

# **ACRS Submission**

## **Community Safety in Regional and Rural Communities**



To:

Legislative Assembly Committee on Law and Safety  
NSW Parliament

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## Table of Contents

|                                                                   |                 |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|
| <b><i>Introduction .....</i></b>                                  | <b><i>3</i></b> |
| <b><i>Road trauma in regional and rural communities .....</i></b> | <b><i>4</i></b> |
| <b><i>Random Breath Testing .....</i></b>                         | <b><i>4</i></b> |
| <b><i>Automated Enforcement .....</i></b>                         | <b><i>5</i></b> |
| <b><i>Conclusion and recommendations .....</i></b>                | <b><i>6</i></b> |
| <b><i>References .....</i></b>                                    | <b><i>7</i></b> |

## 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 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.

The terms of reference for this inquiry focus on youth crime, which the ACRS submits needs to be considered in a systems-based approach. Considering youth crime in isolation is likely to result in limited improvements to overall safety in regional and rural communities.

Young people are commonly involved in road trauma, both in perpetrating driving and other offences, but also in being victims of fatal and serious injury crashes. Driving offences are the 4<sup>th</sup> most common offence type for young people proceeded against by NSW Police, and many of the most common offence type, theft, involves vehicles.(1) Road trauma accounts for more than one quarter of all deaths of young people aged 15-19 years – the highest of any age group.(2) There are clear connections - drivers with a history of dangerous driving offences are more than three times as likely as other drivers to be themselves killed in a crash.(3)

To address these issues, requires addressing the systemic causes of both the offending behaviour and the road crashes. A Victorian study of the characteristics of culpable driving offenders sounds that most represent a largely disadvantaged section of the population, lacking on factors long identified as social determinants of health. These people are likely to have limited education; have poor knowledge, risk perception and attitudes towards driving and other offending; and have cognitive functioning and/or mental health challenges.(4-6) Remoteness from urban centres, with its accompanying lack of public transport options and reduced exposure to intensive policing operations exacerbate these factors. A study of young people in regional Queensland found that car theft and 'joyriding' predominately attracts disenfranchised youth who lack opportunities for education, employment and leisure.(7)

Other submissions to this inquiry will no doubt respond to the terms of reference regarding community services to respond to these systemic challenges. This ACRS submission will focus on measures to address road trauma in regional and rural communities.

In this submission, ACRS recommends that:

- This inquiry endorses the action items in the NSW 2026 Road Safety Action Plan and the priority area of enhancing road safety in local communities.
- Data for random breath testing and mobile drug testing be published and updated monthly
- Average speed (point to point) cameras be used to enforce speed limits for all vehicles

## Road trauma in regional and rural communities

Regional residents in NSW have a road crash fatality rate more than four times that of metropolitan residents,(8) with seven out of every ten fatal crashes in 2023 occurring outside the greater Sydney area.(p57)(9) ACRS agrees with the comment of Committee Chair, Mr Edmond Atalla MP, that "every person deserves to feel safe in their community, regardless of where they live." (10) Regional road deaths are not restricted to the open road where speed limits are 100-110km/h. In 2023, *urban country* fatal crashes, i.e., roads in regional cities and towns, claimed the lives of 120 people last year.(9) This represents a 69% increase on 2022. "Local people are dying on local roads," 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.(11)

*Enhancing road safety in local communities* is a priority area in the NSW Government's 2026 Road Safety Action Plan and includes an action to "review and expand the Local Government Road Safety Program (LGRSP) to ensure every council has access to a Road Safety Officer to better resource their road safety planning." (p20)(12) In a 2023 report to Parliament on regional road safety, the NSW Auditor General found that "only 52% of local councils in regional New South Wales participated in the LGRSP in 2022–23, despite the fact that local councils own and manage approximately 80% of Local Roads." The report recommended that by November 2024, Transport for NSW (TfNSW) should "expedite the review of the Local Government Road Safety Program and make recommendations to government aimed at increasing the uptake of the Program by councils in regional New South Wales.(p8)(8)

