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Warrumbungle Shire Council

Submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety (Staysafe)

Warrumbungle Shire Council appreciates the granting of an extension of time in order to make a submission to this Inquiry.

Our submission addresses each of the terms of reference in turn.

The impact of speed limits and travel times on driver behaviour and safety

Regional areas of Australia account for 55% of road crash deaths.

The rate of road crashes is 9.6 per 100,000 people in regional Australia compared with 2.2 per 100,000 in major cities.¹

For the period 2016-2020, in the Warrumbungle LGA, speeding is listed as the cause of casualties in 34% of crashes compared to 28% in Western NSW and 17% in all of NSW.²

In terms of degrees of crashes, 37% of crashes are fatal or serious injury compared to 27% in Western NSW and 22% in all of NSW.³

A number of roads in regional areas, with Warrumbungle being no different, are undivided, single carriageways with poorer surface conditions and design and increased hazards such as straying animals and roadside obstructions such as vegetation which are a legacy of lower road standards.

The default speed limit for these roads typically applies (100km/h).

73% of fatalities in regional areas were the result of run-off road and head-on crashes.⁴

Other contributory issues in regional areas include:

- Fatigue, often as a result of longer journey times
- Limited access to public transport
- Drivers not driving to conditions.

There are some road treatments that can be employed to reduce these risks such as:

- Audio tactile line markings
- Wire rope and other barriers
- Median treatments including widening centrelines or safety barriers
- Shoulder widening
- Improved protection of hazards on curves.

Obtaining funding for some of these treatments is not always easy. One of the issues is that evidence of crash history is often difficult to demonstrate because a number of non-injury accidents are not reported.

Not all councils in NSW have access to a Road Safety Officer who can drive some of these safety initiatives because it requires 50/50 funding.

¹ [Factsheet: Regional road safety | National Road Safety Strategy](#)

² [Crash and casualty statistics - LGA view - Interactive crash statistics - Statistics - NSW Centre for Road Safety](#)

³ [Crash and casualty statistics - LGA view - Interactive crash statistics - Statistics - NSW Centre for Road Safety](#)

⁴ [Factsheet: Regional road safety | National Road Safety Strategy](#)

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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. *That the Local Government Road Safety Program be expanded to ensure that every council has access to a Road Safety Officer to better resource their road safety planning and development of network safety plans.*
2. *That the Inquiry consider simplified processes for regional councils to access safety improvement funding.*

The impact of improved vehicle technology and road infrastructure

Recent years have seen a significant improvement in vehicle technology from anti-lock braking and electronic stability control to adaptive cruise control, automatic emergency braking, blind spot alerts, lane departure warning, reversing cameras, driver and passenger airbags, self-tensioning seat belts and so on.

Road infrastructure improvements include improved crash barrier systems, signage (including improved real time information about road conditions such as delays, weather conditions etc.), road markings, street lighting and improved frangibility of roadside poles and other structures.

According to data from the [National Road Safety Strategy](#), road user deaths have dropped by more than 20 per cent over the past decade, as both passive and active safety technologies have improved.

In the near future autonomous vehicles and intelligent transport systems have the potential to significantly improve road safety. A national approach is required to ensure consistency across Australia.

It is likely that priority will be given to metropolitan areas where potentially greater benefits can be realised however there is the opportunity to make significant improvements to road safety in rural and remote areas with longer travel distances, fatigue issues and limited public transport.

NSW Government has established a facility in Orange with the capability to test new and emerging technologies.⁵ It is hoped that there may be opportunities to expand this testing with pilots or trials on regional roads.

RECOMMENDATION

3. *That the Inquiry advocate for Regional NSW to be included in the roll out of new technologies and infrastructure improvements such as autonomous vehicle testing.*

The use of variable speed limits

Currently variable speed limits are used in a limited number of situations such as on motorways and bridges.

They are used to “achieve and maintain optimal network traffic conditions, with minimal delays and congestion to provide an appropriate balance between safety, mobility and amenity on public roads.”⁶

Variable speed limits are also used at school zones where speed limits are reduced at school times to reduce the risk to pedestrians especially children.

⁵ [Cudal facility open for testing - Research - NSW Centre for Road Safety](#)

⁶ [Variable speed limit signs](#)

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It can be argued that the use of variable speed zones could be expanded where particular conditions could permit the prevailing speed limit to be changed.

While motorists are always required to drive to the conditions, there are situations where an explicit speed change may be required.

For example, in parts of rural Victoria, when vehicles approach a highway from a side road, they trigger sensors which reduce the speed on the highway from 100km/h to 70km/h.⁷

There may also be situations where say a 70km/h speed limit through a rural village could be changed to 100km/h between the hours of say 11pm and 5am when the roadside activity that warranted the 70km/h speed limit no longer applies.

With smart sensors and connected infrastructure there is scope for greater use of variable speed limits in appropriate circumstances.

RECOMMENDATION

4. *That the Inquiry recommend that TfNSW explore the expanded use of variable speed limits especially in rural/regional areas.*

Any other related matters

Heavy vehicle safety

The Oxley and Newell Highways traverse the Warrumbungle Shire and serve as key inland freight routes from Melbourne to Brisbane. In addition, there are a number of strategic regional routes providing access for the transport of sheep, cattle and grain products.

Consequently, the percentage of heavy vehicles on the road network is high relative to other areas.

Approximately 18% of all road crash deaths involve a heavy vehicle.⁸ While heavy vehicle crashes are less prevalent than other vehicles, their greater mass contributes to more severe crashes with the other vehicle suffering the worst of the impact.

There are a number of actions that can be taken to improve the safety of roads with a high percentage of heavy vehicles such as the provision of overtaking lanes at regular intervals and the provision of adequate heavy vehicle rest stops to address fatigue.

Council appreciates the recent improvements in passing lanes on the Newell Highway however there is still more work required.

Communications and Connectivity

Being able to call for help in the event of an accident can sometimes mean the difference between life and death. Low traffic volumes in regional areas (which means fewer opportunities to seek help from a passing motorist), combined with poor connectivity, mobile phone black spots and distance from emergency services can translate into a serious situation in the event of a serious injury crash.

While the Commonwealth Mobile Black Spot Program has made some inroads into addressing this issue, there is a lot more work to be done and it is important that this program continues to be funded.

⁷ [Side road activated speed signs \(arrb.com.au\)](http://arrb.com.au)

⁸ [National Road Safety Strategy 2021-30](#)

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There are a number of outstanding black spot locations in the Warrumbungle Shire area that need to be addressed.⁹

RECOMMENDATIONS

5. *That the Inquiry recommend that TfNSW continue their program of construction of passing lanes on key freight routes.*
6. *That the Inquiry recognise the importance of communications and connectivity and the need to be able to call emergency services in the event of an accident.*
7. *That the Inquiry advocate for the ongoing funding and rollout of the Mobile Blackspot Program.*

Warrumbungle Shire thanks the Inquiry for the invitation to make a submission.

Resolved by Council on 21 July 2022.

⁹ [Mobile Black Spot Database](#)

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