

The College invited a wide range of road safety stakeholders to give their views on what the National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020 should look like. The following pages present their responses.

Views from the ACRS, ACRS Chapters and Individuals

Let's grab this Leadership Opportunity!

By Ian Johnston AM, Adjunct Professor, Monash University Accident Research Centre

Australia has come a long way since the peak road crash death rates of the late 1960s and early 1970s. The gains in safety have outstripped the increases in road use to such an extent that the absolute numbers of deaths and severe injuries have also fallen dramatically. In 2008 the number of deaths was less than half what it was in 1970, almost 40 years ago!

There are many reasons for these gains. One fundamental reason is that as the number of vehicles and road users climbed inexorably so the road, traffic management and licensing systems evolved to better match the demand. Similarly, once vehicle safety design took hold in the late 1960s, progressively safer vehicles have been produced; initially increasingly more crashworthy and more recently through excellent crash prevention initiatives such as ESC. And we have certainly led the motorised world in the use of legislation and innovative enforcement to manage the highest risk behaviours – seat belt laws, helmet wearing laws, random breath testing, speed cameras, etc.

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Importantly, however, we have come to think differently about road safety. We have abandoned the “blame the victim” mindset which led us to an initial over-reliance on legislation, regulation, enforcement and public education to control what was perceived to be widespread wanton, or at least negligent, misbehaviour. At least conceptually, if not yet operationally, we have come to embrace the Safe System philosophy through which we accept that people are human and will make mistakes and that system designers and operators must accept front-line accountability for producing a road transport system in which no-one behaving legally will be killed or seriously injured.

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Equally importantly we began to plan our interventions in a scientific, evidence-driven way and to understand the

significance of effective implementation. Road safety strategic planning is less than 20 years old and we are still learning how to do it properly. The best practice planning model involves explicit identification of the relatively small number of critical problems, the comprehensive identification of all known, effective interventions for each problem and the modelling of the likely outcomes from a range of packages of those identified interventions which are politically feasible, with the modelling taking into account a range of potential resource levels.

Having a strategy and an action plan is one thing, achieving implementation is quite another. The keys to success can be summed up in the four Cs:

- **Constituency** – unless the public demands action, appropriate resource will not be applied. In Victoria, for example, each of the new programs introduced in 1970, in the period around the mid 1970s, in the mid 1980s and in the early 2000s followed public “outrage” at apparent, dramatic increases in death totals
- **Commitment** – without political will from the top, success must be limited. The outstanding demonstration is in France which went from laggard to best practice within three years after the President personally intervened
- **Cooperation** – road safety is institutionally very complex with the actions of numerous agencies impacting upon progress. Without meaningful cooperation integrated packages of measures cannot be successfully applied.
- **Coordination** – the necessary bedfellow of cooperation, coordination is vital to integration and synergy across institutional efforts.

It is instructive that the latest work out of Europe on how to measure road safety progress recommends three indices – one based on upon policy performance (eg the quality of the strategic and operational planning and the political will); one based upon implementation performance (eg process indicators like resource applied); and one based on more conventional safety outcome measures (eg deaths and injuries) with the three linked causally in a chain from policy to outcome.

And this is where we must focus in developing Australia's next national road safety strategy and action plans. While

acknowledging the importance of past national strategies we must now:

- Develop a best practice approach to formulating the strategy rather than what appears in the past to have been a compromise document that caters for policy and cultural differences between jurisdictions. In short, the national strategy should be a model that puts the light on the hill. It should follow the example of the recently announced WA strategy which put an evidence-driven set of options – based upon resource assumptions - out for public debate, irrespective of supposed community and political reaction. Bureaucrats should not attempt to act as community or political filters. Each jurisdiction will continue to develop its own strategy and the concept of a national model is the most appropriate.
- Stop assuming that a “one size fits all” strategy is necessary. Australia is not homogeneous in its safety issues – metropolitan, regional and remote area safety problems differ and we need a strategy for each. Action plans will then logically follow the range of strategies.

- Increase the focus on the true nature of the problems, particularly crash types such as single vehicle run off road and intersection collision, rather than placing our total dependence upon the conventional approach of seeking to change macro-behaviours such as drink/drug driving, speeding, fatigue, etc.

Place a special focus on what the Commonwealth can do in an action plan of its own. Recognise that much of the system design and operational performance accountability lies with individual jurisdictions and recognise that there is much the Commonwealth can do by way of its leadership position. Some examples include specifying safety features in its public service vehicle purchasing policy; modelling safe driving policies and practices as part of its “corporate” leadership and encouraging major national corporations to do likewise; develop appropriate and transparent performance monitoring processes; help develop a stronger public constituency for road safety, particularly in regional and remote areas; promote the development and implementation of innovative safety projects that would hasten the adoption of a Safe System approach in practice. With the right mind-set many more initiatives can be conceived during the planning process.

A Role for the College (ACRS) in a Decade of Road Safety

The following is an edited section of a proposal being considered by the ACRS prepared by Greg Smith ACRS College member.

The College was established in 1988 as an association for people and organisations working in road safety. The College values experience as much as academic qualifications in its members, who come from a wide range of disciplines. These include traffic engineers, epidemiologists, road trauma specialists, researchers, driver trainers, enforcement agencies, policy makers, transport manufacturing industries, motoring associations, insurance companies and many others who have a stake in road safety.

The College aims to foster communication, cooperation and support among workers in road safety; to disseminate information on road safety and traffic education; to encourage community groups to work for the reduction of the road trauma; to encourage the professional assessment, evaluation and monitoring of road safety programs and to promote those most effective in reducing road trauma.

The College has a range of activities; national conferences and seminars, visiting lecturer programs, regional chapter programs such as local seminars, forums and guest lecturers, makes submissions to governments on road safety issues and promotes best practice in all facets of road safety.

The College can have a key national role in developing and extending the capacity of its members in delivering a national road safety strategy. A strategy developed with the support and commitment of the College members will build long term



competence to assist the community in the understanding of a safe system approach.

As the safe system develops and efforts are increasingly made to turn theory into practice, and as international and national issues play out, the role of the College will potentially become more important in providing the opportunities for those involved in road safety to share knowledge and experiences.

Trying to find the best information can be challenging and time-consuming. To address this issue, the College is considering the development of an online road safety portal that would become a first port-of-call for good road safety practice in Australia.