***This inquiry should endorse the delivery of action items in the NSW 2026 Road Safety Action Plan and the priority area of enhancing road safety in local communities.***

*"I am certain that every person in NSW, particularly in regional NSW, will join me to support the delivery of this plan."*

The Hon. Jenny Aitchison, MP, Minister for Regional Transport and Roads (p3)(12)

## Random Breath Testing

In 2023, in addition to the 69% increase in urban country fatal crashes, 78% of all alcohol related fatalities in NSW occurred on country roads.(13)

For over 40 years, random breath testing (RBT) has been part of the "range of functions being performed by NSW police officers (Term of Reference 'F'). Although primarily a highway patrol task, about 30% of RBT has

historically been performed by non-highway patrol police. According to the NSW Police Force (NSWPF) Corporate Plan, “reducing road trauma” forms part of the key result area, “Maintain Public Safety”.(14)

Ms Yasmin Catley MP, Minister for Police recently reported to Parliament that NSWPF conducted “over 3.5 million RBT’s” in 2023.(15) Whilst the Minister did not provide an exact number, the figure of 3.5 million is about 300,000 fewer than 2022 and represents a 42% reduction in RBT compared to 2019.(16) Regarding the operational strength of the NSWPF, the NSW Government also recently admitted that “we are carrying more than 1,500 vacancies”.(17)

The systemic reduction in RBT combined with the 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 Inquiry, victims of road trauma, and the wider public cannot explore this significant community safety issue without access to a comprehensive RBT data set.

***The Inquiry should call for random breath testing (and mobile drug testing) data to be published 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).

Where RBT has been strategically increased, road trauma is reduced.

*“A Northern Region Road Policing Strategy was implemented involving reviews of all fatal motor vehicle collisions. On 30 June 2022, Northern Region reported a 42.9% increase in Random Breath Testing and a 19.9% decrease in fatal vehicle collisions.”*

Deputy Commissioner Peter Thurtell, Regional NSW Field Operations (p10)(18)

## **Automated Enforcement**

The Auditor General Report to Parliament – Regional Road Safety, found that the current “automated enforcement strategy offers very little enforcement in regional areas” (Page 45). The report noted 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 demands on police resources in a range of areas have been highlighted by organisations such as the Country Mayors Association.(19) Automated enforcement can supplement and support police on-road enforcement.

The Auditor General noted that “average speed cameras are the only camera type overwhelmingly located in regional areas, but these apply only to heavy vehicles and are positioned on major freight routes (Page 3).” The ACRS participated in the 2024 NSW Road Safety Forum organised by Transport for NSW, where average speed cameras were discussed. There was strong support at the Forum for this form of enforcement as being effective, evidence-based, and accepted by the community, and noted that NSW is the only jurisdiction in Australia to restrict their use. The Forum Summary Outcomes report noted a key message from presentations and panels being to “Increase compliance with speed limits through the strategic use of average speed cameras, emphasising their effectiveness as a fair and equitable enforcement tool that has been proven to reduce road trauma”.(20)

***ACRS recommends that average speed (point to point) cameras should be used to enforce speed limits for all vehicles.***

Finally, domestic violence is a leading social issue in Australia. There are occasions where motor vehicles are used during the commission of domestic violence offences which also affects road safety. The Inquiry may wish to consider how automated enforcement systems operated by TfNSW, the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator, and NSWPF automatic number plate recognition technology could assist in the detection/monitoring of domestic violence offenders and the protection of victims.

## Conclusion and recommendations

The ACRS appreciates the opportunity to make this submission and contribute to improving community safety. We are particularly keen to highlight our recommendations that:

- This inquiry endorses the action items in the NSW 2026 Road Safety Action Plan and the priority area of enhancing road safety in local communities.
- Data for random breath testing and mobile drug testing be published and updated monthly
- Average speed (point to point) cameras be used to enforce speed limits for all vehicles

Please do not hesitate to contact us should you need any further information.



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