

education; health care providers; automobile associations; educators; students; insurers; vehicle manufacturers; the media and victims of road traffic crashes and their families. But a strong commitment at the political level is crucial. Today's success stories often result from a decision at the highest level of government to improve safety on the road.

Advocating Global Road Safety

By Lori Mooren, Principal Consultant, Fleet and Road Safety, ARRB Group Ltd

The spate of youth road fatalities that we have seen in New South Wales in the last quarter of 2006 represents tragedies that no community should have to bear. These are made all the more tragic to those of us who know how these kinds of events can be prevented. There are evidence based solutions.

In Australia we have influenced significant change in community and political attitudes in favour of road safety in recent times. But somehow, we as a road safety “profession” have not entirely convinced the global – or even the Australian community – that it is best to choose safety intervention over “personal freedom” or other socioeconomic benefits.

Within the Australasian College of Road Safety, we have debated to what degree we should be a community advocate versus a professional support organisation. For a while, many of us took the conservative view that we should work towards a strengthening of our members' skills and knowledge before we embark on public advocacy. This has been a sensible approach. But increasingly, we are finding a role in ‘advising’ community leaders on some key issues. We have established a series of policy positions on major road safety issues based on our collective knowledge base. Beyond this we have organised seminars and forums for public discussion as well as responded to questions by media organisations.

In doing this we must not forget that road safety is a political issue. Many of the things that help to prevent road trauma present costs to the community. Whether it be in economic or social terms, the people and governments that represent them must make choices about doing things that will produce both beneficial and costly consequences. So the question becomes “are the restrictions that governments impose in the interest of road safety going to be acceptable to community.”

Over the past 3 or 4 decades we have seen quite marked shifts in Australian community attitudes with regard to road safety measures. The most significant shift we have seen is the support for random breath testing and the growing social disapproval of driving while under the influence of alcohol. Less so, but definite, has been the shifts in attitudes toward the problem of speeding. There is far more public demand for

Through the World Youth Assembly for Road Safety – the key global event of the First United Nations Global Road Safety Week – the World Health Organization, UN Regional Commissions and their partners are giving a voice to young people. Let us listen to their advice. And let us improve safety on the world's road, for their sake and for ours.”

speed enforcement now than there ever has been. These shifts in favour of road safety measures have come about as a result of deliberate road safety campaigns that have combined public education with other interventions, most importantly enforcement and penalty increases.

Even more so, governments in developing countries are making more or less deliberate choices about whether or not to embrace road safety as a community priority. Even in countries that have ten times the road trauma levels that we have in Australia are seemingly more committed to rapid road development than to address the rapidly growing incidence of road fatalities. The logic appears to be that rapidly growing economies need to rapidly develop road infrastructure to meet the demands of this activity. And this growth will reduce poverty quicker, which in turn improves the health, and indeed the life expectancy of the people.

How sadly ironic. Both sides of the argument have a point. However, the reality is that the rush to reduce poverty is in effect resulting in an exponential growth in road deaths. We are also learning more about how road death and injury contributes to poverty – of families and of communities.

There have been a few studies that have begun to demonstrate this. And at macroeconomic levels road crashes consume 1-2% of national gross domestic products. Studies that demonstrate the links between poverty and road injury are needed to help governments to make more informed choices in the development of public policy and in the management of community resources.

“Every 3 minutes a child dies on the world's roads.”
The Commission for Global

Road Safety, chaired by Lord Robertson (former UK Cabinet Minister) uses these kinds of words to implore governments, especially the G8, to take action now to reduce this tragedy. Thus the sponsor, FIA Foundation, is embarking on a global campaign to draw attention to this issue.



In China alone someone dies every 4– 5 minutes in a road crash. Globally 3,000 people die every day. It is conservatively estimated that 1.2 million people die each year on the world's roads. An additional 20-50 million more people are seriously injured every year. Moreover, road fatalities and injuries are predicted to increase by 67% by the year 2020

Yet huge social costs have been imposed in the form of increased air travel security following the so-called 9/11 event that killed equal to the daily road toll as a one-off, while relatively little concerted effort is made to address road deaths.

