

Legislative Council Select Committee
Via: Mr Tim Mills
Inquiry Secretary
Parliament House, HOBART 7000
Email: rst@parliament.tas.gov.au

Dear members of the Select Committee

Inquiry into Road Safety in Tasmania

Thank you for your initiative to conduct an inquiry into road safety in Tasmania, and for opening your inquiry to submissions from the public.

I am sure you will receive many submissions on a range of issues. I would like to make recommendations to your inquiry on **four** issues that might otherwise be neglected.

1. Autonomous vehicles – making Tasmania’s roads suitable for the 21st Century

The future of driving is almost certainly autonomous vehicles. There are a number of hurdles to jump – both technological and regulatory – before that becomes a reality, but one only has to look at the investments being made by the major car companies, and the trials being conducted overseas and in Australia, to see the trends.

The push towards autonomous vehicles will inevitably come from commercial interests such as trucking companies, delivery companies and taxi companies. However, increasingly it will come from elderly people, people with a disability, foreign tourists and others who will expect and demand equal access to the convenience that a motor vehicle offers – and under conditions of maximum safety.

The technology is not quite there yet, and it is important to moderate the messages coming from techno-enthusiasts, but autonomous vehicles hold the promise of significant safety benefits. Despite the best efforts of road safety authorities, using both carrots and sticks to change the behaviours of motor vehicle drivers, it is clear that those behaviours are resistant to change. People are demonstrating through their actions that they expect to be able to text while commuting, they expect to have a few (or many) drinks before commuting, they expect to be able to watch a YouTube video while commuting (or even an entire movie), they expect to be able to go ‘just a little bit’ over the speed limit, and they expect to be able to get behind the wheel when sleepy, when medicated, when ill etc.

These are the expectations people have in the 21st Century and, to a greater or lesser degree, all of them are understandable. Driver education and/or stiff penalties will have limited impact if they go against strongly held expectations. Significant progress in road safety, as opposed to marginal changes, will therefore come from taking the human driver out of the equation.

As we go deeper into the century, the safety of drivers, their passengers and other road users should no longer depend on people’s ability to turn wheels, push peddles, flick indicator levers etc much as they did a hundred years ago.

However, if autonomous vehicles are to become a reality, we must have the roads of the 21st Century too. This involves not only the width of roads and the number of lanes, but also the technology involved in ‘smart’ signage, lights and other road infrastructure that allows vehicles to communicate with the infrastructure and each other.

As we move towards this future, Tasmania should not find itself in a position where autonomous vehicles are being adopted around the world, but we have to wait 10, 20 or 30 years for our road-building plans to catch up.

I draw to the Committee’s attention the coverage of this issue in the media¹ and I commend to the Committee the work of the Australian Driverless Vehicle Initiative and their submission to the NSW Future Transport Technology Roadmap and other processes.²

Austrroads, a collective of the Australian and New Zealand transport agencies representing all levels of government, has released a series of reports that examine the readiness of Australian and New Zealand highways and freeways to support automated vehicles.³ These reports make a number of recommendations including in relation to:

- adding edge lines, lane lines and centrelines to roads that do not have them
- ensuring these lines have good contrast with the road surface and are regularly maintained
- revising electronic speed signs so they can be easily interpreted by machine vision systems.

As the Austrroads statement accompanying the release of the reports says⁴:

Vehicle automation on highways is expected to lead to improved road safety and significantly reduced risk of accidents, vehicle emissions and driver workload.

I would add to this that vehicle automation will need to go beyond just highways if it is to deliver its full potential and already autonomous vehicles are being trialled and tested on suburban and rural roads around the world.

Recommendation 1:

Relevant Tasmanian agencies should start now to adopt standards – based on best national and international practice – in all its road-building and road upgrade plans that will equip Tasmania’s roads for autonomous vehicles.

