

Road Safety in Australia

- 2.1 There are currently about 1700 road deaths each year in Australia, and over ten times as many serious road injuries (currently the annual rate of serious injury is approximately 22 000¹). Road crashes are a major cause of premature death. The economic cost has been estimated at some \$15 billion per annum (1996).²
- 2.2 Cost of crashes by injury category were:
- Fatal crashes: \$2.92 billion
 - Serious injury crashes: \$7.15 billion
 - Minor injury crashes: \$2.47 billion
 - Property damage only crashes: \$2.44 billion³
- 2.3 The fatality rate is substantially higher for males than females. As a proportion of population it is also substantially higher for people living in rural and regional areas than for those living in cities.
- 2.4 Drivers account for approximately 45 per cent of fatalities, passengers 24 per cent, pedestrians fifteen per cent, motorcycles 14 per cent and cyclists 2 per cent. Trucks are involved in 17 per cent of road fatalities. In crashes involving trucks, 15 per cent of those killed are truck drivers. Around one per cent of fatalities involve buses,

1 ATSB, *Serious Injury Due to Road Crashes Australia, July 1999 to June 2002*.

2 Department of Transport and Regional Services (DOTARS), Submission no. 23, p. 1.

3 Bureau of Transport Economics (BTE), Report 102: Road Crash Costs in Australia, BTE, Canberra, 2000, p. xii.

and most of these were pedestrians or the occupants of other vehicles.⁴

- 2.5 A range of measures have been adopted in recent decades in an effort to mitigate this tragedy, with some considerable success. The low point of road safety was the late 1960s and 1970s, when road accidents consistently claimed in excess of 3000 lives every year nationally, representing 25–30 fatalities per 100 000 population every year.
- 2.6 The worst year was 1970, with 3798 killed, or 30.4 fatalities per 100 000 population. Since then, the death rate has more than halved, despite a near doubling of the population, distances travelled having more than doubled, a threefold increase in vehicle registrations, and trebling of the number of people holding drivers licences.⁵
- 2.7 The latest initiative is the National Road Safety Strategy, and related action plans. The Strategy aims to achieve a reduction in the fatality rate of forty per cent, from 9.3 per 100 000 population in 1999 to no more than 5.6 in 2010.⁶ The National Road Safety Strategy provides the framework for the road safety strategies of individual States and Territories.

Road Safety Trends

- 2.8 In the last twenty years, there has been a significant improvement in the number of fatalities on Australia's roads. Table 2.1 shows a steady decline in the absolute number of road fatalities nationwide over the last two decades, a decline matched in all jurisdictions except the Northern Territory.
- 2.9 Table 2.2 shows this decline in road fatalities is consistent across road use types—drivers, passengers, pedestrians, motorcyclists (including passengers) and cyclists.
- 2.10 Tables 2.3, 2.4 and 2.6 examine fatality trends across all jurisdictions using three different measures. Table 2.3 measures fatalities per 100

4 DOTARS, Submission no. 23, p. 2.

5 ATSB, *Road crash data and rates, Australian States and Territories 1925 to 2001*, DOTARS, Canberra, September 2002, pp. 2–3.

6 ATC, *National Road Safety Strategy, 2001–2010*, p. 3.

000 population, the basic standard by which fatality trends are assessed, and demonstrates huge improvements across all jurisdictions since 1975.

- 2.11 Similar trends are evidenced in table 2.4, which measures fatalities per 100 million kilometres travelled; and table 2.6 which measures fatalities per 10,000 registered motor vehicles.
- 2.12 Table 2.5 looks at fatality trends per 100 000 population by age group, and demonstrates that improvements in fatality rates is fairly consistent across all age groups.
- 2.13 What is also clear, however, is the decline in the rate of improvement over recent years, the plateau effect across all types of measurement and all jurisdictions.

Table 2.1 Road Fatalities by State and Territory, 1980–2002

	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aust
1980	1303	657	557	269	293	100	63	30	3272
1981	1291	766	594	222	238	111	70	29	3321
1982	1253	709	602	270	236	96	60	26	3252
1983	966	664	510	266	203	70	48	28	2755
1984	1037	657	505	232	221	83	50	37	2822
1985	1067	683	502	268	243	78	67	33	2941
1986	1029	668	481	288	228	91	71	32	2888
1987	959	705	442	256	213	77	84	36	2772
1988	1037	701	539	223	230	75	51	31	2887
1989	960	776	428	222	242	80	61	32	2801
1990	797	548	399	226	196	71	68	26	2331
1991	663	503	395	184	207	77	67	17	2113
1992	649	396	416	165	200	74	54	20	1974
1993	581	435	396	218	209	58	44	12	1953
1994	646	377	418	159	211	59	41	17	1928
1995	620	418	456	181	209	57	61	15	2017
1996	581	417	385	181	247	64	72	23	1970
1997	576	377	360	148	197	32	60	17	1767
1998	556	390	279	168	223	48	69	22	1755
1999	577	383	314	151	218	53	49	19	1764
2000	603	407	317	166	212	43	51	18	1817
2001	524	444	324	153	165	61	50	16	1737
2002	561	397	322	154	179	37	55	10	1715

Source ATSB, *Road Fatalities Australia: 2002 Statistical Summary*, p. 38.

