

ACRS Submission to Inquiry into Interventions to Reduce Road Trauma in Regional NSW Caused by Speeding, Fatigue, Drink and Drug Driving



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.

To:

Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety
NSW Parliament

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Introduction

The Australasian College of Road Safety 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 College 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.

The College 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 College policy positions must be evidence based.

In this submission, ACRS recommends that:

- Mobile speed camera warning signs should be removed. The NSW Government should explore methodology to improve the detection and deterrence of adverse driver behaviour by the mobile speed camera program.
- The Inquiry recommend random breath testing (and mobile drug testing) data be posted online and updated monthly.
- The Inquiry should call for the immediate publication of AusRAP star ratings for NSW roads.
- Should current data support it, the Inquiry should again recommend the legally prescribed blood/breath alcohol concentration level applying to motorcycle riders be reduced to 0.02.
- To enhance road safety capacity at local government level, we propose a funding initiative by the NSW government to provide all local councils in NSW with Bronze memberships of the ACRS.

ACRS response to the Terms of Reference

a) Research and data on regional NSW-specific factors, characteristics and demographics of road crashes

In 2023, ACRS NSW Chapter recognised the disparity between the Greater Sydney area and regional areas in terms of road trauma outcomes and held our first regional road safety forums in Newcastle/Hunter (17 April) and the Illawarra/South Coast (14 November).

Seven out of every ten road deaths this year (2023) in NSW have occurred outside of metropolitan Sydney

Focus on Road Safety in NSW Southern Region, ACRS Media Release, 14 November 2023(1)

The decision to hold regional road safety forums was vindicated by the regional road safety report from the Auditor General of NSW which was released at the end of 2023. The report highlighted that:

Between 2017 and 2021, the average number of fatalities for every 100,000 of the population living in regional New South Wales was 8.33, approximately four times higher than the equivalent measure for Greater Sydney. Similarly, the average number of serious injuries in regional New South Wales over the same period was 75.24 for 100,000 of the population, compared with 50.53 in Greater Sydney.

NSW Auditor General Regional Road Safety Performance Audit, Executive Summary, Page 1(2)

In February 2025, with the assistance of Transport for NSW (TfNSW) Community Road Safety Grant funding, ACRS hosted regional road safety forums in Orange and Wagga Wagga. ACRS acknowledges Mr Phil Donato MP, Member for Orange; Dr Joe McGirr, Member for Wagga Wagga; and the Hon. Michael McCormack, MP, Federal Member for Riverina, who supported the forums.

Conventionally, road crashes have been thought about in terms of who is to blame for an individual event. However, the road traffic system is a complex interaction of many interrelated components.(3) Similarly, the NSW 2026 Road Safety Action Plan (page 14) adopts the safe system approach which focuses on the interaction of various aspects or pillars to reduce deaths and serious injuries.(4)

Attempts to reduce road deaths and serious injuries must identify and address the key issues faced in rural and remote areas. Crash types over-represented in rural and remote areas include single-vehicle lost control/run-off-road, overtaking, and head-on crashes. Heavy vehicles also contribute to more deaths and injuries in these areas. There are higher levels of drink-driving, unlicensed drivers, lower quality vehicles and unrestrained users found in serious and fatal crashes in rural areas. Crashes at high-speed crossroad intersections or involving pedestrians and cyclists are also more likely to be fatal in rural areas.(5)

ACRS publishes policy position statements on specific areas of road safety. These are designed to provide a concise overview of a road safety policy issue, the principles underpinning the ACRS position on that issue, and an evidence base for the recommended policy actions. ACRS has recently released policy position statements on Rural and Remote Road Safety, and Infrastructure Star Ratings for Roads.

The Rural and remote Road Safety policy statement raises factors associated with this regional road trauma.(5) These include higher travel speeds which increases crash risk and the severity of the outcome. There are also socio-economic factors such as the involvement of older vehicles which lack modern safety features such as electronic stability control which can prevent crashes from occurring, and longer incident response times, delaying vital first aid and medical assistance.

