

## Submission to the Inquiry into Road Safety in Tasmania

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Mr Tom Mills  
Inquiry Secretary  
Parliament House, Hobart  
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Dear sir

I provide this submission by request and on the basis of my experience, knowledge and qualifications gained as a former police officer with Tasmania Police for nearly 40 years and having retired on 20 August 2021 at the rank of Commander.

The central problem to address with road safety in my experience is more about changing road user, community and political attitudes towards driving as opposed to just addressing symptomatic driving behaviour; either through messaging, law enforcement or technical solutions such as improved roads. There is a difference between behaviour and attitude with behaviour largely the consequence of attitude.

For example, one of the key messaging planks for road safety in Tasmania is the public advice focus on the 'Fatal 5'. The messaging is delivered through a range of mediums and more particularly during specific road safety initiative programs or following events such as a serious crash. The messaging is largely situational and reactive, and without any type of planned delivery strategy. Messages include, 'Don't speed', 'Don't drink drive', 'Wear your seatbelt', 'Don't use your mobile phone' and 'Stop driving if you are fatigued'.

In my view, the 'Fatal 5' is merely an attempt to address situational driving behaviours that are driven by personal choice. People will either choose to abide by the advice or not and that is usually dependent upon a whole range of factors, including personal circumstances and self-interest of road users at a point in time. It is my experience that a proportion of the population will break traffic laws if it suits their need, and they think they can get away with it. This is probably true for many aspects of life where self-interest is a key factor in personal choice.

The real focus to address road safety is a much deeper and more intrinsic concept, and that is changing the hearts and minds (or attitude) of road users to fundamentally believe that following suggested behavioural advice (like the 'Fatal 5') and abiding by the law is the right, moral and ethical thing to do for themselves, other road users and the wider community for

which they are a part of. What I'm suggesting is that road safety is more about individual ethical and moral decision making by road users as opposed to merely addressing symptomatic behaviours, which are largely situational and not embedded in daily personal belief. In this respect, changing road user's attitude should be the 'aim point' of any strategy going forward.

What does attitudinal change look like? In my view, the heightened and well-publicised personal hygiene practices resulting from COVID is a good example. We all know good hand hygiene is the right thing to do for our own health and well-being; yet for many it was situational if not optional prior to COVID. In this respect, COVID seems to have caused a significant attitudinal shift in personal hygiene. If one wants to witness attitudinal change in action, one only needs to sit outside a Bunnings store and watch how many people now rinse their hands with sanitiser both on entry and exit. It's not happening with everyone, but it is with many. I'd argue that prior to COVID and despite any strategic placement of sanitiser, very few would have used it.

So, why have people's attitude changed? In my view, it's largely because of effective education and messaging, and it's happened over a long period of time which has clearly given people time to understand it, analyse it, prove it to themselves that it works, accept it and then inculcate it into personal beliefs and daily living. Anecdotally, we hear of people having reductions in basic cold and flu symptoms since COVID because of improved hygiene practices. Consequently, it stands to reason that everyone is benefitting from the attitudinal approach of others – a pack mentality of sorts. The same could apply with road safety.

Had COVID and all the associated messaging about its effects and consequences not occurred, I seriously doubt we would see the attitudinal shift in personal hygiene. People are doing it freely and willingly, which in effect is what we want road users to do when it comes to safe driving behaviours such as those espoused in the 'Fatal 5'.

What I'm suggesting in terms of a future road safety strategy is a similar approach used in responding to COVID. The Government, support agencies and the community need to take road safety as seriously as they have with COVID if we are serious about reducing injury and improving driver behaviour. I don't believe it has been. For example, infection and consequential fatality rates seem generally to be the ultimate benchmark for failure with the Government's approach to COVID. Likewise, serious crash and fatality rates are the failure benchmark for road safety. By comparison, Tasmania has recorded 13 Covid deaths, with a significant degree of effort consumed and expended to minimise mortality. This includes all the daily messaging and reporting to keep people's 'eye on the ball' so to speak. The consequence is in my view, a clear demonstration of a significant community attitude shift around personal safety and obligations toward one another (whether one agrees with the COVID approach or not, the attitude shift with many has happened). Yet, in the same COVID fatality period, Tasmania has had 33 road deaths and aside from the usual, if not obligatory media reporting the day after a road death occurs with a reminder of the 'Fatal 5', no one seems to bat an eyelid, except of course for the victim's families, relatives and friends who are sadly, often left behind and too soon forgotten.

In a general sense, my view is the community just seem to accept road deaths as part of everyday living and sadly, appear quite complacent about it unless someone is directly affected. For the most part, the majority of the population aren't affected by individual crashes, so their overall concern is probably minimal, particularly when the messaging on a particular serious crash dissipates. Out of the mind it goes, until the next one!

In my view, all we've done is tinker around the edges with road safety with the same old activities and messaging; yet we expect results to change without any new ideas, approaches or different thinking. New rules and enforcement are only part of the equation; much like codes of conduct statements and punitive measures for employees when it comes to encouraging ethical workplace behaviour. They are largely fear driven mechanisms to control behaviour. They have little effect on attitude if people don't really believe in safe driving behaviour as the right thing to do when it comes to how road users should treat and respect each other in the community and on the roads. There is plenty of evidence, particularly in the leadership and ethics space, to support this notion. As I previously stated, one only has to see how many times people knowingly break the law if they think they can get away with it. This is particularly true with traffic offences. In my view, this is one important aspect of poor road user attitude that seriously needs to change.

