

INQUIRY INTO ROAD TOLLING REGIMES

Organisation: Australasian College of Road Safety - New South Wales Chapter

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New South Wales Chapter

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Tolling Review

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Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary	Error! Bookmark not defined.
2. Key Issues	4
2.1. Global, National, and State Road Safety Strategies	4
2.2. Smart Motorways and Safe Systems.....	4
2.3. Star Ratings	5
2.4. M4 Parramatta and the Church Street Off-Ramp	5
2.5. Access and Equity.....	5
3. Recommendations	7
3.1. Helping Motorists Chose Safer Routes	7
3.2. Discounted tolls	8
5. About the Author	9

1. Executive Summary

The Australasian College of Road Safety (ACRS) is the peak association for road safety professionals, advocates, law enforcement and members of the public who are focused on saving lives and preventing serious injuries on our roads (www.acrs.org.au).

The New South Wales Chapter, Australasian College of Road Safety (ACRS-NSW) maintains a state-wide network of road safety stakeholders, globally acclaimed academic researchers, practitioners, and government officials.

The provision of improved road infrastructure is relevant to the *Safe System* pillar of *Safe Roads*. In the case of motorways in the Sydney metropolitan area, motorists elect to pay a user charge (a toll) in order to access the road infrastructure.

This arrangement is not new. The late Senator John Button provided this response in the Australian Senate in 1992, to a question relating to the construction of the “missing link” of the F4 Freeway.

There is a growing trend around the world for the private provision of public infrastructure. Given the budgetary constraints facing many governments, this trend means that citizens are often able to enjoy the benefits of increased and improved infrastructure earlier than they otherwise would.

As with any new infrastructure project, there will be costs as well as benefits to those affected by the Motorway. Drivers will need to decide whether to continue using the Great Western Highway, with its many traffic lights and difficulties, or to use the Motorway, pay the toll and gain the benefits of large reductions in travel times and improved fuel efficiency from faster, steadier travel. Whichever decision drivers make, the end result will be a reduction in congestion and improved travel times, for those using the Motorway and for those using the Highway.

Question No. 1985, Tuesday, 18 August 1992

This tolling review is an opportunity to look at motorway infrastructure, their user charges, and overlay them against the latest road safety knowledge, with a view to delivering improved road safety outcomes.

2. Key Issues

2.1. Global, National, and State Road Safety Strategies

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 74/299 proclaimed 2021-2030 as the 2nd Decade of Action for Road Safety, with the goal of preventing 50% of road traffic deaths and injuries. This resolution was passed in August 2020.

The Australian Office of Road Safety recently issued the *Draft Nation 2021-30 Road Safety Strategy*, and it is expected the finalised strategy will be issued by the end of the year. Safe system principles are applied to the strategy.

Safe System approach: This is in step with the United Nations approach to global road safety through its Sustainable Development Goals and the second Decade of Action on Road Safety

<https://www.officeofroadsafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/draft-national-road-safety-strategy.pdf>

New South Wales Centre for Road Safety is well into the task of devising *Road Safety Plan 2026* which will succeed *Road Safety Plan 2021*.



Figure 1: Safe Systems (Towards Zero) from NSW Road Safety Plan 2021. A new strategy is being developed.

2.2. Smart Motorways and Safe Systems

Recent toll road projects in the Sydney area are examples of *smart motorways*. Austroads, the collective of the Australian and New Zealand transport agencies, representing all levels of government, described the nexus between smart motorways and safe systems as follows:

Smart motorway projects are typically driven by requirements for capacity improvement; however, they have potential for significant safety benefits. Regardless of the project's drivers, the design, operation and maintenance of smart motorways should apply the principles and concepts of the Safe Systems approach.

This approach recognises that road users make mistakes and requires design to account for those mistakes in order to reduce the incidence and severity of crashes when they do inevitably occur. This includes consideration of all aspects of the system, including roads, roadsides, vehicles and speed management.

