

# ACRS 2025-26 Pre-Budget Submission



## ***About the Australasian College of Road Safety***

The Australasian College of Road Safety was established in 1988 and is the region's peak organisation for road safety professionals and members of the public who are focused on saving lives and serious injuries on our roads.

The College Patron is Her Excellency the Honourable Sam Mostyn AC, Governor-General of the Commonwealth of Australia.

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## Introduction

The Australasian College of Road Safety (ACRS) is the region's peak membership association for road safety with a vision of eliminating death and serious injury on the road. Our members include experts from all areas of road safety including policy makers, health and transport professionals, academics, community organisations, researchers, federal, state and local government agencies, private companies, and members of the public. The purpose of the ACRS is to support our members in their efforts to eliminate serious road trauma through knowledge sharing, professional development, networking, and advocacy. Our objectives include the promotion of road safety as a critical organisational objective within government, business, and the community; the promotion and advocacy of policies and practices that support harm elimination; the improvement of relative safety outcomes for vulnerable demographic and user groups within the community; the promotion of post-crash policies and practices; and the promotion of a collegiate climate amongst all those with responsibilities for and working in road safety.

ACRS believes that we should prevent all fatal and serious injuries on our roads; the road traffic system must be made safe for all road users; system designers should aim to prevent human error and mitigate its consequences; life and health are not exchangeable for other benefits in society; and that all ACRS policy positions must be evidence based.

ACRS believes the allocation of funding in the 2025-26 Federal Budget should be made with these principles in mind. It is also economically responsible to do so. Preventable road trauma costs up to an estimated 3% of GDP in wealthy countries such as Australia(1). The National Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030 (NRSS) acknowledges this annual cost as \$30 billion in Australia(2). Investing in road safety will reduce this preventable and costly burden.

The ACRS is pleased to make this pre-budget submission. It comes at a critical time for road safety. We are now almost halfway through the NRSS, and the first annual report against the Action Plan indicates we are nowhere near meeting our targets and fully delivering the Action Plan. With 1,300 people having been killed on our roads during 2024, we have had a record 4<sup>th</sup> year in a row of increased fatalities(3). That hasn't happened since before the introduction of random breath testing and mandatory seatbelts. Australia must do more to demonstrate commitment to road safety as a national priority, to turn these statistics around and align with the UN Decade of Action on Road Safety 2021-2030 and our own targets.

The estimated \$30 billion annual cost of road trauma to Australia was calculated on 2016-2020 figures, including an estimated \$2.9 million per fatality(4). Adjusted for inflation, our failure to be on track for our NRSS targets is costing an estimated \$2.6 billion per year for the extra fatalities alone. The equivalent figure for extra serious injuries requiring lifetime care would be far higher. This trauma is preventable, and these costs avoidable. In purely economic terms, not addressing road trauma is poor economic management. In moral terms, it's inexcusable.

Addressing road safety requires more targeted and strategic funding than simply handing over billions of dollars for building more roads and adding new lanes hoping to ease congestion. It requires separate funding to address the whole system, embedded as a longer-term commitment to road safety. Funding must be allocated to programs and projects directly targeted to road safety (rather than just 'linked to') and broadened to include road safety programs and projects outside infrastructure. This fundamental issue about how road safety funding is prioritised must be addressed in the 2025-26 Budget.

## ACRS recommendations

This submission presents recommendations for investments in road safety in the Australian Federal Budget 2025-26. The investments relate to national road safety funding and achieving the road safety targets, and to capacity building within the road safety sector through increased support for local councils and professional development.

Currently in Australia, 3 people die and over 100 are seriously injured in road crashes every day, and the numbers are getting worse, not better. If we are going to address this national crisis, the investments recommended in this submission are essential. This submission makes two general recommendations:

1. **National road safety funding - \$0 new investment:**
  - \$5 billion per year allocated to dedicated road safety activity of all types, including non-infrastructure activities, from the infrastructure budget; and
  - Analysis by the Parliamentary Budget Office of the investment required to achieve the National Road Safety Targets
2. **Capacity building by ACRS – \$5,348,000 new investment over four years:**
  - \$537,000 per year for *supporting and building road safety capacity in local government*;
  - \$200,000 per year for *capacity building of road safety professionals in low- and middle-income countries*;
  - \$250,000 per year for *developing and maintaining a Road Safety Research Clearinghouse*;
  - \$350,000 per year for *road safety professionals capacity building*

These investment recommendations are detailed in the following section.

