TfNSW, approved speed changes without council authority, undermining trust and highlighting TfNSW’s authoritarian approach.

Misapplication of Local Knowledge

TfNSW’s lack of local insight is evident in poorly placed crash barriers in Bega Valley, which caused accidents while leaving vulnerable roads untouched. The Local Traffic Committee manages most road issues but is barred from discussing speed limits, disenfranchising local input. In rural areas like Bega Valley, crashes often involve wildlife or vehicles veering off-road, worsened by fatigue. A local safety plan would prioritize wildlife barriers, tactile road markings, and advanced driver training, aligning with community needs.

Proposed Measures to Reduce Road Trauma

To address rural road trauma, a holistic Safe Systems approach, tailored to local conditions, is essential:

1. **Empower Local Councils:** Grant councils authority to set speed limits through Section 355 Traffic Committees, ensuring community-informed decisions that balance safety and road function, fostering compliance.
2. **Enhance Infrastructure:** Allocate funds for rural road upgrades, including tactile centerlines and edge lines, wildlife barriers, and rest areas to mitigate fatigue and animal-related crashes.
3. **Improve Driver Education:** Introduce mandatory advanced driver training for rural drivers, focusing on high-movement road skills and skid recovery, to enhance decision-making and reduce crashes.
4. **Adopt Appropriate Speed Zones:** Implement 90 km/h zones on high-movement roads to maintain driver engagement while ensuring safety, reducing monotony-induced fatigue.
5. **Transparent Data Collection:** Reform crash investigations to capture cumulative factors like fatigue and monotony, similar to aviation accident protocols, ensuring accurate data informs policy.
6. **Increase Public Transport:** Expand rural public transport options to reduce reliance on long-distance driving, lowering fatigue-related crash risks.

Conclusion

TfNSW's speed reductions, ignoring scientific evidence on fatigue and local input, have worsened rural road safety. By adopting a comprehensive Safe Systems approach with these proposed measures, NSW can reduce road trauma, prioritizing infrastructure, education, and community collaboration.

1. **Safe Systems is not being implemented correctly, with speed being cherry-picked, this is not working to improve safety in Rural Areas.**
2. **Transport for NSW has lost sight of the Safe Systems principle that *"Speed management on high movement roads must integrate with other Safe System pillars: safe roads, safe vehicles, safe road users, and post-crash care."* Speed is not the magic bullet.**
3. **The simplistic view that simply dropping speed limits, backed with authoritarian enforcement, will reduce accidents on Rural Roads has proven to be a failure.**
4. **Transport for NSW continues to double down on deadly policy failure.**
5. **Speedzone management on council roads is inconsistent with the roads' use and community expectations.**
6. **Transport for NSW refuses to comply with its own policy by not involving the council or the community in consultation.**

Implementation of relevant recommendations from the 2023 Performance Audit Report of The Auditor-General, entitled 'Regional Road Safety', dated 30 November 2023

In addition to the Auditor General's recommendations, Rural and Regional areas would benefit from consideration of the following

1. **A rethink on Safe System in Rural Areas, taking a holistic approach consistent with Safe Systems.**
2. **Local Traffic Committees should be changed to a section 355 committee of council so as to be closer to the relevant safety issues of the local area and consultation of the community, instead of simply complying with the Transport NSW narrative. Councils should be responsible for speed limits on council roads, within an agreed framework and approved by the elected council, consistent with almost every other aspect of managing council roads. Council will also be in a better position to match funding priorities and programs on council roads with grounded local knowledge of the safety issues and community behaviours.**
3. **If item 1 cannot be quickly achieved, roll back the last 12 months of speed zone changes until a review can be performed that is consistent with the roads' use and consistent with other safety measures. We urgently need to stop the deaths.**
4. **New approach to road funding to prioritise high movement roads that do not meet Safe System specifications.**
5. **If the government is unable to fund advanced driver training, then develop an "A Plate" (advanced driver) system to give leniency on rural roads to drivers who have voluntarily completed advanced driver training (with a curriculum matching successes in Germany), the objective of putting safer drivers on the road, directly in line with Safe Systems**
6. **Greater use of the 90 kph speed zone.**

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cr David Porter is a second-term councillor in the Bega Valley, a second term on the Traffic Committee and a member of the South Eastern Transport Strategy. David voluntarily attended an advanced driver training course and has subsequently achieved a 38-year clean driving record, which would place him statistically as one of the state's safest drivers. David Porter has global knowledge, working all over the world for global tech companies and has many years of experience in data collection and reporting.

(1) NRMA Funding Local Roads 2025 <https://www.mynrma.com.au/-/media/nrmaheadless/files/funding-local-roads-2025.pdf>

(2) Bega Valley petition https://www.change.org/p/stop-speed-limit-reductions-on-our-roads-without-due-process?utm_medium=custom_url&utm_source=share_petition&recruited_by_id=32b86b35-5ebc-44ea-8734-9a86cc6e1b86

(3) NSW Road Safety Report 2020 <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/system/files/media/documents/2023/Road%20Safety%20Progress%20Report%202020.pdf>

(4) National Road Safety Centre fact sheet: <https://www.roadsafety.gov.au/nrss/fact-sheets/vision-zero-safe-system#:~:text=Physics%20determine%20the%20known%20limits,anticipating%20and%20accommodating%20human%20errors.>

(5) *The National Road Safety Centre fact sheet*

(6) Journal of the Australian College of Road Safety <https://journalofroadsafety.org/article/32063-management-of-speed-the-low-cost-rapidly-implementable-effective-road-safety-action-to-deliver-the-2020-road-safety-targets>

(7) Monash Accident Research Centre <https://www.monash.edu/muarc/archive/our-publications/papers/fatigue>

(8) The Relationship Between Drivers' Cognitive Fatigue and Speed Variability During Monotonous Daytime Driving <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC5893797/>

(9) Australian Financial Review <https://www.afr.com/politics/federal/states-to-be-forced-to-give-up-secret-road-crash-data-20240214-p5f4w5>

(A) Transport for NSW <https://www.transport.nsw.gov.au/roadsafety/topics-tips/fatigue#:~:text=Research%20shows%20that%20driving%20while,do%20to%20avoid%20driving%20tired.>

(B) Transport for NSW Speed Zoning Standard <https://standards.transport.nsw.gov.au/search-standard-specific/?id=TBA%20-%200004459:2022>

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Thank You.