[https://austroads.com.au/publications/traffic-management/agsm/media/AGSM-16-Guide to Smart Motorways.pdf](https://austroads.com.au/publications/traffic-management/agsm/media/AGSM-16-Guide%20to%20Smart%20Motorways.pdf)

2.3. Star Ratings

At a national level, the ACRS advocates for the publication of safety star ratings on roads as a condition of Commonwealth investment in the network.

There have been significant achievements globally by the International Road Assessment Program (iRAP), EuroRAP and previously, AusRAP. However, progress in Australia has been slow following the sidelining of AusRAP and, while some road authorities are using this assessment process, consumers still have no objective, easily understood, uniform public information about the safety of the roads they use.

There is abundant evidence to support non-regulatory assessments of road safety with a highlight being the success of NCAP programs around the world and ANCAP in Australia and New Zealand. These programs make essential public safety information transparent.

This same approach will be particularly valuable for roads in regional communities where the fatality rates are so high. Respectful, strategic conversations are needed in regional communities about the inherent safety of the current infrastructure, the safety of the speeds that are being travelled, and the options and costs associated with providing a safe road environment.

<https://acrs.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/ACRS-Submission-draft-NRSS-2021-2030-FINAL.pdf>

2.4. M4 Parramatta and the Church Street Off-Ramp

The Committee's attention is drawn to the *Review of Road Safety – M4 Eastbound Off-ramp*, Released in June 2019 by Transport for NSW.

<https://roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au/downloads/review-m4-eastbound-off-ramp-parramatta.pdf>

Chapter 4 (page 8) of the TfNSW document provides a timeline that follows the implementation of a toll on the M4, fatal crashes that occurred in the vicinity of the Church Street off-ramp, and processes undertaken by road authorities following those crashes.

2.5. Access and Equity

The Australian Senate Economics References Committee's 2017 inquiry into *Toll roads: issues of building, financing, and charging (1)*, discussed in detail in the costs to households and businesses for using toll roads. The inquiry provided examples of how toll roads can be financial burden but also examples of how they can help save money.

In *Chapter 4 Equity aspects of toll arrangements*, the issue of unpaid toll fine and the outcome of these situation is raised. Part 4.18 stated '*Geographically, infringement debt was disproportionately concentrated in outer suburban communities with higher rates of disadvantage. The fines, when they are paid, divert money from already disadvantaged local economies.*'

The report also said for unpaid tolls in NSW, "debt collectors are engaged by the road operators, and the amount recovered is the toll plus an administration fee."

The Senate review failed to explore the impact tolls have on those with low incomes who cannot afford to use these roads. For example, students, young drivers, people from low socioeconomic areas and those on the minimum wage. These groups include some the highest risk drivers in the community. A tolling system that forces higher risk drivers in often older vehicles onto roads that are recognised as having a lower safety rating is counterintuitive to road safety.

The existence of the Toll Relief scheme, subject to specific criteria, is noted, as is the continued operation of the cashback scheme for the south-western end of the M5 motorway.

¹ The Senate, Economics References Committee, *Toll roads: issues of building, financing and charging* September 2017. Commonwealth of Australia 2017, ISBN 978-1-76010-654-6

3. Recommendations

3.1. *Helping motorists chose safer routes*

ACRS national advocacy for Star Ratings (Section 2.3) is about having the “strategic conversations” about road safety and “the options and costs associated with providing a safe road environment”.

At a state level, ACRS-NSW recommends motorways/toll roads should be assessed for their Star Ratings and the results published.

In the previous section on the M4 Motorway and the Church Street Off-Ramp (Section 2.4) the choices motorists make to leave a motorway prior to a toll point and utilise an alternative route free of a toll was raised.

In addition to assessing the safety of toll roads, the safety star rating should also be ascertained for such alternative/free routes. These routes would be nominated on motorway incident response plans as emergency detours, so safe systems principles must also apply on these roads to minimise the likelihood and severity of secondary incidents.

The publication of star ratings for new motorways/toll roads in NSW and the alternative free route should undertaken in the planning phase and reviewed periodically once commissioned.