### 1. National road safety funding

#### a) Road safety funding within the Federal Budget

The National Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030 committed that “a significant increase of total road transport infrastructure funding is directed to targeted road safety improvement”. This commitment is in line with recommendations from the report on the inquiry into the previous National Strategy(5), and of the Joint Select Committee on Road Safety’s report(6). However, the starting point is opaque. It is currently unclear how much money the Australian Government spends on road safety. Within the Budget documents funding is outlined for specific road infrastructure programs, some of which are directly related to road safety, but others conflate construction, maintenance, and safety within the one program. While road safety interventions must include areas outside infrastructure, the lack of clarity on the current routine road safety infrastructure spend should be resolved. A clear line item for dedicated road safety interventions within the infrastructure budget would improve transparency and accountability for ensuring that improvements to road safety are being adequately funded.

Road safety must be addressed as a whole system, with a long-term commitment required. Funding for road infrastructure is not necessarily road safety funding – it must be targeted and strategic, and include programs and projects outside infrastructure. The 2025-26 Budget must demonstrate prioritisation of road safety to address the increasing, yet preventable trauma levels on our roads.

**Proposal: \$5 billion per year allocated to dedicated road safety activity (of all types, including non-infrastructure, capacity building, etc.) from the infrastructure budget.**

**Financial commitment required: Nil additional**

### **b) Costing to achieve road safety targets**

The goal of the National Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030 is to reduce road fatalities by 50% and serious injuries by 30% by 2030(2). Importantly, the document recognises that the targets from the previous National Strategy were not achieved. The independent review of that 2011-2020 Strategy found that key reasons for the failure were a lack of implementation and accountability(5). Those mistakes must be avoided in the 2021-2030 Strategy. Essential to facilitating implementation and accountability is an analysis of the investment required to achieve the targets – where, when, and how much funding is needed. This would ensure firstly, a rigorous assessment of whether the \$5 billion per year is sufficient, and secondly, that those funds are received by the right areas at the right time to get and keep Australia on track to meet the road safety targets.

**Proposal: Analysis by the Parliamentary Budget Office of the investment required to achieve the National Road Safety Targets.**

**Financial commitment required: Nil**

## **2. Capacity building**

In line with recommendations from the Joint Select Committee on Road Safety's report(7), the National Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030 acknowledges the need for professional development for those working in road safety: "requires efforts to build capacity and capability not just in government agencies but all system designers and operators, including engineers, planners, law makers, enforcement agencies, post-trauma crash care workers, and others". As the organisation which brings together these disparate sectors under the one road safety umbrella, the ACRS is uniquely placed to assist in building capacity among road safety professionals. We propose multiple elements to this.

### **a) Local Government capacity building**

The National Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030 places specific requirements on local governments in respect to road safety nationally, through for example, the development of Network Safety Plans and infrastructure star ratings, whilst simultaneously recognising the need for capacity building and strengthening. The 537 local councils across Australia have responsibility for around 75% of the road network(8), where significant trauma occurs, but there is great variation in the needs as well as capabilities, skills, and resources available to respond, especially between urban and remote councils(9, 10).

To enhance road safety capacity at local government level, membership of the ACRS's Local Government Network would be provided to every local council in Australia. Our activities for members include continuing education through regular webinars, workshops, and the annual Australasian Road Safety Conference, a



weekly road safety newsletter, and access to the peer-reviewed Journal of Road Safety, extensive networking opportunities, as well as guidance on evidence based policy through ACRS Policy Position Statements.

Memberships for local councils would provide these benefits to road, traffic, and planning staff in local councils, helping build capacity and professional development opportunities, and increasing the profile and prioritisation of road safety within local councils. Doing so will ensure that the professionals who make decisions about roads and the road system at the local government level will have a good understanding of the most effective road safety strategies to produce the safest outcomes. A lack of coordination and awareness of successes being achieved elsewhere can be a significant barrier, resulting in efforts and discovery needlessly being duplicated in isolation. The ACRS Local Government Network has a strong track record of success, with knowledge sharing among members leading to replication of innovative practice, with significantly reduced costs, and new Network Safety Plans being developed.

**Proposal: Four-year commitment to supporting and building road safety capacity in local government.**

**Financial Commitment Required: \$2.148 million i.e., \$537,000 per annum for four years.**

### **b) Low and Middle Income Countries capacity building**

The ACRS International Outreach Chapter has over 300 members from 37 countries including 29 low- and middle- income countries (LMICs), where 93% of global road deaths occur(11). It is co-Chaired by three members from Malaysia, Botswana, and New Zealand.

The IOC helps to build capacity in LMICs, providing members the opportunity to present their road safety work and assist each other in addressing the challenges faced in improving road safety in their respective countries. The reduction of road trauma is especially important for economic growth in LMICs where the demographic profile of the country is usually younger, and the victims of road trauma are often the main income earners. There has been a high level of support for the IOC from ACRS membership within Australia and overseas.