At the start of the year, ACRS reviewed a range of publicly available data sources relating to road deaths in 2022, 2023 and 2024 (provisional data). Some data were specific to regional NSW. Key points from that analysis include:(6, 7)

- Road deaths for 2023 and 2024 were 21% higher than 2022
- Over ¾ of the state's road deaths occur outside of the Sydney metro area
- There were almost twice as many fatal crashes in the Wollongong metro area in 2024 compared to the Newcastle metro area – both areas had the same number of fatal crashes in 2022
- Fatal crashes on the coastal highways (Pacific and Princes) are stable or falling, whilst they have doubled on inland routes (Hume and Newell) between 2022 and 2024
- Fatal crashes in urban parts of country NSW are still 32% higher than two years ago
- In non-urban parts of country NSW, fatal crashes have increased by 11% on 2022 and 2023 levels
- Over the past three years, there has been a 42% increase in fatal crashes involving light trucks (including dual-cab utility vehicles)
- Overall fatal crashes involving all heavy vehicles have increased by 19% in the past three years
- Motorcyclist deaths increased by 34% in 2024, compared with 2023
- Deaths associated with speed and alcohol fell in 2024 but are still higher than 2022
- Fatigue related deaths have more than doubled between 2022 and 2024.

Adverse trends have continued into 2025, according to provisional data. In the first six months of this year, 134 people were killed in crashes outside the Sydney metropolitan region – an increase of 31 on the same period in 2024. Of fatal crashes in country areas, the urban country category now accounts for 43%.(6)

Mr Bernard Carlon, Chief of Centre for Road Safety (CRS), told the Country Women's Association of NSW Conference in Coffs Harbour on 8 May 2024 that crashes killed 920 people in country areas and seriously injured a further 7,644 people in the five years 2019-2023.(8) This is enough crash victims to fill major regional sporting venues such as Wade Park in Orange, Maitland Sportsground, or Robertson Oval in Wagga Wagga.(9)

b) Effectiveness of current strategies and programs to reduce speeding, fatigue, drink and drug driving in regional NSW

At the same time as fatal and serious injury crash data is trending upwards, there has been a corresponding reduction in enforcement activity and outcomes, most notably around speed and random breath testing.

Speeding

Revenue NSW data for speeding and red-light camera offences show the fluctuation of offences detected by the mobile speed camera program in recent years.(10) These fluctuations correspond to operational policy changes (Table 1):

Table 1: Mobile speed camera data

Year	Offences	More than 30/45 km/h over speed limit
2024	37,936	367
2023	36,506	316
2022	319,005	1,343
2021	442,956	1,751
2020	50,790	475
2019	29,162	361

More than 750,000 motorists were detected speeding in the two years from 2021-2022. This fell to less than 75,000 motorists in 2023-2024, following the reintroduction of mobile speed camera warning signs. Significantly, in 2021-2022, without the benefit of warning signs, mobile speed cameras detected more than 3,000 motorists exceeding the speed limit by more than 30km/h or more than 45 km/h. These offences are serious enough to warrant driver licence suspension.

Unfortunately, these high-speed drivers appear to no longer be deterred from this adverse driver behaviour, since the return of mobile speed camera warning signs. In 2023-2024, fewer than 700 drivers were detected exceeding the speed limit by more than 30 km/h or more than 45 km/h by the mobile speed camera program. The job of detecting high-speed offences has fallen to the NSW Police Force (Table 2):(10)

