

# Integrating Safe System principles into Road Safety Auditing

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## Abstract

On 21 February 2019, Austroads released an update to the Guide to Road Safety (AGRS) Part 6, which is now called Managing Road Safety Audits. The current guide remains for now as Part 6A, but where there is any contradiction, the new Part 6 takes precedence.

Key new items in the guide relate to the duties when engaging auditors, the duties when undertaking road safety audits, and the duties of road transport authorities.

## Background

On 21 February 2019, Austroads released an update to the Guide to Road Safety (AGRS) Part 6, which is now called Managing Road Safety Audits. The current guide (Austroads 2019b) remains for now as Part 6A, but where there is any contradiction, the new Part 6, which provides guidance on the procurement, management and conduct of road safety audits, takes precedence. It aims to:

- inform practitioners new to road safety audit principles and concepts (especially project clients and project managers) and encourage the conduct of audits and other assessments to maximise their benefits
- ensure practitioners are aware of up to date operating environments and contexts (e.g. the Safe System approach to road safety), and recent developments in predictive risk assessments.

The Guide emphasises the responsibilities of road and transport agencies and key players such as project managers, project sponsors and auditors to maximise alignment with Safe System principles by integrating them into the road safety audit process. This can be achieved by:

- relating possible crash forces to tolerable levels of the human body when identifying hazards and assessing fatal and serious injury risks
- categorising road safety audit findings and/or treatment options by their Safe System alignment

Key items that practitioners need to note (Austroads 2019a) are as follows:

## Engaging auditors

Key duties include requirements to:

- Ensure that the Auditors have adjusted their approach to reflect this new guidance
- Be absolutely sure that the Auditors are completely independent of the project (Section 4.1.2)
- Be sure the Auditors to be engaged understand the Safe System approach (Section 4.1.1)
- Ensure the Audits are comprehensively considering Safe System principles (Section 3.3 and 3.4). This should be done by either:

- Getting a Safe System Assessment undertaken at an early stage of a project and providing that to the Audit team; or
- Ensuring the Auditors are following a process whereby they clearly demonstrate how findings and recommendations align with Safe System principles.
- Ensure there is a process for closing out audit findings and recommendations (Section 4.5).

### **Undertaking Road Safety Audits**

Key duties include requirements to:

- Make sure the person undertaking the audit understands the Safe System approach to road safety and how it relates to infrastructure (Section 4.1.1)
- Apply Safe System principles in the audit process (Section 3.3). This should be done by:
  - Relating possible crash forces to tolerable kinetic energy levels, regardless of the likelihood, when identifying hazards and assessing Fatal and Serious Injury risks; and
  - Categorising RSA findings and treatment options, if provided, by their alignment with the Safe System (Primary, Step-Towards, Supporting or Non-Safe System).

### **Road Authorities**

Key duties include requirements to:

- Have a documented Road Safety Audit policy (Section 2.4)
- Be absolutely sure that Auditors are completely independent of the project and have no potential conflict of interest (Section 4.1.2)
- Put in place systems to record and monitor Road Safety Audit outcomes (Sections 4.6 and 4.7)
- Embed Safe System thinking into your organisation (Section 4.8)

### **Discussion**

This radical shift from traditional road safety audit practices will require some existing road safety auditors to acquire familiarity with Safe System principles and their application. Comparing the old and new guides highlights where the new guide will lead to improved safety outcomes. Both practitioners and those intending to contract practitioners to undertake an audit should be aware of these changes so as to ensure that any work that is undertaken is compliant with the new guidelines.

### **References**

Austrroads 2019a Guide to Road Safety Part 6: Managing Road Safety Audits  
Available at: <https://austrroads.com.au/publications/road-safety/agrs06>

Austrroads 2019b Guide to Road Safety Part 6A: Implementing Road Safety Audits  
Available at: <https://austrroads.com.au/publications/road-safety/agrs06A>