Table 2.2 Fatalities by road user, 1980–2002

	Drivers	Passengers	Pedestrians	Motorcycles	Bicycles
1980	1236	842	644	442	93
1981	1279	889	629	424	94
1982	1237	850	591	482	88
1983	1034	689	512	410	103
1984	1036	756	541	390	90
1985	1143	763	538	404	83
1986	1134	730	537	405	78
1987	1095	737	493	359	79
1988	1144	776	548	323	87
1989	1122	781	501	299	98
1990	935	634	420	262	80
1991	910	554	343	248	58
1992	815	570	350	197	41
1993	859	513	331	203	45
1994	809	501	367	190	59
1995	874	491	398	204	48
1996	869	499	351	193	57
1997	776	431	328	177	52
1998	741	468	318	181	44
1999	820	428	299	176	40
2000	852	450	287	191	31
2001	776	407	290	216	46
2002	785	422	249	224	34

Source ATSB, *Road Fatalities Australia: 2002 Statistical Summary*, pp. 37–8.

Table 2.3 Road Fatalities per 100 000 population, by State and Territory, 1975–2002

	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aust
1975	26.12	24.03	30.96	26.79	26.32	29.75	68.91	16.08	26.59
1980	25.20	16.78	24.58	20.56	23.09	23.61	53.28	13.38	22.27
1985	19.53	16.58	19.52	19.54	17.13	17.61	45.11	13.13	18.63
1990	13.66	12.52	13.76	15.78	12.15	15.36	41.53	9.21	13.66
1991	11.24	11.38	13.34	12.72	12.65	16.50	40.49	5.88	12.23
1992	10.88	8.89	13.73	11.33	12.06	15.75	32.13	6.79	11.28
1993	9.68	9.73	12.73	14.92	12.46	12.30	25.77	4.01	11.05
1994	10.66	8.40	13.12	10.84	12.39	12.48	23.65	5.64	10.80
1995	10.12	9.25	13.97	12.32	12.05	12.03	34.36	4.92	11.16
1996	9.36	9.14	11.53	12.28	13.99	13.49	39.59	7.46	10.76
1997	9.18	8.20	10.60	9.99	10.97	6.76	32.10	5.50	9.54
1998	8.77	8.41	8.09	11.28	12.23	10.17	36.34	7.10	9.38
1999	9.00	8.17	8.97	10.08	11.79	11.24	25.42	6.08	9.32
2000	9.30	8.58	8.90	11.03	11.31	9.12	26.08	5.71	9.49
2001	7.97	9.24	8.93	10.12	8.68	12.93	25.28	5.01	8.95
2002	8.45	8.15	8.69	10.13	9.29	7.83	27.78	3.11	8.72

Source ATSB, *Road Fatalities Australia: 2002 Statistical Summary*, p. 15.

Table 2.4 Road Fatalities per 100 million km travelled, by State and Territory, 1976–2002

	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aust
1976	3.70	3.38	3.86	3.20	3.21	3.91	7.96	2.32	3.55
1979	3.50	2.82	3.55	2.98	2.44	3.11	7.45	1.35	3.15
1982	2.92	2.19	2.78	2.45	1.91	2.66	6.16	1.35	2.56
1985	2.33	1.78	2.21	2.19	1.73	1.99	5.40	1.63	2.09
1988	2.06	1.63	2.16	1.72	1.49	1.87	4.75	1.35	1.88
1991	1.44	1.23	1.49	1.43	1.29	2.00	4.60	0.61	1.41
1995	1.27	0.97	1.32	1.33	1.18	1.32	4.23	0.50	1.21
1998	1.06	0.87	0.94	1.20	1.25	1.15	4.65	0.70	1.05
1999	1.04	0.84	0.95	1.15	1.23	1.40	3.00	0.64	1.02
2000	1.18	0.75	0.86	1.26	1.07	0.98	3.13	0.56	0.98
2001	0.89	0.87	0.84	1.01	0.89	1.53	3.29	0.52	0.91
2002	0.92	0.77	0.88	1.04	0.93	0.83	3.21	0.32	0.89

Source ATSB, *Road Fatalities Australia: 2002 Statistical Summary*, p. 15.

Table 2.5 Road Fatalities per 100 000 population by age groups, 1980–2002

	0–16 years	17–25 years	26–39 years	40–59 years	60–69 years	70+ years	All
1980	9.8	51.8	20.7	15.7	47.8		22.3
1985	7.6	43.6	18.0	13.8	38.5		18.6
1990	5.6	29.9	13.5	9.8	12.8	21.8	13.7
1991	4.6	25.7	12.6	8.9	12.0	20.5	12.2
1992	4.4	23.9	11.9	8.1	10.9	17.6	11.3
1993	4.1	23.6	12.2	8.3	10.1	16.0	11.1
1994	4.2	21.8	10.9	8.0	11.5	19.1	10.8
1995	4.0	24.0	12.2	8.0	10.9	17.4	11.2
1996	4.3	22.4	11.2	8.4	10.3	16.7	10.8
1997	3.7	21.2	10.2	7.0	8.6	14.2	9.5
1998	3.7	19.3	9.7	7.6	7.8	15.4	9.4
1999	3.3	20.1	10.8	6.6	10.0	13.6	9.3
2000	3.5	20.7	11.1	7.2	8.1	13.9	9.5
2001	3.0	18.9	10.0	7.3	8.7	13.5	8.9
2002	2.9	18.2	10.9	7.2	7.3	11.5	8.7

Source ATSB, *Road Fatalities Australia: 2002 Statistical Summary*, p. 20.