Table 2: Police-detected Speeding

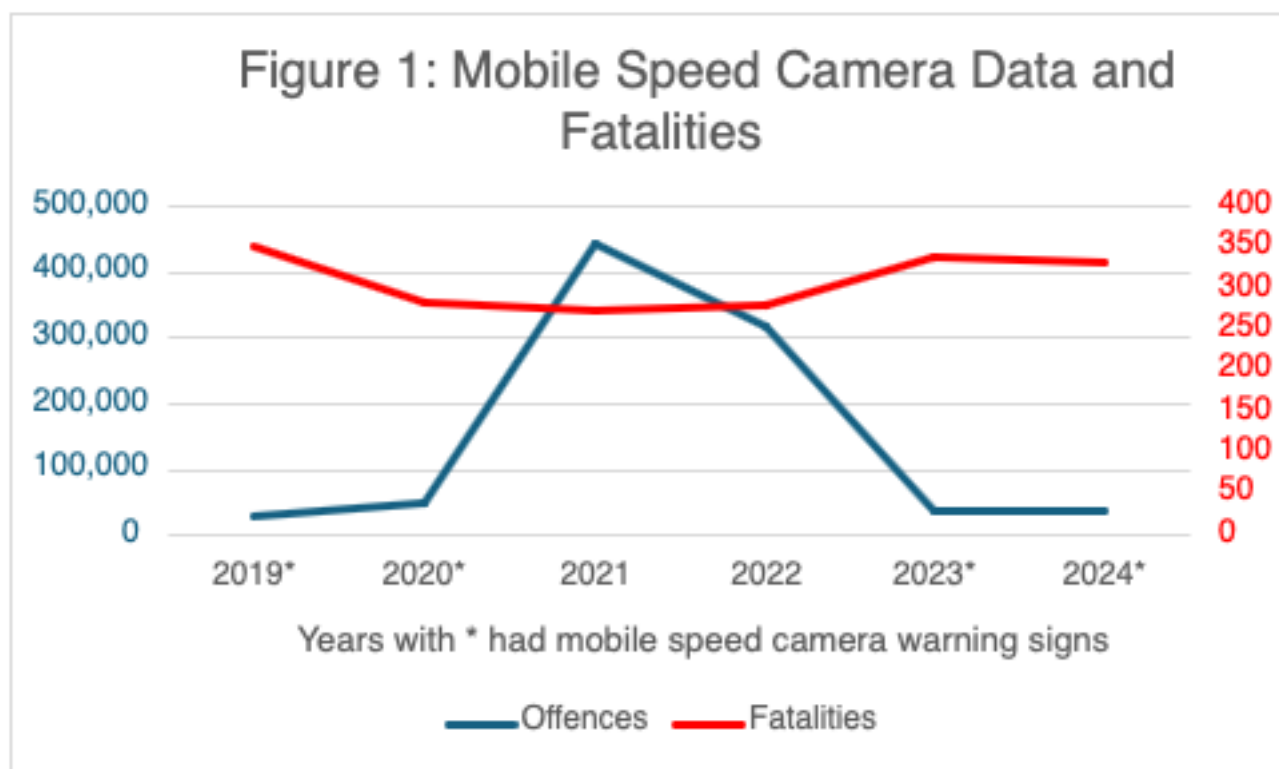
Year	Offences	More than 30/45 km/h over speed limit
2024	185,597	13,643
2023	174,615	11,428
2022	164,287	9,576
2021	179,465	10,632
2020	207,866	11,629
2019	216,241	10,875

Although still well below 2019 levels, total police-detected speeding offences have been rising for the past two years. Most notable are the 13,643 motorists detected in 2024 by police for exceeding the speed limit by more than 30 km/h or more than 45km/h.

Note that these data sets are statewide totals. Data analysts could be tasked with filtering the data for regional-only results.

Modelling by the Monash University Accident Research Centre estimated that between 34 and 43 lives could be saved each year and around 600 serious injuries prevented in NSW through the removal of mobile speed camera warning signs.(11) The accuracy of that modelling has been borne out in the increase in fatal and serious injury crashes since the reinstatement of warning signs.

In Figure 1 below, the relationship between the number of mobile speed camera detected speeding offences is plotted against the number of fatalities, for the years 2019-2024. Allowing for the anomaly of 2020 COVID lockdowns, as can be clearly seen, in the years where the speed camera warning signs were removed, the number of speeding offences detected increased, and the number of fatalities decreased. When the warning signs were reinstated, the number of detected offences decreased, and the number of fatalities increased. This relationship should be further investigated to determine whether there were other policy changes which may have impacted the results, or whether this is, in fact, as it appears to be – a direct relationship between the mobile speed camera warning signs and fatalities as predicted in the MUARC modelling.



The NSW Government position regarding mobile speed camera warning signs is well known, describing the program as being “transparent”,(12) but crash and offence data suggest that this comes at the expense of deterrence, detection and lives.

The NSW Government should explore methodology to improve the detection and deterrence of adverse driver behaviour by the mobile speed camera program. For example, last year the NSW Government passed legislation giving police “wandering search powers” to “keep knives off our streets”.(13) These additional powers, once authorised by a senior police officer, can be exercised in a location where “a relevant offence involving weapons, knives, or violence has occurred within the past 12 months”.

ACRS strongly supports the removal of all mobile speed camera warning signs as being the evidence-based policy. However, should the current Government policy persist, special criteria and authorisation for mobile speed camera operations at or near the locations of fatal or serious injury crashes, and high-speed driving offences, could be applied without sacrificing the Government's principle of transparency.

ACRS supports the use of average speed cameras to enforce speed limits for all vehicles.

The 2026 Road Safety Action Plan for NSW recognises that:

Over 80 per cent of the rural network has a default 100 km/h speed limit whether they have safety protection features or not. This includes lower quality roads that give motorists limited chance to correct the vehicle if it veers from its lane. Given the low chance of surviving a crash at higher speeds, safe speed settings are needed to reduce crashes on these roads, especially on narrower roads where retrofitting of safety infrastructure is challenging.