2. Motorcycles and scooters – making Tasmania’s roads safe for riders

Motorcycle and scooter riders are significantly over-represented in Tasmania’s road trauma figures.⁵

¹ For example, www.abc.net.au/news/rural/2021-06-27/driverless-trucks-australia/100241248

² <https://cdn-adv.s3.ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/ADVI-Response-TfNSW-FTT-Roadmap-3.pdf>

³ <https://austrroads.com.au/latest-news/how-ready-are-australasian-roads-for-automated-driving>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ For the figures, see Towards Zero—Tasmania’s Road Safety Strategy 2017–2026’ at www.towardszero.tas.gov.au

Other states have investigated how to make roads more motorcycle and scooter-friendly and have come up with sensible recommendations and guidelines. A good example is the December 2014 report by Vic Roads: 'Making roads motorcycle friendly: A guide to road design, construction and maintenance'.⁶

The issues identified in the Victorian report apply equally to roads in Tasmania, including the hazards posed by:

- Crack sealant creating slippery patches
- Road grooving in the direction of traffic flow
- Slippery metal utility covers
- Utility covers that are not flush with the road surface
- Slippery pavement marking
- Loose surfaces
- Obstructed view created by roadside vegetation.

Some issues, however, may be unique to Tasmania. But, to my knowledge, no similar comprehensive report establishing measures that should be taken to make Tasmania's roads more motorcycle and scooter-friendly has been produced.

Tasmania's 'Towards Zero Action Plan 2020–2024'⁷ does list as an action that the government will 'conduct motorcycle road safety audits', but it does not say what are the criteria that the audits will examine. In the absence of a report like the Victorian one, it is unclear what factors the audits will take into consideration. Also, according to the Action Plan, these audits will only be conducted on 'touring routes' in rural areas. It is not clear why motorcycle road safety audits would not be conducted on city streets and other areas which Tasmanian riders use every day.

Furthermore, I cannot find any published results of audits conducted so far or any program for future audits. The Action Plan says the government will 'work with the motorcycling community ... to identify innovative treatment options.' I can find no process in official websites for how the government has engaged, or will be engaging, with the motorcycling community. I have not been consulted nor, to my knowledge, has the registered riding club I am a member of been consulted.

Recommendation 2(a):

Relevant Tasmanian agencies should investigate and publish a comprehensive report (drawing on interstate reports as well as coronial reports, road traffic investigations and academic studies) on best practice in road design, construction and maintenance for motorcycle and scooter-friendly roads as the basis for the motorcycle road safety audits promised in the Towards Zero Action Plan 2020-2024

Recommendation 2(b):

The responsible agencies should publish the results of motorcycle road safety audits conducted, the actions taken as a result of the audits, the program of future audits, and the process for consultation with the motorcycle and scooter communities on the audits.

⁶ www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/-/media/files/technical-documents-new/miscellaneous-guidelines/making-roads-motorcycle-friendly.ashx

⁷ www.towardszero.tas.gov.au

3. Food delivery riders – taking action before tragedy

Food delivery riders are an increasingly common sight on Tasmania's roads, particularly in the cities. The riders face insecure working conditions and are often recent migrants with little or no protection by unions or other representative organisations. Safety standards are inconsistent or inconsistently followed and enforced. Workers compensation provisions are uncertain and avenues for complaint are limited.⁸

Following several deaths of food delivery riders in other states, inquiries have been conducted with a view to improving the safety and working conditions of these riders. Examples are the NSW Joint Taskforce on Food Delivery Safety⁹ and the federal Senate Select Committee on Job Security's inquiry into On-demand Platform Work in Australia.¹⁰

However, no such inquiry has been conducted in Tasmania and, to my knowledge, the Tasmanian Government has taken no action to review and implement the recommendations of inquiries in other states.

We should not have to wait for a tragic road accident (or a series of accidents) involving food delivery riders in Tasmania before we take action.

Recommendation 3:

The Tasmanian Government should commission an independent public inquiry into factors affecting the safety of food delivery riders in Tasmania, taking into account experiences and inquiries in other states.