Table 2.6 Road fatalities per 10 000 registered motor vehicles, by State and Territory, 1980–2002

	NSW	Vic	Qld	SA	WA	Tas	NT	ACT	Aust
1980	5.17	3.35	4.43	3.80	3.93	4.36	13.40	2.84	4.32
1985	3.57	2.80	3.25	3.28	2.81	2.93	9.33	2.58	3.23
1990	2.47	2.07	2.28	2.56	1.89	2.41	8.55	1.64	2.31
1991	2.17	1.81	2.40	2.15	1.95	2.58	8.91	1.08	2.13
1992	2.02	1.47	2.27	1.85	1.85	2.43	6.68	1.21	1.93
1993	1.80	1.60	2.09	2.41	1.88	1.87	5.26	0.69	1.87
1994	1.98	1.34	2.12	1.73	1.85	1.87	4.46	0.93	1.80
1995	1.86	1.46	2.27	1.88	1.78	1.78	6.75	0.82	1.84
1996	1.68	1.37	1.85	1.84	2.02	1.97	7.49	1.22	1.73
1997	1.63	1.21	1.69	1.49	1.55	0.98	6.05	0.86	1.51
1998	1.51	1.23	1.25	1.63	1.68	1.49	6.75	1.13	1.45
1999	1.57	1.17	1.36	1.46	1.62	1.61	4.75	0.96	1.44
2000	1.62	1.23	1.35	1.59	1.56	1.30	4.95	0.89	1.46
2001	1.40	1.34	1.38	1.46	1.20	1.84	4.86	0.79	1.39
2002	1.46	1.16	1.32	1.45	1.27	1.10	5.30	0.48	1.34

Source ATSB, *Road Fatalities Australia: 2002 Statistical Summary*, p. 22.

- 2.14 Evidence presented to the Committee indicated that these national trends were broadly indicative of trends in the various States and Territories. There were, however, a number of issues highlighted by individual States.
- 2.15 In its submission to the inquiry, the Queensland Government noted that the fatality rate in that State had declined from 12.7 deaths per 100 000 population in 1992 to 8.06 deaths per 100 000 population at 30 September 2003. During that time however, the rate of hospitalisations due to road accidents had broadly increased, with the rate of hospitalisations recorded in 2002 up almost 14 per cent on 1992.⁷
- 2.16 A similar trend was evident in data presented by Mr Eric Howard, General Manager, Road Safety, VicRoads. While road fatalities in Victoria were trending down, consistent with the national average, and current fatality rates were below the Victorian average for 1999–2001, the number of serious injuries had risen, and was trending above the average rate for 1999–2001.⁸ A similar trend is also evident in new South Wales.⁹
- 2.17 On the other hand, data presented by Mr Phil Allan, Acting Director, Road Safety, Department of Transport and Urban Planning, South Australia, indicated that in South Australia serious injuries had levelled out in rough proportion to fatalities.¹⁰
- 2.18 In his evidence before the Committee, Mr Howard also highlighted the disparity in fatality rates between metropolitan and country areas. Road fatalities in Melbourne were trending down while those in rural Victoria were trending up. In 2003 road deaths in rural Victoria exceeded those in Melbourne.¹¹

7 Government of Queensland, Submission no. 31, p. 15.

8 Powerpoint presentation by Mr Eric Howard, General Manager, Road Safety, VicRoads, Exhibit no. 4.

9 Australian Automobile Association, Submission no. 18, p. 11.

10 Powerpoint presentation by Mr Phil Allan, Acting Director, Road Safety, Department of Transport and Urban Planning, South Australia, Exhibit no. 5.

11 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 6; Powerpoint presentation by Mr Howard, Exhibit no. 4.

- 2.19 Similar findings were presented by Mr Allan in evidence before the Committee. In South Australia, there has been an increase in rural crashes over the last decade, and a decrease in metropolitan crashes.¹² Between 2000 and 2002, 58 per cent of fatal crashes and 47 per cent of serious crashes occurred on rural roads.¹³
- 2.20 In its submission to the inquiry, the Western Australian Government also noted that more fatal crashes occur in country areas (58 per cent) than in Perth (42 per cent), while more serious injury crashes occur in Perth (62 per cent) than in country areas (38 per cent). In 2002 rates of serious injury and death were greater outside Perth (21.6 deaths per 100 000 population) than in Perth (5.07 deaths per 100 000 population).
- 2.21 Road injuries and deaths in Western Australia are not predominantly a highway problem. Four per cent of serious crashes occur on national highways, 31 per cent on state highways and 65 per cent on local government roads. Over half of fatal crashes occur in roads zoned 70 km/h or less.¹⁴
- 2.22 The submission noted annual death and injury rates of about 200 and 3000 persons per annum respectively in Western Australia, at a cost of about \$1.5 billion annually. It further noted that while Western Australia had the second lowest fatality rate per 100 000 population in 1990, by 1998 it was the second highest. While other jurisdictions had improved their performance Western Australia's had levelled out. Since 1998, however, Western Australia has gradually improved while other jurisdictions have plateaued.¹⁵
- 2.23 Analysis of those being killed and injured on Western Australia's roads revealed:
- the road users most commonly involved in fatal crashes are drivers and passengers, particularly male drivers aged 17 to 59;
 - about 37 per cent of drivers and riders involved in fatal crashes are aged 17 to 24 and about 90 per cent of these are male;

12 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 31.