ACRS would like to further expand the International Outreach Project work to:

- Establish an LMIC Professional Mentorship program to match Australian mentors and LMIC professionals (mentees) to support, provide advice, and access the Australian-based ACRS network of road safety professionals.
- Host an annual LMIC Networking Field Tour which brings approximately 20 LMIC road safety professionals to Australia to meet with their Australian colleagues, have presentations from senior road safety professionals, and conduct tours of training and organisational sites.

**Proposal: Four-year commitment to capacity building of road safety professionals in low- and middle-income countries in the form of the LMIC Professional Mentorship Program (\$50,000) and annual LMIC Networking Field Tour (\$150,000).**

**Financial Commitment Required: \$800,000 i.e., \$200,000 per annum for four years.**

### c) Road Safety Research Clearinghouse

Research clearinghouses serve multiple purposes. They can provide a searchable repository of references to research articles and publications on a particular topic and can also help to bridge the gap from research to policy/practice by providing a database of evidence-based programs. Clearinghouses have standards which must be met for an article or publication to be included, such as around transparency via open access to results and reporting of funding sources and conflicts of interest. Clearinghouses support evidence-based policy by distilling findings from trusted sources and assisting decision makers in selecting interventions for which there is robust evidence. They can build capacity and strengthen relationships with policy makers, providing access to information critical for development of effective road safety policy. Clearinghouses can also commission research to fill gaps which are identified in the existing research by the clearinghouse itself.

While examples exist in other countries of road safety clearinghouses, no similar mechanism to bring together sound evidence on road safety exists in Australia in a searchable database, freely accessible to all.

The ACRS is uniquely placed to establish and maintain a road safety clearinghouse in Australia because of our diverse membership. Our members include all of the major university-based and other government/non-government road safety related research institutions throughout Australia. This network would ease access not only to research as it is published, but to information about research projects planned and currently underway, and the process of adding to the clearinghouse would identify gaps, overlaps, and potentials for collaboration to maximise the effectiveness and efficiency of Australia's road safety research.

**Proposal: Four-year commitment to road safety research through the development and maintenance of a Road Safety Research Clearinghouse.**

**Financial Commitment Required: \$1,000,000 i.e., \$250,000 per annum for four years.**

### d) Road Safety Professionals capacity building

The ACRS has system-wide influence on the National Road Safety Strategy priorities and actions, and provides support for work towards Vision Zero. The project will increase community education, awareness, and collaboration by providing road safety professionals with consistent, current, and evidence-based information, and a network to support a positive road safety culture. With ACRS's breadth of membership and influence in the road safety sector, the project aligns with all NRSS priority areas and addresses 16 actions. This project will greatly impact the quality and reliability of information available within the road safety community, thereby improving road safety outcomes overall.

#### Road Safety Professional Certification

Currently in Australia there is no definition of a road safety professional, with no consistent standards applied to the term, despite the significant responsibility the roles have in designing, implementing, and monitoring our road transport system. This project would develop a Road Safety Professional Capability Framework, leading to implementation of a Road Safety Professional (RSP) certification program. The RSP Certification would establish a professional requirement for RSPs to know current legislation and best-practice, providing tools to successfully implement NRSS Actions.

### Journal of Road Safety Sponsorship

The peer-reviewed JRS is the leading source for road safety evidence in Australasia; it is the forum for novel research into road safety initiatives. It features contributing authors from Australasia and globally, introducing new perspectives to research across NRSS priority areas. The JRS has achieved an Impact Factor (IF), a key indicator of its importance as an international scientific journal. Importantly, the JRS is open access, meaning that anyone can access the articles without having to pay for a subscription. This is vital in terms of ensuring that the most up-to-date evidence on what works in road safety is freely available and accessible to everyone. Sponsorship of the JRS would ensure that it is able to remain open access, which is rare for journals of this type.

### Journal of Road Safety Mentorship

Encouraging contributions from First Nations authors and those from low- and middle- income countries ensures that their road safety research is shared internationally. A mentorship program would provide dedicated support to authors through the publication process to encourage and enable these authors to publish their research in the JRS.

**Proposal: Four-year commitment to capacity building of road safety professionals in the form of Road Safety Professional Certification (\$250,000), Journal of Road Safety Sponsorship (\$40,000) and Journal of Road Safety Mentorship (\$60,000).**

**Financial Commitment Required: \$1.4 million i.e., \$350,000 per annum for four years.**

## Conclusion and Recommendations

Road safety is an urgent and increasing issue in Australia. After four consecutive years of increase in the number of people killed on our roads, as a country we cannot afford to continue to neglect this area. ACRS calls for investment of:

1. National road safety funding – \$0 new investment
2. Capacity building by ACRS – \$5,348,000 new investment over four years

ACRS welcomes the opportunity to make this submission and contribute to improved road safety in Australia. Please do not hesitate to contact us should you require any further information.



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