The Plan includes an action to conduct 'speed zone reviews of high-risk, default speed zones on low-quality, high speed country roads'. ACRS strongly supports this review and notes it is supported in the National Road Safety Strategy and 2023-25 Action Plan, with a nation-wide review which was due to commence in early 2023 but has yet to be completed.

Drink driving

For over 40 years, random breath testing (RBT) has been pivotal in targeting drink driving. Not just a highway patrol task, about 30% of RBT was historically performed by non-highway patrol police.

Ms Yasmin Catley, MP, Minister for Police, told Budget Estimates in March 2025, that the NSW Police Force conducted 3.4 million RBTs in 2024.(14) This represents a reduction of 43% compared with 2019.(15) Data from the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (BOCSAR) show a 28% fall in the detection of drink driving (Prescribed Concentration of Alcohol) offences in 2023-24 compared to 2018-19.(16)

It is understood the NSW Police Force is significantly understrength, and the NSW Government is taking steps to recruit additional police.(17) The systemic reduction in RBT combined with current police staffing levels might be contributing to the increase in alcohol-related fatal crashes, particularly in regional areas, and the increase in urban country fatalities. However, this can't be explored further without access to a comprehensive RBT data set, as well as a roadside drug testing data set. This Inquiry should recommend that RBT (and mobile drug testing) data be posted online and updated monthly. Data should be broken down by Year/Month/Region/Police District or Area Command, as well as by Duty type (Highway Patrol or Non-Highway Patrol).

Drug driving

Prior to last year, 2019 saw the highest number of roadside or mobile drug tests carried out by NSW Police. According to BOCSAR, it represented a peak in overall testing and a local trough in the percentage of positive drug tests.(18) BOCSAR also said that in 2023, "police were more likely to encounter and subsequently charge motorists who reside in regional areas, use methamphetamine, are older, and are repeat drug driving offenders when compared to 2019" (p12).

Fatigue

As previously indicated, fatigue related deaths have more than doubled between 2022 and 2024. The provision of safe and clean rest areas, including public toilets, for all road users, is critical if NSW is to reduce fatigue-related crashes. The 2024 Australasian Road Safety Conference heard analysis showing that 93% of fatigue related crashes in South Australia occurred within 20 km of a rest stop.(19)

Not all rest areas in NSW have public toilets, and those that do many not have flushing toilet or potable water which can discourage use. Initiatives to encourage motorists to plan their journeys and take regular rest breaks would be enhanced by improvements to highway rest area public toilets and facilities.

c) Proposed measures to reduce road trauma in regional NSW

ACRS has published policy position statements on a range of topics. The most recent position statements relate to Rural and Remote Road Safety and Infrastructure Star Ratings for Roads.

Rural roads have higher posted speed limits and corresponding higher vehicle speeds and crash severity issues. There is a disparity between posted speed limit and infrastructure (high speeds, lower quality roads). People become habituated to risk due to repeated travelling at high speeds with little or no experience of trauma from crashes. Rural speed management strategies should be comprehensive in scope and not rely primarily on setting and enforcing speed limits. Speed limits should be set to match the road function, adjacent land-use characteristics, and road design.

Star ratings of roads and streets provide a consistent measure of road infrastructure safety, enabling the monitoring of road safety strategies and programs. They also empower users with valuable information to inform travel choices and advocate for improvements.

The International Road Assessment Programme (iRAP), a UK registered global charity, has developed a star rating system for assessing road infrastructure safety and informing investment decisions. The iRAP star rating process proactively evaluates the inherent safety of road infrastructure for all road user groups: pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists and vehicle occupants.

A 3-star or better rating has been adopted by the United Nations and World Health Organization for all new road designs and for 75% of travel on existing roads for each road users group, as a global benchmark for infrastructure safety performance and investment prioritisation.

In Australia, the ratings are known as AusRAP and are coordinated by Austroads:(20)

AusRAP ratings identify where the risk of fatal or serious injury is greatest. Prioritising the highest risk roads for treatment will maximise the return on investment, with each additional star in the star rating representing a halving of the risk. In addition to reducing impacts of road trauma on individual families, safer roads will reduce the number of hospital bed days that result from serious crashes.