13 Government of South Australia, *South Australian Road Safety Strategy 2003–2010. Road Trauma: Facts and Figures*, p. 3.

14 Government of Western Australia, Submission no. 37, pp. 4–5.

15 Government of Western Australia, Submission no. 37, pp. 2–3.

- about 30 per cent of those killed are not wearing seatbelts (sometimes in combination with alcohol);
 - the major factors contributing to fatal crashes are drink driving (22 per cent), speeding (35 per cent) and fatigue; and
 - the major factors contributing to severe injury are speed and failure to wear seatbelts.¹⁶
- 2.24 The high incidence of fatalities amongst young males was also an issue in South Australia. Males account for 74 per cent of road deaths in South Australia, a significant proportions of these being men aged between 16 and 30. Overall, the 16–20 year age group accounted for 15 per cent of fatalities.¹⁷

Road Safety Strategies

- 2.25 The National Road Safety Strategy provides the basic policy framework for improved road safety in Australia. Its target, no more than 5.6 road fatalities per 100 000 population is to be achieved through pursuit of eight principal strategic objectives:
- improved road user behaviour;
 - improved safety of roads;
 - improved vehicle compatibility and occupant protection;
 - use of new technology to reduce human error;
 - greater equity among road users;
 - improved trauma, medical and retrieval services;
 - improved road safety policy and programs through research of safety outcomes; and
 - encouraging alternatives to motor vehicle use.¹⁸

16 Government of Western Australia, Submission no. 37, p. 4.

17 Government of South Australia, *South Australian Road Safety Strategy 2003–2010. Road Trauma: Facts and Figures*, p. 4.

18 ATC, *National Road Safety Strategy, 2001–2010*, p. 4.

- 2.26 A combination of education, driver training and enforcement are seen as the keys to improved driver safety, including measures set out under the *National Action Plan for Youth Road Safety*.¹⁹
- 2.27 Improving the safety of roads is seen as the most achievable single factor in reducing road trauma. The Strategy notes that:
- General road improvements have been found to reduce fatalities by two lives per annum per \$100 million invested and provide benefit/cost ratios averaging 3.3. Black spot programs have been found to reduce fatalities by over 20 lives per annum per \$100 million and produce high average benefit/cost ratios of around 4. As these findings were made prior to the estimated annual monetary cost of crashes being revised from \$6 billion to \$15 billion, they are likely to now be conservative. Investment in roads, and especially in black spot programs, therefore offers excellent returns over the period to 2010.²⁰
- 2.28 Improving vehicle compatibility and occupant protection includes designing vehicles that cause less damage to other vehicles and road users in a crash. Four wheel drive vehicles are highlighted as a risk to other road users because of their high mounting and heavy chassis.²¹
- 2.29 Potential technological innovations include devices capable of:
- ensuring that restraints are used;
 - maintaining safe following distances between vehicles;
 - preventing speed limits from being exceeded;
 - controlling cornering response;
 - enforcing license conditions;
 - monitoring driver alertness;
 - performing breath tests before starting a car (e.g. alcohol interlocks); and

19 ATC, *National Road Safety Strategy, 2001–2010*, pp. 5–6.

20 ATC, *National Road Safety Strategy, 2001–2010*, p. 6.

21 ATC, *National Road Safety Strategy, 2001–2010*, p. 8.

- automatically notifying emergency services of location and severity of crashes and number of occupants involved.²²
- 2.30 Targeted strategies are intended for vulnerable road users, such as youth, indigenous people, older people, and residents of rural and remote areas, pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists. There is also a recognised need to improve trauma, medical and retrieval services, especially in rural areas where crash speeds are higher, response times are greater, and medical and retrieval services less well equipped to deal with severe trauma.²³
- 2.31 Research is required to support the national strategy, investigating
- the causes of road crashes;
 - the consequences of road crashes;
 - the effect of existing countermeasures; and
 - the likely effect of potential countermeasures.
- 2.32 Benchmarking will be used to help assess the benefit of road safety measures and promote their adoption across jurisdictions.²⁴
- 2.33 Encouraging alternatives to motor vehicle use has the potential to reduce exposure to road trauma, as well as achieving environmental and health benefits. This requires:
- land use planning that reduces the amount of transport necessary for people and goods;
 - transport planning that integrates transport systems and improves the quality and effectiveness of transport;
 - expansion of telecommuting and other measures that avoid the need to travel; and
 - promoting the benefits of public transport, walking and cycling.²⁵