Given the absence of intersections and therefore reduced points of conflict, it would be expected that safety on the toll road/motorway would rate higher than the alternative free route.

It appears some work has undertaken to quantify toll road safety, as evidenced by this quote from the NorthConnex website:


The risk of a crash driving through NorthConnex is predicted to be five times lower than on Pennant Hills Road.

<https://www.northconnex.com.au/news/safety-first-for-northconnex>

NorthConnex also has a page on their website outlining the range of safety features contained within their tunnel system.

Whilst expenses such as compulsory third-party insurance and fuel are unavoidable, motorists could consider toll charges as being discretionary.

When light and heavy vehicles elect to use the free alternative, they are making the decision, as Senator Button said, to use an existing road with “its many traffic lights and difficulties” rather than paying a toll and “gain the benefits of large reductions in travel times and improve fuel efficiency from faster, steadier travel”.



With the advent of new global, national and state road safety strategies that will take us through the decade, now is the time to introduce safety into the route selection decision-making process.

The draft National Road Safety Strategy 2021-30 for example, calls for action beyond those traditionally responsible for road safety through the use of a “social model”.

There are so many parties which can influence trauma outcomes, and the social model approach means being open to constantly exploring and finding different levers for change, and expanding the understanding of the safe system across the community. The aim is for road safety to be at the core of every club, business, and organisation to influence individuals and achieve cultural change.

Draft National Road Safety Strategy 2021-30

Motorists, be they single car owners, motorcyclists or the operators of commercial fleets, need the help of government, road authorities, motorway operators, and insurers, to be better informed about safe route selection.

3.2. Discounted Tolls

ACRS-NSW calls on stakeholders to investigate new opportunities for discounted tolls.

The issue of toll roads is not confined to those who elect to pay the toll and those who do not. Both the toll road/motorway and alternative (free) routes form part of a broader transport network.


The Draft National Road Safety Strategy 2021-30 refers to the concept of *movement and place*.

Motorways and movement corridors provide for fast movement with little or no ‘place’ function, whereas in vibrant streets, local streets, and places for people (e.g. shared zones) the emphasis is on slow movement, and place is the primary consideration.

Draft National Road Safety Strategy 2021-30

Toll road alternatives traverse suburban strip-shopping centres, 40km/h school zones, multiple sets of traffic lights, and residential areas. They travel past aged care homes, early learning centres, places of worship, parks, playgrounds, sporting fields, licensed premises, and other local community facilities. These streets are not the sole domain of commuters passing through, be they in heavy or light vehicles.

At a time when 59% of serious injuries from road crashes are occurring in metropolitan areas, encouraging light and heavy vehicles onto toll roads has the potential to reduce road trauma and improve safety, air quality, and amenity in suburban streets affected by toll-avoiders.



Recognizing that road safety requires addressing broader issues of equitable access to mobility and that the promotion of sustainable modes of transport, in particular safe public transport and safe walking and cycling, is a key element of road safety.

United Nations General Assembly Resolution 74/299, adopted 31 August 2020

The reference in UN General Assembly Resolution 74/299 to public transport is important. A recent media release by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (*Fewer Australians Using Public Transport after COVID-19*, 14 April 2021) highlighted on-going reduced public transport usage and how “normal patterns of usage had not returned for everyone.”

The information contained in the ABS media release would suggest capacity exists within the public transport system, to divert toll road users onto public transport through discounts or other incentives. There are alternatives to toll roads outside of other roads.

4. About the Author

Michael Timms retired from New South Wales Police Force in January 2020 following a 33-year career. Mr Timms has over three decades experience in Highway Patrol and road policing and was a member of the Command Leadership Group, Traffic and Highway Patrol Command.

He holds a Bachelor of Professional Studies (Policing) UNE, majoring in road safety studies and completed the Monash University Road Safety Leadership Program in 2016.

He has written and presented papers at road safety conferences in Australia and overseas. A member of the Australasian College of Road Safety for over eleven years, he joined the NSW Chapter Executive Committee in 2020.