Austroads has produced a document illustrating how star ratings can be applied.(21)

On 21 February 2024, Austroads announced “Australia’s states and territories will commence publishing updated AusRAP star ratings in 2024, with a commitment to publish star ratings for all major arterial roads by 2025.”(22) At the time of writing, this is yet to occur. The publication of star ratings with a compilation of results from all states and territories is essential. Highlighting successful case studies will maximise the effectiveness of the star rating programs and ensure accountability for infrastructure improvements.

The Inquiry should recommend immediate publication of AusRAP star ratings for NSW roads.

It is ACRS policy to collaborate with governments and stakeholders on star ratings initiatives and raise awareness of their benefits and limitations in improving road safety. This courtesy applies to the Staysafe Committee.

Motorcycle safety

In 2010 Staysafe held an inquiry into Vulnerable Road Users.(23) One of the recommendations from the Committee report was:

In the interests of public safety and in recognition of the high degree of motor coordination and vigilance required to ride a motorcycle in a safe manner, the Committee recommends that (legislation) be amended to reduce the legally prescribed blood alcohol concentration level applying to motorcycle riders to 0.02.

Recommendation 13, p54

The recommendation was supported in principle by the Government’s 2011 response(24) but never acted on or followed up. The recommendation was predicated on the NSW Police Force submission which included a case study on fatal motorcycle crashes in the alpine region. The submission contained data showing that between 2005 and 2009, eight motorcyclists had died in crashes with a blood alcohol level between 0.02 and 0.049 in NSW. Had Recommendation 13 been made law, the lives of around 20 motorcyclists could have been saved in the intervening years (should the data trend have continued). If road trauma reduction targets are to be achieved, those 20 lives need to be saved in the future.

If the current data support it, this Inquiry should again recommend the legally prescribed blood/breath alcohol concentration level applying to motorcycle riders be reduced to 0.02. Prior to public hearings, the Committee should request that Transport for NSW supply postmortem blood sample results for motorcycle riders killed in crashes for the most recently available 5 year period to see if riders are still being killed with alcohol in their system below the legally allowable 0.05 level.

d) Implementation of relevant recommendations from the 2023 Performance Audit Report of the Auditor-General, entitled ‘Regional Road Safety’, dated 20 November 2023

Local government road safety

In 2021, the NSW government accepted in-principle the recommendation from the NSW Parliamentary StaySafe Committee, that local government should have a legislated role and responsibility for road safety.(25) If local councils are to take more responsibility for road safety, then they should be empowered to do so through legislation and provided with resources to act. Local government should, for example, be empowered to lower speed limits as part of implementing place making, which involves community consultation, and would help with efforts to reduce road trauma through reducing speeds.

ACRS believes in road safety capacity building for local governments, who are responsible for around 75% of all roads in Australia and carry much of the burden of responsibility for road safety. The NSW 2026 Road Safety Action Plan recognises the importance of this with its priority area of 'Enhancing road safety in local communities', including the action of 'Review and expand the Local Government Road Safety Program to ensure every council has access to a Road Safety Officer to better resource their road safety planning and integration in their local communities'.

To enhance road safety capacity at local government level, we propose a funding initiative by the NSW government to provide all local councils in NSW with Bronze memberships of ACRS. Funding of Bronze corporate ACRS memberships would provide benefits to road, traffic and planning staff in local councils, so helping to build capacity and professional development opportunities, and to increase the profile and prioritisation of road safety within 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.

The Auditor General recommended that TfNSW "Develop and implement a plan to measure and mitigate the known and emerging risks causing underspends in the Community Road Safety Fund (Auditor General Recommendation 2, Page 8). Financing Bronze corporate membership of ACRS for Councils via the Community Road Safety Fund would be one way to mitigate those risks.

Automated enforcement

The Auditor General Report noted the current 'automated enforcement strategy offers very little enforcement in regional areas' (page 45). The report highlighted the use of mobile phone detection cameras to identify non-use of seat belts because 'the non-use of seat belts is twice as prevalent in the deaths of drivers in regional NSW compared to metropolitan areas' (page 46).

