The Relevance of Australasian Road Safety Strategies in a Future Context

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Abstract

The improvements to road safety since the 1970’s are becoming increasingly difficult to sustain in many developed countries. This paper analyses ten Australasian Government road safety strategies against three key criteria: 1. a comprehensive framework for road safety, 2. anticipated changes to transport and the economy, and 3. the changing and variable nature of future transport and its context. The analysis concludes that current Australasian road safety strategies are weak in some areas of content and do not address future challenges. Improvements are suggested to the strategies’ thoroughness and robustness.

Background

Road deaths in Australasia have reduced since the peak in the early 1970’s. Yet, over the last few years, the long term declines have lessened, and become increasingly difficult to maintain (OECD/ITF, 2016). This phenomena is not isolated, but is being observed in many developed countries and raises many questions; firstly, as to why it is occurring. Secondly, how can road safety management continue to improve road safety, especially in times of rapid contextual change? In addition, road safety in Australia has not improved at the same rate as the most successful countries internationally. The ‘Safe Systems’ basis of current Australasian road safety strategies is more than 10 years old, but the underlying policy tools and parts of the system they are applied to are at least 80 years old. Thorough application of systems approaches is not yet realized (Peden etal., 2004).

Methods

This paper describes the assessment of current road safety strategies in Australia against three key criteria. The first is against the seven elements of a newly developed comprehensive framework for road safety management based on systems theory and practice (Chapanis, 1996; Hughes, 2017). The second criterion is the main changes to transport and the economy that are likely to affect the context of road safety (EU, 2016; NTC, 2016). The third criterion is the changing and variable nature of future transport and the economy (Rasmussen, 1997; Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; Hughes, 2017). A five point scale is used for assessment of the extent to which the strategies reflect the three key criteria.

Results

The analysis found that current road safety strategies were strong on some elements of best practice but weak on many, while some elements were missing almost entirely. The strategies did not reflect the anticipated future changes to transport and the economy, or the changing and variable nature of future conditions.

Conclusions

The study concludes that Australasian road safety strategies should be developed more thoroughly and could be designed to more robustly respond to future changes in transport and economic contexts. Suggestions are made to improve Australasian road safety strategies so that they are more likely to be successful and more applicable to the future than the current versions.
References