Beyond the Commission's work, Ambassador Al-Hinai, Oman's Permanent Representative to the UN, has advocated a more proactive approach to addressing the problem of road injury. This has raised awareness to the issue and built stronger political will to do something. As a direct result of these efforts, the United Nations held two historic meetings on April 14th and 15th 2004, resulting in the UN General Assembly passing resolutions committing member States to collectively pursue a more active approach to road safety.

While there hasn't been a resounding groundswell of greater public commitment by the G8 nor indeed of any of the UN members, some agencies have made efforts to improve their support for road safety. For example, the World Bank has established a "facility" for financing road safety programs and projects. The Fleet Forum was also established with the purpose of guiding UN agencies for road safety improvements amongst their own staff and contractors who deliver humanitarian aid to remote communities using dangerous roads. And the Danish Government through DANIDA have financed a pilot fleet safety project.

So advocacy does work. We need to guard against complacency and remember to keep finding ways of pushing road safety onto the public agenda.

But there are enormous challenges of advancing road safety:

- in countries where police are corrupt or ill-equipped to enforce traffic regulations,
- in countries that are so rapidly developing economically that there is an intense rush to build big high-speed roads – at any cost,
- in countries that have vehicle fleets of 1960s standards in terms of occupant safety (including an absence of seatbelts),
- in countries where a small motorbike is the family vehicle, and
- in countries where government agencies don't have the skills and knowledge that good performing countries have developed over the past few decades.

The practical challenges are big. The technical challenges of building capacity and adapting good practices from good performing countries are also sizeable.

Collaboration members, the WHO, GRSP, the FIA Foundation and the World Bank, are producing a series of good practice

'how to' manuals for low and middle income countries. ARRB in partnership with the TRL (UK) and VTI (Sweden), is currently working on the speed management manual. The helmets manual is currently being introduced through workshops in a number of Asian countries. Separately the FIA Foundation is financing a pilot international Road Assessment Program (iRAP), which gives roads safety ratings (with stars – similar to NCAP). And the World Bank Facility is financing a number of other initiatives, including one to build a good practice global network of traffic police.

But the political hurdles to engendering a strong commitment to road safety are enormous. This is why advocacy is an important part of road safety.

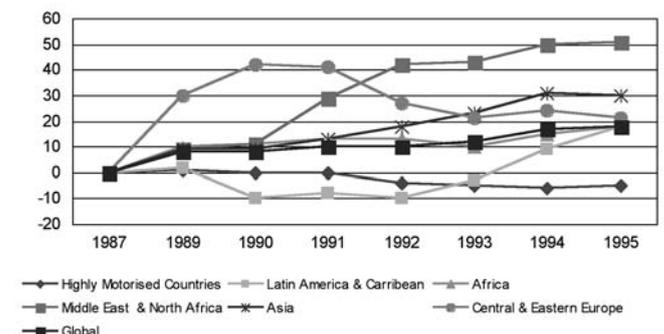
During the recent meeting of the UN RS Collaboration many lamented the lack of action in response to all of our efforts to stimulate some commitment by global leaders and infrastructure financiers, like the World Bank, regional Development Banks and bi-lateral donors, including AusAID. But as one participant pointed out, the countries themselves have got to be encouraged to call for this kind of assistance. We can't just rely on financiers placing conditions on funding agreements to ensure that road safety gets incorporated into projects.

Perhaps the Australasian College of Road Safety can play a role in this challenge. A number of individual road safety researchers and practitioners have approached us to join or link with us somehow. The GRSP is also interested in how we could assist in guiding others in the Region to set up a membership based organisation to advocate good road safety practice.

The College, with its broad skill and knowledge base as well as the energy and commitment of its members is well placed to take part in global good practice road safety advocacy.