Likewise, improving our roads is a purely technical solution. Of course, it's a good thing to do and potentially reduces risks associated with driver error or inattention, but it's not a panacea for road safety as suggested by some. This is because people still get injured and die on good roads. In fact, many road users regularly traverse poor roads without incident. The same can be said for skills-based driving programs. Improving skill is one thing but changing personal beliefs and attitude is another. A highly skilled driver can have a poor attitude to driving. The reverse applies. Again, not a panacea but still a potentially useful activity if it is accompanied by attitudinal change.

How do we approach road safety? In a similar way in which COVID was approached: Strategically – and with planned, co-ordinated, consistent, focussed, regular and targeted education, messaging and role-modelling, together with effective infrastructure improvements and enforcement. Imagine if on each weekday, the Premier got out in the media and messaged on road safety like he did with COVID? What do you think would happen? I'm not suggesting that he do that here, I'm just trying to highlight the effects of powerful and consistent messaging, supported by evidence from key, reliable and believable people.

Add-ons such as more road rules, more speed cameras and so forth are as I suggest, fear driven mechanisms to control short-term behaviour. Whilst generally necessary and part of an overall attitudinal change approach, they are largely technical solutions which have proven to be ineffective alone in terms of sustainable road safety improvement. Of course, they have some impact on attitude, but I wonder how long that change is meaningfully sustained with the broader population in terms of personal beliefs and values. For example, my experience tells me that the memory of making a conscious decision to speed fades

quite quickly, but the annoyance and in some cases, indignance of being pulled over for speeding by police and what occurs in that engagement lingers with some for much longer. That is what people remember, and not the fact that they were speeding in the first place or whatever law it was they were breaking at the time. In my view, all of this is symptomatic of a poor attitude to driving and road safety. Quite often the police get blamed for giving the driver a ticket. This is usually accompanied by the constant wailing of 'revenue raising' claims. Many people take little responsibility for their own behaviour and like to blame others for their mistakes. Sadly, it's common, yet predictable human behaviour when it comes to road safety.

However, none of this is an overnight fix; it's what contemporary leadership academics and theorists refer to as an 'adaptive problem' – one that is complex, requires innovation, experimentation, and adaptation over a long period of time and where technical solutions in isolation do not achieve sustainable and meaningful results. Technical solutions are those with known solutions that only require the application of existing knowledge and workflows to solve – simple, easy and proven fixes in other words. Making continuous progress towards road safety improvement is the aim. Fundamental to making progress with adaptive problems is the notion that people must learn something new and change something about themselves if they want change to happen. In this respect, it's about changing people hearts, minds and beliefs about the ethical nature of safe driving behaviour and their relationship with other road users and the broader community. Much of my recent work at the Australian Institute of Police Management is focussed on these concepts. I don't propose to expand upon that other than to offer some further discussion if requested.

As I've previously stated, my experience suggests to me that targeting driver attitude is the fundamental strategy. Aside from road infrastructure upgrades, which are always welcomed, the tangible considerations falling out of such an approach could include, but are not limited to the following:

- A long-term strategic road safety mindset and commitment by Government
- Consistent and co-ordinated stakeholder engagement and messaging across all road safety advocates and groups.
- A constant and saturating multi-media campaign every day, every night and at every opportunity to ensure that road safety is well and truly on every road users radar all the time.
- Increase visible signage on highways. This can include graphic and impacting images as a reminder for the consequences of a poor driving attitude.
- Mandatory on-line education sessions when applying for and renewing driver's licences (learner, provision and full) to reinforce messaging.
- Removing the discretionary police cautioning system to reduce the obvious sense of entitlement (and change the attitude) some road users have in avoiding a penalty for certain traffic offences. Having reviewed countless caution requests as a District Commander, such an attitude prevails.

In summary, I've suggested one approach to changing attitudes which is borne out of the recent COVID experience. There may be others and, in that regard, proper evidence-based research rather than a 'best guess' approach would be a more reliable approach. The same can be said for the suggested tangible considerations above.

Such an approach won't change everyone, but in time, there is a strong chance it can change the attitude of many. In my view, COVID has proven that it can happen. So, why shouldn't targeting attitude be the primary strategy to change driver behaviour? The problem as I see it is we keep banging on about the same stuff when it comes to road safety (more police, new laws, higher fines, more speed cameras) and we've had all of these things put in place over time, yet nothing changes. The road toll remains! So why are we still talking about the same strategies and expecting a different result?

I strongly encourage this Committee to avoid the temptation of looking for quick technical wins and fixes as has been suggested by some. Have the courage to look at this issue through a different, more personalised lens and accept that making continual and sustained progress will take time and require a long-term strategic commitment by both the Government, road users and the wider community as being a sustainable pathway forward.

Should the Committee require anything further, please contact me.

Yours sincerely

**Brett SMITH APM**