

Roderick Katz PhD


23 July 2021

Road Safety in Tasmania
Attn: Mr Tim Mills
VIA EMAIL rst@parliament.tas.gov.au

Dear Sir / Madam,

RE: Inquiry into Road Safety in Tasmania

Congratulations for holding this inquiry. In my opinion it is overdue. The Tasmanian road system has a relatively poor safety performance.

Road crashes have horrendous costs for people injured and the many people affected by the injuries and deaths on Tasmania's roads. These go beyond physical and into psychological and economic costs.

I am making this submission as an interested party based on:

1. A general interest in road safety including being on the ACT Road Safety Board and having a special interest in the safety of vulnerable road users
2. Being the father of a daughter who has moved to Hobart at the start of 2021 to commence a career as an engineer with The Hydro; and,
3. Having made a number of trips to Tasmania over the years and observed some of the difficulties facing the jurisdiction when it comes to creating a safe road system.

There are a number of things about the road environment that strike the visitor to Tasmania that may be simply accepted by those who live there as being part of the decor. These include:

General transport planning

Considering the size of the cities, urban congestion in Tasmania is quite bad. Commuting is very much dominated by car travel and the traditional solution to congestion seems to have been to expand numbers of lanes and minimise motor vehicle delay at intersections. The legacy of this planning approach

has been cities that are relatively unattractive and hostile to people taking public transport, walking, riding or scooting as well as the elderly and the young.

Generally, Tasmanian roads have poor provision for people walking and riding bicycles. It seems to be assumed that if people want to participate in these activities they can drive somewhere and enjoy one of the many fantastic trails Tasmania has to offer. While that is true for some, it fails to take advantage of the transport efficiency of active travel.

Walking and cycling are not well integrated into urban centres nor planned for within major road infrastructure. The frankly terrifying experience of trying to walk or, particularly, cycle across the Tasman Bridge epitomises the poor consideration for active travel.

Recommendations for urban planning:

- The approach to urban planning needs to have a greater consideration for road safety. All levers at the government's disposal should be considered including:
 - Mandates for new infrastructure to include excellent provision for walking and cycling. It needs to go beyond token signage or lane marking.
 - Developer contributions to ensure that new developments have plans in place to encourage active travel
 - Retrofitting a high standard network of active travel routes through Hobart and Launceston. This would allow these cities to benefit from the recent popularity of devices such as e-bikes and e-scooters. Increasing the mode share of these devices would reduce the safety burden on others.

Vehicle Fleet

The Tasmanian vehicle fleet is on average the oldest in Australia (13.3 years versus 10.6 years for Australia as a whole) (<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/industry/tourism-and-transport/motor-vehicle-census-australia/latest-release>). Some of this may be as a result of the mix of vehicles including the high proportion of camper vans and rigid trucks in Tasmania. Nevertheless, the age of the fleet has an impact on road trauma. This is through both collision avoidance and survival - older vehicles are not equipped with the active and passive features of modern vehicles such as Autonomous Emergency Braking (AEB) or driver and passenger protection.

Outside the urban centres, Tasmania's roads are dominated by large 4WDs, trucks, camper vans and vehicles towing caravans. These large mass vehicles pose a real conundrum for those concerned about safety. The only way to address this is to reduce the usage of these vehicles, and their speed.

Recommendations on fleet:

- Government fleet purchases should
 - Preference the smallest suitable vehicle
 - Meet current ANCAP 5 Star safety ratings
 - Include e-bikes for all departments located in urban centres
- Use economic incentives to change the vehicle mix and usage in Tasmania.
 - Registrations should be increased for all large mass vehicles.
 - Introduce a usage charge (per km) for larger mass vehicles
 - Discounts on registration for vehicles that meet ANCAP 5 Star safety ratings
 - Consider a congestion charge for vehicles entering the city centre in Hobart and Launceston. This could be scaled according to size and weight of the vehicle.

Speed

Speed limits in Tasmania are often inappropriate for a Safe System (the safety framework broadly adopted by Australian Road authorities).

Driving outside major centres in Tasmania is often a terrifying experience as there is a pressure (evidenced by tail-gating) to drive at or above the set speed limit. These limits themselves are too often at an inappropriately high 100 km/h. This is an unsafe speed given road-side hazards, poor road shoulders, presence of wildlife, poor sight lines, lane widths, surface quality, weather conditions, driver skill, vehicle age, performance and mass etc..

If there was one thing that would produce safety benefits in the short term it would be reducing speed on Tasmania's roads via a general reduction in default speed limits in urban and rural areas.

There have traditionally been political objections to changing speed limits but there needs to be a recognition of the cost of the trauma on Tasmanian roads. A government that fails to act to reduce speeds in Tasmania is in dereliction of its duty of care to its citizens.

This inquiry should recommend lower default limits and a combination of behaviour change strategies including encouragement and coercion (enforcement and engineering) to reduce speeds.

Recommendations:

- Reduce the default rural speed limit to 80km/h (70km/h on gravel roads)
- Reduce the default urban speed limit to 40km/h
- Identify urban areas where a speed limit of 30km/h is appropriate
- Introduce a campaign before the changes come into place explaining why Tasmania needs to take action on safety.
- Design and implement an encouragement and enforcement campaign in support of speed reductions.
- Introduce engineering interventions to reduce speed and conflict including through vertical deflection devices such as wombat crossings.

Thank you for considering this submission. I would be willing to assist the Inquiry should you have questions.

Sincerely yours,



Rod Katz