

The NRMA – ACT Road Safety Trust: A Road Safety Success Story

by Eddie Wheeler, Secretary/Manager of the Trust

The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary defines 'prevent' as to '*stop or hinder*'. It goes on to define 'success' as '*accomplishment of what was aimed at*'.

By any definition the evidence clearly demonstrates that the NRMA – ACT Road Safety Trust has been a high achiever in reducing the potential for crashes in the ACT and region. To understand the unique role the Trust plays in road safety in the ACT it is necessary to trace its history.

The Trust was established in 1992, as a statutory public charitable trust with its principal objective *to enhance road safety for the benefit of the ACT road-using community*.

Additional objectives include:

- promote and stimulate research on road safety and implementation of accident and injury counter measures, especially in the area of accident prevention;
- encourage and promote the education of the ACT road-using community; and
- assist in the care and rehabilitation of persons injured or traumatised as a result of road accidents.

A Board of five honorary part-time Trustees administers the work of the Trust. These comprise an independent Chairperson, two representatives appointed by NRMA Insurance and two by the ACT Government. The Secretary/Manager manages the day-to-day affairs. The Trust normally meets three times during the year and conducts its activities completely independently of both the ACT Government and NRMA Insurance, while maintaining excellent relations with them.

The initial funding source for the Trust was a sum of \$10 million made available by NRMA Insurance Ltd as a result of surplus third party premiums arising from lower than expected compulsory third party insurance claims. Wise investment strategies resulted in an amount of \$12 million becoming available for allocation to road safety initiatives.

The Period 1992 to 1998

While the enabling legislation had no sunset clause, the Trust was established on the understanding its original funding would eventually expire and its work complete. The 'old' or 'original' Trust allocated its \$12 million funding between 1992 and 1998 to some 110 wide-ranging initiatives including four 'Landmark' projects viz:

- A perpetual Chair of Road Trauma and Emergency Medicine at the Canberra Clinical School at a cost of \$3.5

million. This position has been occupied by Associate Professor Drew Richardson since November 1998;

- The *Road Ready* novice driver education program introduced into the ACT in 2000 at a cost of \$2 million;
- An Independent Living Unit Complex for acquired brain injury patients many of whom are victims of road trauma at a cost of \$799,000; and
- A Prolonged Care Cottage for the National Brain Injury Foundation, which cost \$750,000.
- These 'Landmark' projects were seen as substantial and long-term beneficial legacies to the ACT region.

The 'New' Trust

With the original funding of \$12 million fully committed the Trust was expected to cease operations by the end of 1998. However, the introduction of a Road Safety Contribution by the ACT Government raised in association with motor vehicle registration fees provided the Trust with a new funding source. This \$2 levy is matched by NRMA Insurance and gives the Trust some \$600,000 annually for road safety initiatives.

While the work of the Trust continues to be underpinned by the annual grant program, Trustees have been proactive on a number of fronts. Six universities with established credentials in road safety research have accepted a Trust funded Postgraduate Research Scholarship. The aim of the scholarships is to encourage innovative and substantial research into road safety and its value puts it at the top end of available scholarships. Already three high quality students have been approved to undertake research and the remaining scholarships are expected to be awarded later this year.

Offering postgraduate scholarships to selected interstate research institutions is in keeping with the Trust's recent decision to advertise nationally for research proposals under its Grant Program. It is still the Trust's preferred option that its funded research be undertaken within the ACT - with the benefits shared nationally. Clearly the ACT already benefits from other funded research and the Trust believes the selective commissioning of research outside the ACT increases the opportunity for benefits to flow back into the Territory.

Road safety does not end at the ACT border. A commissioned report by the ARRB Group released by the Trust in May 2005 was a sobering reminder of the extent of road trauma ACT motorists/passengers are involved in interstate. It reaffirmed an earlier study's findings that speed and fatigue are issues for ACT drivers when undertaking a journey outside Canberra.