4. Pedestrians – making Tasmania's footpaths safe and useable for all users

Many of Tasmania's footpaths are unsuitable for people with disabilities. Even in the city centres, the footpaths of many roads are too narrow, or the pavement is broken up, or they are interrupted by tree roots, or cars are parked over them, or they lack gutter crossings. What's more, they are often blocked by wheelie bins on bin night and the following day (or several days). All of this makes them unsuitable for people on mobility scooters, forcing them to navigate the margins of the road. This is not only inconvenient, but also places them in danger.

Similarly, many footpaths and traffic signals are still not designed with the needs of visually impaired or hearing-impaired users in mind.

⁸ A recent example of the media reporting is: www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2021/jun/27/call-for-federal-regulator-for-australias-gig-economy-after-sixth-delivery-rider-death-revealed

⁹ www.nsw.gov.au/media-releases/new-laws-to-drive-safety-outcomes-gig-economy

¹⁰ www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Job_Security/JobSecurity

Belinda Binns of Newnham wrote the following to the Examiner newspaper on August 9 2021:¹¹

In the wake of numerous stories published in The Examiner, expressing the need for better accessibility for people in wheelchairs in local Launceston areas, I too would like to make a pledge for better access to pedestrian footpaths.

I am also wheelchair bound living with cerebral palsy.

I have been a resident of the Newnham area for some 20 plus years.

None of the footpaths are completely flat making it somewhat unsafe to travel on fully.

There are times where you just can't travel safely on the footpaths so you ride your chair as close to the gutter or ride in the bike lane.

Police have indeed stopped me as well for not riding on the footpaths, but it's too unsafe not to. The wider community just thinks that people with disabilities have in-home services and services should be responsible for all of our needs.

We who live with disabilities have lives outside of care – we too like to get out and about. We have a life just like the rest of the locals. With numerous falls from my chairs I almost never go alone in case of a fall happening.

One way to fix the issue I say is to bring back wheelchair licenses and registration like you had when I was a teen before it faded out. At least we can legally ride on the road (bike lane) where it's flatter and safer for everyone who regularly tries to navigate unsafe footpaths as a wheelchair user.

The City of Launceston 'Access Framework for Action 2020–24' refers to Greg who lives on a farm outside Launceston:

Once in town, he has a favourite coffee shop he would like to visit independently and he would like to be able to have lunch with his wife occasionally. As Greg uses a white cane for his primary method of navigation, he finds the uneven footpaths, lack of tactiles and insufficient audible pedestrian crossings a barrier to his independent mobility.

Dave Asten, whose wife Carmel uses a wheelchair said:¹²

I've nearly tipped Carmel out of wheelchairs when they've caught on a gutter crossing. ... I'm an engineer and I know civil engineers can do better with their standards.

Ask one of them to sit in a wheelchair and see if you as a general manager can take your mayor, comfortably without upsetting the wheelchair, into a toilet, into a public building, into a tourist resort.

¹¹ www.examiner.com.au/story/7375650/we-who-live-with-disabilities-have-lives-outside-of-care/

¹² www.abc.net.au/news/2016-09-29/tasmanian-council-leaders-challenged-to-tour-towns-in-wheelchair/7887662

Even the then mayor of Glenorchy Kristie Johnson said she had tried to get around her town in a wheelchair as part of the council's disability awareness training.¹³

It was a very difficult exercise ... We went in Northgate ... we went down the main road and it certainly gave me a new appreciation of the difficulties people face all the time.

Recommendation 4:

The relevant government departments should be asked to prepare, in consultation with councils and other authorities, a plan for making Tasmanian footpaths and other road infrastructure suitable for pedestrians with disabilities – in line with the best national and international standards – and they should be required to report to Parliament each year on the percentage of the road infrastructure that meets these standards.

Thank you for considering this submission and its recommendations. I am available to appear before the Committee if required.

Rajan Venkataraman
Sandy Bay
Tasmania

¹³ Ibid