

Draft

**Submission to the Staysafe (Joint Standing
Committee on Road Safety) Inquiry into heavy vehicle
safety and use of technology to improve road safety**

March 2018

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Introduction

Local Government NSW (LGNSW) is the peak body for local government in NSW, representing all NSW general purpose councils and related entities. LGNSW facilitates the development of an effective community based system of local government in the State.

LGNSW welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry concerning heavy vehicle safety and other road safety related issues. Our submission highlights recent policy positions advocated as part of our submission to the Draft NSW Future Transport 2056 and NSW Road Safety Plans, and at our 2017 Annual Conference.

This submission is in draft form until it is considered by the LGNSW Board. Any revisions made by the Board will be forwarded in the form of an updated submission.

As the road manager for the 164,000km local and regional road network, about 90% of the NSW road network by road length, local government has a direct interest in and responsibility for the safety of drivers, passengers, riders and pedestrians using that network.

In managing this network, councils must balance the needs of a diverse range of road users including local residents, heavy vehicle and freight industry operators, work and business travellers, school students, people with disabilities and tourists.

LGNSW acknowledges the importance of freight transport for productivity and economic development in national, regional and local contexts. However, improving freight efficiency through extending access to local roads or greater use of higher productivity heavy vehicles does not always provide optimum outcomes for local communities. Councils and communities are concerned about the negative impacts on local road infrastructure, road safety and amenity.

LGNSW believes that a local government road safety strategy is required to better focus and target the specific road safety challenges facing councils in managing their local road network. This would also include the identification of specific assistance to address road safety priorities and other related measures such as behavioural programs within local communities.

Most of the Inquiry's terms of reference relate to technologies, upon which LGNSW has little comment. Our concerns are with the issues that affect safety on the local government road network, particularly funding.

Local Road Network/Funding Needs

According to the Centre for Road Safety, 49% of road trauma related accidents occur on the local road network. There is particular concern about the increases in road accidents in rural and regional areas of NSW, with 67% of fatalities in 2017 occurring on country roads.

There is a funding maintenance and upgrade backlog facing local government across the state. Councils in NSW face an infrastructure renewal backlog of \$6.3 billion and an annual renewal gap of \$650 million¹. Both the Australian and NSW governments have increased spending on roads in NSW, including funding for black spots, safer roads programs and the local government road safety program, but more assistance is needed from both federal and state governments to specifically address the local road network, including to address issues relating to the freight task and heavy vehicle traffic.

¹ Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia NSW Roads and Transport Directorate, 2014, 2014 Road Asset Benchmarking Report, accessed November 2017, <https://www.ipwea.org/roadtransportdirectorate/aboutrd/new-item/assetbenchmarkingproject>

There are fundamental differences in the local road network that require unique treatments and responses to address road safety issues. The Draft Transport Strategy and Road Safety Plans focus on strategies that readily apply to the state road network but do not recognise that state roads and local roads have different problems requiring different solutions. Local government has limited resources and access to funding; there is a relatively wide geographic spread of accident locations across the network; more heavy vehicles mean growing physical impacts on infrastructure and on community road safety; and road use demand is rising.

While LGNSW has welcomed the Government's recent announcement of a new \$125 million Saving Lives on Country Roads program, we believe there is ample justification for a matching \$125 million to specifically address road safety outcomes on the council managed local and regional road network.

Heavy Vehicle Issues

LGNSW acknowledges the importance of freight transport for productivity and economic development in national, regional and local contexts. Local government's primary interest in freight comes from the responsibilities for its local road network, which for most councils, especially in regional areas, is the single largest item of expenditure. The local road network is a significant component of the national and state transport system totalling in NSW some 164,000 km, or about 90% by length of all roads in the state. This local road and bridge network has an asset value of \$51.9 billion (\$17.4 billion in metropolitan Sydney, \$34.5 billion in regional areas²). Most of this road network is particularly vulnerable to the impacts of heavy freight traffic.

The benefits of increased freight movements to the national and state economies, to the freight and logistics industries and to their customers do not flow automatically through to councils in terms of increased revenue to address the impact incurred by growth on the roads themselves, particularly in a rate-pegged environment which exists in NSW. These impacts include direct road and bridge infrastructure damage or deterioration exacerbated by heavy vehicle traffic, and the potential for on-road conflict with other road users.

Councils need new funding mechanisms to be able to share in the productivity improvements accruing to the heavy vehicle and logistics industries through use of higher-productivity vehicles and other transport efficiency gains. This would provide councils with a means to deliver the road upgrades that these vehicles require to use local roads.

LGNSW is not able to comment on the management of heavy vehicle driver fatigue and other safety risks through in-vehicle technologies.