More broadly, Australia has a role on the global stage. Australian jurisdictions, despite our shortcomings in road safety, have led the world in some very important advances and achievements over the past few decades. We need to continue to lead by example. We can also offer our experience, both positive and not so, to help others in the world to expedite the development and implementation of strong road safety programs.

The first Global Road Safety Week, 23-29 April, 2007, with a focus on youth, presents an opportunity for us to showcase our achievements in road safety. It also presents an opportunity to spearhead some actions to address youth road safety as well.



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 www.makeroadssafe.org
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Curbing Roadside Hazards

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Introduction

In 2004 the ACRS published “ Road Safety Towards 2010” – a compilation of expert views on what was needed to achieve the National Road Safety Strategy (NRSS) target of a 40% reduction in the road crash death rate by 2010. By the time the review was published, the road death rate had been trending downwards and was only slightly above the pro-rata target. Many contributors to the review, while noting the need to maintain the effort to improve safety, were cautiously optimistic. Now however, three years since the College review was published and with four years remaining in the national strategy, the task of achieving the national target is more daunting than ever.

Road deaths in 2006

During 2006, 1,605 people were killed in road crashes, which is 22 (1%) less than in 2005, but 22 (1%) more than the 1,583 deaths that occurred in 2004– when the College review was written. The improvement in 2006 over the 2005 result was led by South Australia, with 31 (21%) fewer deaths, the Northern Territory with 13 (24%) fewer deaths and the ACT also with 13 (50%) fewer deaths. Notably, the 2006 result in South Australia was 19 fewer than the previous low of 136 deaths, recorded in 1953.

As shown below in Figure 1, reductions were also recorded in Victoria and NSW. Unfortunately Western Australia, Queensland and Tasmania each recorded more deaths in 2006 than in 2005. The increase in Western Australia of 40 (25%) deaths is particularly concerning.

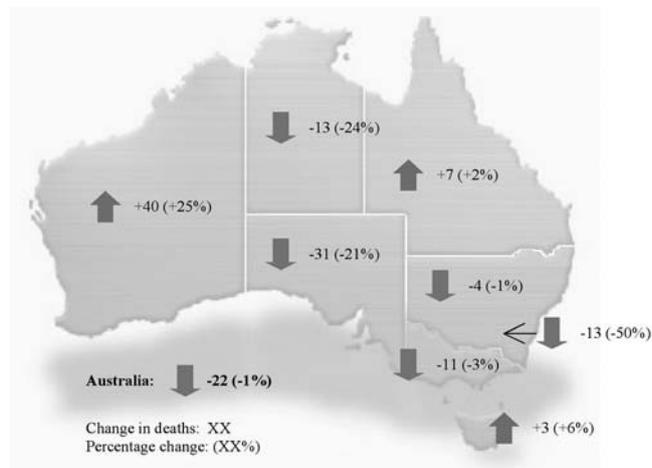


Figure 1 Change in road deaths between 2005 and 2006
 Source: Australian Transport Safety Bureau Fatal Road Crash Database

A step backward

By December 2006, the national death rate per 100,000 population was 7.8. Although this is an improvement on the rate of 9.3 at the beginning of the Strategy, it is actually higher than the January 2005 rate of 7.7. That is, during the past two years the national road fatality rate has gone backwards. The effect of this is that since the start of 2005, the gap between what would be expected if we were on target and the actual death rate has grown, as shown below in Figure 2.

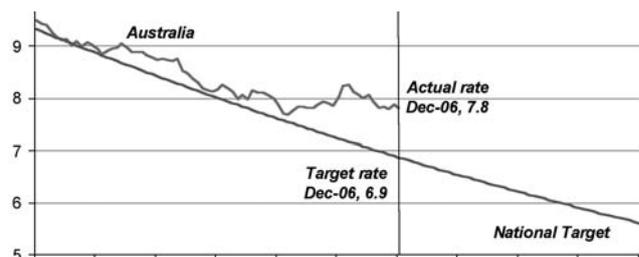


Figure 2 National road death rate versus National Road Safety Strategy target (deaths per 100,000 population)
 Source: Australian Transport Safety Bureau