The Trust has forged a strong partnership with the ACT and Region Chapter of the Australasian College of Road Safety. With the Trust providing the necessary funds, a number of very successful seminars have been staged in recent years. The National Museum of Australia was the venue for seminars on Speed and Drug Driving while Professor Claes Tingvall from

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Sweden delivered a compelling address on Vision Zero at the CSIRO Discovery Centre. This partnership will continue to provide opportunities to discuss topical road safety issues. It is also worth noting that the establishment of the Head Office of the Australasian College of Road Safety in Canberra was made possible by a Trust grant of \$209,000 in 1994.

Victoria's Transport Accident Commission (TAC) is another eminent organisation with which the Trust has established strong links. TAC's reputation for producing powerful and persuasive road safety messages is well established and the Trust is fortunate in being provided access to its range of material. As a result, the Trust has funded the showing of the award-winning short film *Anything in Hoyts* cinemas prior to the feature film. Further funding is allowing the current showing of the film *Harsh Reality*. Both films target risk taking behaviour by young drivers and have been widely lauded in Victoria. The speed reduction commercial 'SloMo' is another in the stable of TAC resources the Trust has shown to effect on local television.

The ACT has a well-established reputation for being in the vanguard of road safety innovation – a reputation aided and abetted by Trust initiatives and funding. The Road Ready novice driver program is an excellent example and it remains the envy of other jurisdictions. The Mature Aged Skills Training for Experienced Riders (MASTER) course developed by the ACT Motorcycle Riders Association (MRA) and heavily subsidised by the Trust is another example of innovation attracting interest from interstate.

The MASTERS course was the subject of a presentation by the MRA at the 2005 Australasian Road Safety Research Policing Education Conference in Wellington New Zealand, where it attracted numerous inquiries. With the death of eight motorcyclists on ACT roads in 2005, the range of motorcycle safety initiatives currently being funded by the Trust under its Grant Program is timely.

Assessment of Success

Since it was established in 1992, the Trust has committed \$16.3 million to 260 innovative road safety projects. Many of these initiatives such as assistance to Kidsafe to purchase additional baby capsules for their loan scheme have an immediate and tangible impact. Others such as road safety campaigns on television and in the cinema are more difficult to measure but undoubtedly increase road safety awareness in the community. Clearly the pay-off in relation to many Trust-funded initiatives resides in the future and the extent that attitudes and behaviours are changed.

The potential for the Trust's successes to be realised in the longer term was confirmed in an independent evaluation of the Trust's first six years of operation by Dr Michael Henderson, a leading road safety consultant and the then Chairman of the Australian Advisory Committee on Road Trauma. Dr Henderson concluded that 'the cost of the

Trust's activities has been returned in value to the ACT community and many project outcomes will be realised in the long term'. There is little doubt the work of the Trust in the intervening years since Dr Henderson made that comment would reaffirm its continued veracity.

The National Road Safety Strategy aims to achieve a forty percent reduction in the number of fatalities per 100,000 population in the period 2001-2010. The Strategy adds that the "target will require strenuous effort by all parties involved in road safety..." For its part, the Trust will continue to work with the Department of Urban Services, the Australian Federal Police and the community to ensure the ACT makes its contribution towards this national goal.

The Australian Concise Oxford Dictionary defines 'optimism' as having a hopeful disposition. The continued work of the NRMA – ACT Road Safety Trust in the community gives genuine cause for optimism in relation to the future prospects of road safety in the ACT.

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Safe and Mobile: Introductory Studies in Traffic Safety

Now in its third reprint, this manual was written for students in tertiary courses in Traffic Safety at Australian Universities and in Police Academies. The text is recommended also for specialists working in Traffic Safety who wish to become more familiar with broader issues in this multidisciplinary profession.

The contents and authors are as follows:

- The Past: Hit and Miss (Jennifer Clark, University of New England)
- The Driver: The Psychology of Road Safety (R F Soames Job, University of Sydney)
- The Vehicle: Automotive Engineering (Chris Coxon, SA Department of Transport)
- The Environment: Road Engineering (Peter Moses, Consultant, Western Australia)
- The Environment: Transport Economics and Planning (Michael A P Taylor, University of South Australia)
- The Environment: Traffic Management (Angus Witherby, University of New England)
- The Future: Whither Traffic Safety? (Colin Grigg, Consultant, New South Wales)

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