22 ATC, *National Road Safety Strategy, 2001–2010*, p. 9.

23 ATC, *National Road Safety Strategy, 2001–2010*, pp. 9–11.

24 ATC, *National Road Safety Strategy, 2001–2010*, p. 14–15.

25 ATC, *National Road Safety Strategy, 2001–2010*, p. 14.

- 2.34 It is anticipated that the target of the National Road Safety Strategy, a 40 per cent reduction in road fatalities, will be achieved through the improved safety of roads (19%), improved vehicle occupant protection (10%), improved road use behaviour (9%) and new technology to reduce human error (2%).²⁶
- 2.35 The possible measures to attain the strategic objectives outlined in the National Road Safety Strategy were first outlined in the *National Road Safety Action Plan 2001 and 2002*.²⁷ A range of ‘action areas’ are set out under each objective, and a list of ‘possible measures’ under each action area.
- 2.36 The action areas relating to improved road user behaviour relate to:
- drink driving;
 - use of illicit and prescription drugs;
 - compliance with speed limits;
 - matching speed limits to road conditions;
 - fatigue;
 - use of restraints;
 - deterrence of unlicensed driving;
 - work related road use; and
 - community engagement—local government and schools.
- 2.37 Actions to improve the safety of roads include expansion of the ‘black spot’ program, increased use of road safety audits, and improved road design.
- 2.38 Improved vehicle compatibility and occupant protection is seen chiefly as the province of Australian Design Rules (ADRs) and the Australian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP). Possible measures include using ADRs to increase underrun protection on heavy vehicles and promoting awareness of car safety features.

26 ATC, *National Road Safety Strategy, 2001–2010*, p. 19.

27 ATC, *National Road Safety Action Plan 2001 and 2002*.

- 2.39 Use of new technology to reduce human error centres on encouraging the adoption of Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS) as they become available.²⁸ Improving equity among road users involves developing strategies focused upon groups targeted in the National Road Safety Strategy.
- 2.40 Improved trauma, medical and retrieval services include better training for health professionals, improved first aid training for the general public, improved planning of trauma management systems, and use of technology to enable earlier notification of serious crashes.
- 2.41 Improving road safety programs will involve targeted research to better understand the causes and consequences of serious road crashes and to help develop and assess countermeasures. Possible measures include establishing multi-disciplinary teams to undertake investigations of road crashes taking into account all issues including enforcement, road design and driver behaviour. This objective will also involve improving the process through which State, Territory and local governments learn from each other and from overseas practices.
- 2.42 Encouraging alternatives to motor vehicle use includes two action areas:
- Utilising land-use planning to reduce the amount of transport necessary for people and goods
 - Reducing motor vehicle use through promotion of public transport, walking and cycling.
- 2.43 The *National Road Safety Action Plan 2003 and 2004* briefly reviewed the earlier action plan. It found that the overall effort included the continuation and expansion of many proven road safety programs, as well as the introduction of new initiatives expected to bring considerable safety returns in future years. It also found, however, that there had been slower than expected progress towards the overall target of the National Road Safety Strategy. Factors influencing this outcome included:
-

28 In December 2002, the Committee presented its report investigating the safety and efficiency potential of ITS, with a view to facilitating its implementation. The Government has not, as yet, responded. House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services, *Moving on intelligent transport systems*, Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, December 2002.

- Less improvement than expected in overall compliance with drink driving laws and speed limits;
- Increasing diversity of the vehicle fleet;
- A substantial increase in motorcycle rider fatalities, which was not predicted in earlier estimates;
- Changes in vehicle usage (possibly related to economic factors); and
- Statistical variation.²⁹

2.44 The second action plan is more focussed than the first on specific issues. Critical to its success are actions taken in two key areas—speed management and the safety of roads. Other important focus areas are driver impairment, vehicle improvements, licensing and driver management, and special groups and issues.

2.45 Speed management will focus upon:

- extending integrated publicity and enforcement campaigns geared to maximising compliance with speed limits;
- developing national guidelines to support best practice in speed enforcement;
- continuous (automatic) speed enforcement on high volume roads and other roads with high crash rates;
- detailed monitoring of travel speeds independent of enforcement actions;
- introducing a national urban default speed limit of 50 km/h;
- selective extension of urban speed limits less than 60 km/h (for example, to local shopping precincts, school zones and other areas of high pedestrian activity);
- zoning to lower speed limits on selected rural and urban arterials (with a focus on roads of above average crash risk); and
- education and information programs to support speed management initiatives.³⁰

29 ATC, *National Road Safety Action Plan 2003 and 2004*, p. 10.

30 ATC, *National Road Safety Action Plan 2003 and 2004*, p. 14.

2.46 Road environment actions will:

- provide funding for mass application of proven countermeasures targeting
 - ⇒ high volume roads and road lengths with bad crash records or high-risk characteristics; and
 - ⇒ area-based treatments that meet appropriate selection criteria;
- implement road safety risk assessments in road planning, construction and maintenance;
- eliminate unsafe roadside planting programs; and
- maintain and extend black spot programs.³¹

2.47 Alcohol, other drugs and fatigue are the central focus of approaches to driver impairment. Proposed actions include:

- enhance drink driving deterrence—
 - ⇒ maintain and increase resources for enforcement and public education;
 - ⇒ develop national guidelines on best practice in drink driving enforcement;
 - ⇒ focus on developing more effective programs for reducing drink driving in rural areas;
- implement and monitor alcohol interlock and rehabilitation programs to change the behaviour of repeat offenders;
- develop and evaluate improved drug deterrence measures;
- implement road-based countermeasures to reduce the harm arising from fatigue-related crashes;
- address fatigue through further public education for all drivers on risks, warning signs and preventive strategies; and
- complete and implement the Fatigue Reform coordinated by the National Road Transport Commission (now National Transport Commission) addressing heavy vehicle driver fatigue, and the related Compliance and Enforcement Reform.³²

31 ATC, *National Road Safety Action Plan 2003 and 2004*, p. 16.

32 ATC, *National Road Safety Action Plan 2003 and 2004*, pp. 18–19.

- 2.48 Actions to achieve improved vehicle safety include:
- introduce an ADR for intrusive audible seatbelt warning devices;
 - encourage corporate and individual vehicle purchasers to select safer vehicles, through campaigns to promote awareness of ANCAP safety ratings and used-vehicle safety ratings;
 - mandate display of occupant protection safety ratings on new and used vehicles at point of sale;
 - research vehicle compatibility implications of the increasing diversity of the Australian vehicle fleet, and review potential countermeasures (which could include road-based, vehicle-based and behavioural measures to reduce the frequency or severity of multi-vehicle crashes);
 - complete the development and implementation of the National Heavy Vehicle Safety Strategy;
 - introduce an ADR for underrun protection for heavy vehicles;
 - encourage voluntary uptake of Intelligent Speed Adaptation in both light and heavy vehicle fleets, to increase understanding and awareness of potential benefits.³³
- 2.49 Under licensing and driver management the action plan proposes:
- requiring all drivers and riders to carry their licence and produce it when requested by police;
 - resourcing the use of in-vehicle technology to access on-line licence databases;
 - reviewing sanctions to ensure they maximise deterrence;
 - monitoring safety impacts of mobile phones in vehicles.³⁴
- 2.50 Actions relating to special groups and issues include:
- examining and, if effective, introducing extensions to graduated licensing systems to improve the safety of novice drivers (for example, night time driving restrictions and same-age passenger restrictions, which have been effective in other countries);

33 ATC, *National Road Safety Action Plan 2003 and 2004*, p. 21.

34 ATC, *National Road Safety Action Plan 2003 and 2004*, p. 22.

- implementing frontal identification systems for motorcycles so that automated speed enforcement measures may apply to motorcycles on the same basis as other vehicles;
- completing the development of an International Visitors Road Safety Strategy and commencing implementation of key measures;
- working with indigenous communities to identify and implement locally relevant initiatives that improve road safety outcomes for indigenous people;
- developing an internet-based clearing house to share effective indigenous road safety initiatives amongst stakeholders and communities.³⁵

Implementing the Strategy

2.51 While much of the evidence received by the Committee was supportive of the National Road Safety Strategy and the related Action Plans, there was some criticism directed at the implementation of both Strategy and Plans.

2.52 In its submission, DOTARS acknowledged the slow progress made during the first years of the National Road Safety Strategy, but argued that the target set was still achievable. Indeed, the submission argued that the strategy was still on course:

Uniform progress toward the target would have required a cumulative reduction in the fatality rate of 9.7% after two years (to December 2002) and 14.2% by the end of 2003, relative to the base figure.

The actual cumulative reduction by December 2002 was 6.8%.

In the first nine months of 2003 there were 1188 fatalities. This was 6.9% lower than the same period last year and corresponds to an annualised fatality rate of 7.9. If this rate holds for the remainder of the year, the cumulative reduction will be 14.8%, which would slightly exceed the pro-rata reduction target of 14.2% (a fatality rate of 8.0).³⁶

35 ATC, *National Road Safety Action Plan 2003 and 2004*, p. 24.

36 DOTARS, Submission no. 23, p. 5.

- 2.53 This point was taken up by Mr Kym Bills, Executive Director of the Australian Transport Safety Bureau at the one day forum on 28 November 2003. He noted that there had been a substantial fall in the road fatality rate between 2002 and 2003, and that the rate of improvement was very nearly on course. He told the Committee that ‘this reinforces the view in the current action plan that the target is still achievable’. He admitted, however, that this was very much due to a sharp reduction in fatalities in Victoria.³⁷
- 2.54 In evidence before the Committee, Professor Ian Johnston, Director of the Monash University Accident Research Centre, took a different view. He argued that Victoria’s road toll was down ‘not because it is following the National Road Safety Strategy but because it is doing something different’:
- I am probably going to be a little bit controversial here, because I think the National Road Safety Strategy is fundamentally flawed. Several people have made the point—Ian Faulks [Committee Manager, Staysafe Committee, Parliament of New South Wales] in particular—that much of the road safety responsibility lies with the states. The National Road Safety Strategy does not focus on the areas of national responsibility; its fundamental focus is on the coordination of state and territory action. I am not saying that that is inappropriate; what I am saying is that it misses an enormous number of opportunities.³⁸
- 2.55 Professor Johnston argued that the National Road Safety Strategy should focus on three objectives:
- National leadership.
 - National harmonisation (laws, signs, markings).
 - Integrated State/Territory programs.