Improved Data Collection

LGNSW welcomes access to more comprehensive road accident data on the basis that this more accurate level of reporting would ultimately ensure the flow of road safety related funding and resources to local roads.

Collaborative partnerships and Road Safety Strategic Plans

Existing road safety strategies could better address fundamental issue of collaborative partnerships, and offer more engagement opportunities to councils in road safety policy

² NRMA, 2017, Funding local roads, Recommendations to clear the infrastructure backlog", Accessed November 2017: https://www.mynrma.com.au/-/media/documents/reports-and-sub/dcg-7365-local-road-funding-paper_final_low-res.pdf?la=en

formulation. Road safety is a shared responsibility. Overall, existing plans focus on what Transport for NSW and RMS will do as opposed to what the road safety practitioners and engineers across all road authorities in the state need to be doing.

The adoption of the safe systems model is a sound choice for long term strategy to drive road safety in our community. The 'safe system' approach to road safety involves an integrated and holistic view of the road transport system and the interactions between road infrastructure, roadsides, travel speeds, vehicles and road users. However, this approach must involve the State Government fully engaging with councils and assisting them to imbed appropriate local-government-specific road safety/safe systems considerations in their road, asset and integrated planning strategies.

A closer partnership between state and local government can be fostered in this area to provide the necessary support and tools to assist councils in developing local road safety strategic plans in consultation with their communities. Funds should be allocated to incentivise councils' engagement in road safety planning and actions, and specifically provide local government with training and resources to identify, plan, and strategically manage road safety outcomes effectively in their respective areas.

As well as the overarching Road Safety Plan 2021, The Centre for Road Safety has also developed specific road safety strategies and action plans for Aboriginal communities, pedestrians, cycling, and motorcycle segments of road users. Local government believes that a similar local government road safety strategy is required to better focus and target the specific road safety challenges facing councils in managing their local road network. This would also include the identification of specific assistance to address road safety infrastructure priorities and other related measures such as behavioural programs within local communities.

Local Government Road Safety Program

The Government has recognised the importance of the Local Government Road Safety Program (LGRSP), however, a clear strategy is required on how government will promote, support, reinforce and fund this program in the long term. The continuation of this Program is significant to local government as it allows for the provision of Road Safety Officers (RSOs) in councils. RSOs do a commendable job working with local communities, engineers, planners and other stakeholders to address road safety issues, especially behavioural related factors. Their continued presence will be instrumental to better road safety outcomes.

Enforcement activities

Numerous councils in rural and regional areas of NSW participate in regional Council Weight of Loads Groups (WOLG) as part of their asset protection and safety strategy. These groups are located in north-east, north-west, mid-west, mid-north and south-east regions of the State.

The primary objectives of WOLGs are to:

- ensure that heavy vehicles using both council managed local roads and state roads are complying with statutory loading requirements;
- to enforce mass/load limits and reduce wear from heavy vehicle overloading;
- to promote road safety, by encouraging heavy vehicles to comply with weight regulations on local and classified roads; and
- educating truck drivers on safe and legal loading practices.

LGNSW supports this important initiative. It is a cooperative partnership with Roads & Maritime NSW, and its focus on enforcement activities on local roads is welcome.

Connected and automated vehicles technology and electric vehicles

The emerging and transforming technologies associated with connected and automated vehicles have implications for councils as road managers. While it is expected that these changes will have road safety benefits, local government must be included when the Commonwealth and State Governments and industry consider the policy, infrastructure and legislative changes that will be required, especially the implications for the local road network. At the recent Australian Local Government Association National Local Roads and Transport Congress in Western Australia in November 2017 delegates discussed the need to more fully explore the implications of technology and intelligent transport on local government and communities and indicated support for council participation in trials of the new technology.

Conclusion

Road safety is a major issue for local government and requires additional resources and funding from the Commonwealth and State Governments to turn alarming statistics around.

With some 49% of the road trauma occurring on local and regional roads, specific strategies are needed to achieve enhanced road safety outcomes on this network.

The growing freight and heavy vehicle task is placing particular pressure on council roads from infrastructure impact and broader community safety perspectives.

While LGNSW has welcomed the Government's recent announcement of a new \$125 million Saving Lives on Country Roads program, we believe there is ample justification for an additional \$125 million to specifically address road safety outcomes on the council managed local and regional road network.

LGNSW advocates that a local government road safety strategy is required to better focus and target the specific road safety challenges facing councils in managing their local road network.

If you have any questions in relation to this submission, please contact Richard Connors, Senior Policy Officer - Roads and Transport, on 02 9242 4073 or richard.connors@lgnsw.org.au.