The report also said 'average speed cameras are the only camera type overwhelmingly located in regional areas, but these only apply to heavy vehicles and are positioned on major freight routes' (page 3). Since that time, the average speed camera trial to enforce speeds for all vehicles has commenced, but that trial is only possible because of the existence of gantries which have been enforcing heavy vehicle speeds on major freight routes for many years. Expanding on the Auditor General's point, average speed camera technology should be deployed to lengths of road which are not major heavy vehicle routes. Such technology already exists. Western Australia has shown it is possible to deploy mobile point-to-point speed cameras in pairs to check the average speeds of vehicles between two fixed points without the need to construct permanent, fixed gantries at significant cost.(26)

Automated enforcement can supplement and support police on-road enforcement. The ability, for example, to deploy mobile average speed cameras to the snow fields in winter and to the coastal holiday traffic hotspots in summer where light vehicle speeding has been identified or where recent road trauma has occurred could be a significant step forward for road safety.

e) Any other related matters

Investigations

ACRS recently called on the Australian Government to legislate and appropriately resource a national road crash investigation agency, similar to the Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB), which currently investigates air, marine and rail incidents but is prevented by law from examining road crashes.(27)

Investigations by the ATSB have been instrumental in identifying systemic safety risk and driving industry and government action to prevent further tragedies. Applying this model to road safety would allow for targeted investigations, providing critical insights into the factors contributing to severe crashes. In NSW, the Office of Transport Safety Investigations (OTSI) conduct 'no-blame' investigations into transport incidents.

On 21 December 2024, a coach collided with the rear of a multi-combination heavy vehicle on the Hume Highway in the Riverina. As the truck slowed whilst going up an incline, it was struck by the coach, killing the coach driver and injuring 13 passengers.⁽²⁸⁾ Occurring only 18 months after the Greta bus disaster, ACRS has ongoing concerns regarding the absence of no blame or safe system investigations into crashes like this.

Lessons could have been learned such as:

- Whether connectivity between vehicles could prevent these types of crashes
- Identifying improvements to the training and work health system systems for the drivers
- The safe operation of such long and heavy vehicles
- Post-crash learning from a mass-casualty event in regional NSW

ACRS stresses that the creation of a national road crash investigation agency would complement existing efforts, including state-based crash analyses and local road safety initiatives.

Data and statistics

The safety and operation of e-mobility devices such as e-bikes and e-scooters has been examined by Parliamentary Committees. As of 30 June 2025, ACRS is aware of the deaths of two e-scooter riders in NSW this year. Both deaths occurred outside of the Sydney metropolitan area:^(29, 30)

- 32 year old female killed when her e-scooter collided with a utility vehicle in Lithgow on 28/2/25
- 41 year old male killed when he fell from his e-scooter in Lake Illawarra as was subsequently run over by a car on 16/5/25

NSW crash data categorises persons killed or injured in road crashes as drivers, passengers, motorcyclists, pedestrians, pedal cyclists or other. It is unclear from current published records how these two e-scooter riders have been categorised as there are zero deaths listed as 'other'.⁽⁶⁾ Failure to correctly categorise road crash victims could compromise data analysis. The Queensland Government, recognising 'the boom in the popularity of Personal Mobility Devices (PMDs) across Queensland', established a separate category for those road users within their crash reporting system.^(31, 32) The NSW Government should follow Queensland in establishing a separate reporting category for PMDs.

Adverse weather

There are five references in the Auditor General's report to weather events. The ACRS Rural and Remote Road Safety policy position statement also discusses extreme climactic conditions and how behaviours such as driving through floodwaters is leading to tragedy.⁽⁵⁾ In May 2025, a driver was sentenced regarding the deaths of two people riding on the back of a utility vehicle in floodwaters in 2022.⁽³³⁾ More recently, a northern NSW tow truck driver spoke about retrieving at least 20 vehicles from floodwaters, including a B-Double truck, in May 2025.⁽³⁴⁾ There are inherent risks associated with driving during times of flooding or bushfires and warnings to the public from authorities often comes after deaths have occurred. The subject of road safety during an emergency and building resilience into the road network are topics worthy of a standalone Staysafe Inquiry.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Reducing road trauma in NSW is a complex issue, including speeding, fatigue, drink and drug driving, as well as many other factors identified in this submission. ACRS recommends:

- Mobile speed camera warning signs should be removed. The NSW Government should explore methodology to improve the detection and deterrence of adverse driver behaviour by the mobile speed camera program.
- The Inquiry recommend random breath testing (and mobile drug testing) data be posted online and updated monthly.
- The Inquiry should call for the immediate publication of AusRAP star ratings for NSW roads.
- Should current data support it, the Inquiry should again recommend the legally prescribed blood/breath alcohol concentration level applying to motorcycle riders be reduced to 0.02.
- To enhance road safety capacity at local government level, we propose a funding initiative by the NSW government to provide all local councils in NSW with Bronze memberships of the ACRS.

ACRS appreciates the opportunity to comment on this inquiry and contribute to improved road safety in NSW. Please let us know if you need any further information.



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