37 *Transcript of Evidence*, pp. 3, 6.

38 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 52.

2.56 He continued:

The first element really is national leadership in the areas where the federal government has the accountability. The vehicle area and the roadside safety standards on national highways are the two that I think are really underperforming. The second element of a national road safety strategy is the national harmonisation. There is a fair bit in there. We have to have the same laws, signs and markings around the country. The third bit is the integrated programs.³⁹

2.57 Looking at the implementation of the Strategy and related Action Plans, the Australian Automobile Association (AAA) noted in its submission that despite the anticipated contribution of safer roads to reductions in the fatality rate, 'only relatively minor initiatives in this area have been made'. The exception was South Australia. The submission continues:

It is worth noting that the NRSAP 2001–02 assumes that future Government funding for *safer roads* would be maintained in real terms. AAA is concerned that Commonwealth and State Governments have not been increasing investments so as to match the 2002–02 investments in real terms, and therefore, are now effectively spending less on roads.⁴⁰

2.58 The AAA argues that Commonwealth outlays on roads, for example, were lower in real terms in 2002–03 than in 1996–97, despite the introduction of new programs.⁴¹

2.59 The AAA noted little evidence of commitment by way of new initiatives on the part of governments to improve vehicle occupant protection or introduce new technology to reduce human error, despite the role of these objectives in anticipated reductions in the road toll. Only in the area of improved road user behaviour had a number of new programs been introduced.⁴²

39 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 55.

40 AAA, Submission no. 18, p. 14.

41 AAA, Submission no. 18, p. 14.

42 AAA, Submission no. 18, pp. 14–15.

2.60 A similar point was made by Professor Johnston, who noted that Australia was ‘considered a leader internationally, but we are considered a leader only in behavioural control measures’.⁴³ He felt that we were deficient in a number of other respects, especially roadside safety standards. ‘There is an opportunity for the federal government to lead in that respect.’⁴⁴

2.61 With regard to the National Road Safety Strategy, the AAA submission concluded:

It is interesting to note the uniformity with which some programs have been introduced across the States. Programs such as 50km/h speed limits on urban roads, more speed and red light cameras, more audible tactile pavement markers, tougher penalties and increased enforcement, graduated licensing schemes and alcohol interlocks have all been introduced by a number of states.

This comparison is by no means comprehensive in terms of road safety programs being undertaken in Australia. There are many programs, at the Commonwealth, State and Local Government levels that were underway, such as Black Spot Programs, and these have continued since the launching of the NRSS. Nevertheless, it does appear that the implementation of new programs aimed at reducing road trauma has been inconsistent and therefore less effective than predicted.

Unless substantial efforts are made to fulfil the objectives of the new NRSAP 2003–04, and in particular improve the safety of roads, then the prospect of reducing Australia’s fatality rate by 40% by 2010 is going to become increasingly difficult to achieve.⁴⁵

2.62 The Committee supports the view that it is the responsibility of the Commonwealth Government to provide national leadership, not least by setting an example to other jurisdictions in its areas of responsibility. Clearly, this leadership must include setting benchmarks in areas such as vehicle design and the construction and maintenance of national highways.

43 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 52.

44 *Transcript of Evidence*, p. 55.

45 AAA, Submission no. 18, pp. 14–15.

- 2.63 The Committee believes that national leadership must also involve setting benchmarks more generally and ensuring that all jurisdictions are moving in similar directions at a satisfactory pace. This will necessarily involve Commonwealth agencies being conversant with the latest developments in every jurisdiction and ensuring that innovations in one jurisdiction translate into best practice nationwide.

Recommendation 1

- 2.64 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government, in its road safety planning:**

- **set best practice benchmarks for all road safety activities;**
- **sees that these benchmarks are incorporated into future National Road Safety Action Plans; and**
- **directs funding to those jurisdictions which comply with the best practice benchmarks so defined.**

- 2.65 In its submission, the AAA was also less than sanguine about the Strategy's progress:

In 2002 there were 1,725 fatalities as a result of crashes on Australia's roads. This represented a fatality rate of 8.75 per 100,000 population. While it is pleasing to note that this is the lowest rate recorded in the past decade and continues the downward trend, it is still above that which might be expected if the target is to be achieved. If we assume that the 40% reduction target is to be met by a simple linear rate of reduction over the eleven years to 2010, then we would expect that by 2002 the national fatality rate would be 8.29, not 8.75. Admittedly, there will always be variations around the trend, but the fact that the national fatality rate is now 'behind target' suggest that even greater gains (and efforts) will have to be made in the ensuing years.⁴⁶

46 Australian Automobile Association (AAA), Submission no. 18, pp. 9-10.

- 2.66 The AAA was also concerned about the focus on fatalities rather than serious injuries in the National Road Safety Strategy, a concern already noted in this report. Citing figures from New South Wales, the AAA found that while there had been a substantial improvement in the injury rate from the mid 1970s to the early 1990s, the recent plateau in the fatality rate seems to have coincided with an increase in the injury rate. ‘This highlights the point that focussing solely on fatality rates might prove to be misleading, and ultimately detrimental for road safety.’⁴⁷
- 2.67 This was an issue also highlighted by the Queensland Government in its submission. It noted the need to focus on injuries as well as fatalities, but noted several impediments to compiling injury statistics:
- Jurisdictions are reliant on police reports. As such, some hospitalisations such as those resulting from bicycle–vehicle crashes may not be included in police reports due to the uncertain nature of these types of crashes.
 - There is no nationally consistent coding of injuries, and as such, injury levels are not coded in the same way across jurisdictions. Furthermore, road crash data are often not linked between jurisdictions.
 - The hospitalisation category while including catastrophic injuries also includes less serious injuries, such as those referred for observation. This makes the definition of serious injuries more difficult, and also makes it difficult to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of countermeasures on serious injuries.⁴⁸
- 2.68 The dangers in using fatalities as the principal indicator of road safety was highlighted in the 2004 year book of the Australasian College of Road Safety, *Road Safety Towards 2010*. In an article entitled ‘Plotting Progress for Road Safety Development’, Ann Williamson of the NSW Injury Risk Management Research Centre, University of New South Wales, highlighted the fact that improvements in fatality trends could disguise the real level of road trauma as indicated by injury statistics. With regard to heavy vehicles she noted:

47 AAA, Submission no. 18, p. 10.

48 Government of Queensland, Submission no. 31, p. 16.

An analysis of the contribution of heavy vehicles to road safety in NSW ... showed that based on fatal crashes there has been no change in rates for heavy trucks. Based on injury-related crashes however, there has been a significant increase in crashes per registered heavy truck ... The analysis also showed increases in this period for injury-related crashes per kilometre travelled especially for crashes where the truck was the vehicle judged at fault. We could conclude, if only looking at fatality data, that crashes involving heavy trucks are not a major road safety problem and that these crashes are more to do with other vehicles than the trucks themselves, but analysis of non-fatal casualty crashes gives a different picture. There are a lot of them and they cost a lot.

2.69 Similar problems were identified in regard to pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists:

Analysis of pedestrian, bicycle and motorcycle crashes across Australia also showed different patterns between fatalities and injury crashes ... Bicyclists accounted for only two percent of road fatalities compared with pedestrians who accounted for around 15 percent of road fatalities. On the other hand, bicyclists and pedestrians accounted for similar proportions of road-related serious injuries, especially in 2001 (hospitalised for at least one night). Using only fatality information, therefore, we could conclude that pedestrian injury is considerably more important than motorcycle and bicycle injury, but the serious injury statistics would lead to a different conclusion, with motorcycle injury being placed first.⁴⁹

2.70 The Committee is in full accord with the argument of the Queensland Government that comprehensive and nationally consistent injury statistics are vital to understanding the impact of road safety measures. The Committee believes the collection of such data should be made a priority in the next National Road Safety Action Plan.

49 Ann Williamson, 'Plotting Progress for Road Safety Development', in Australasian College of Road Safety, 2004 Year Book, *Road Safety Towards 2010*, p. 6.

Recommendation 2

- 2.71 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ask the Australian Transport Council to:**
- **incorporate the collection of comprehensive and nationally consistent road accident injury data in the next National Road Safety Action Plan; and**
 - **incorporate targets for reducing serious road injury in the *National Road Safety Strategy, 2001–2010*.**
- 2.72 One of the fundamental problems with the Strategy identified by the AAA was that the Action Plans ‘do not list any accountabilities, timelines or anticipated outcomes. They represent a list of suggestions that may or may not be implemented’:
- The latest action plan, NSRAP 2003–04, released in December 2002, has clearly acknowledged that greater efforts need to be made by all parties yet does not include any details of the accountabilities of State or Commonwealth Governments to implement these activities. Subsequently, the action plans do not represent a nation-wide commitment to reducing road trauma in Australia and will be unlikely to do this unless the process changes.
- 2.73 The Queensland Government felt that the priority areas adopted in the Action Plan for 2003–04 offered a better targeted and more appropriate approach to road safety management than the more general platform laid out in the first Action Plan, and supported the retention of the six targeted action areas in future action plans.⁵⁰
- 2.74 The AAA argued that the Commonwealth should ‘lead by example and clearly show their commitment to road safety by stating which actions they will implement and by when’. The AAA also believes the Commonwealth should work to encourage each State and Territory to do likewise.⁵¹

50 Government of Queensland, Submission no. 31, pp. 8–10.

51 AAA, Submission no. 18, p. 15.

- 2.75 The Committee is in full accord with the need for accountability for all actions in all jurisdictions. Only in this way can the commitment of governments and the success of National Road Safety Action Plans be effectively measured. The Strategy and Action Plans should be subjected to regular review and audit.

Recommendation 3

- 2.76 **The Committee recommends that the Australian Government ask the Australian Transport Council to implement a comprehensive system of targets, timelines and accountabilities in future National Road Safety Action Plans and that each new Plan incorporate a more comprehensive review of its predecessor than presented in Plans to date.**

