



Submission for the Inquiry into Serious Injury

March 2013

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1. General

Community awareness of the large burden of serious injury, as a result of road trauma, is not high. Education and awareness campaigns could address this lack of awareness by providing a focus on the effect that serious injuries have on an individual's family, friends and the wider community. Increasing the communities understanding of the impact of serious injuries can contribute to mobilising the community to take action to improve road safety and reduce fatalities and serious injuries.

Recommendation:

- Education and awareness campaigns should be developed to increase people's awareness of the burden of serious injuries as a result of road trauma which can assist in mobilising the community to take action to improve road safety.

2. Identify processes to facilitate accurate, consistent and timely reporting of road related serious injuries.

RACV supports the introduction of the new definition of "severe injury", as defined in Victoria's Road Safety Action Plan 2013-2016 (State Government of Victoria 2013). This will assist in identifying the impact of more severe injuries and could lead to more focussed actions to deal with the key factors causing these injuries. It is also important that Victoria cooperates in a national project that is already seeking to standardise the definition of "serious injury" to better enable more valid comparisons between States and Territories. However it is important the category of "serious injury" is retained to enable comparisons across all jurisdictions in Australia.

RACV has also found that there is considerable delay in the release of crash data, including that for injuries. It is important that this data is released quickly to enable its use in research and campaigns while it is still relevant, and to quickly identify and address road infrastructure issues. Campaigns based upon old crash data won't necessarily be targeting the current behavioural and infrastructure problems that are causing injuries. Changes in existing definitions should also be avoided unless absolutely necessary because it removes the ability to monitor trends over time. This affects research into the effectiveness of countermeasures.

Recommendations:

- The State Government should work collaboratively with the other States and Territories to standardise the definition, the collection of data and timely reporting of "serious injury" crashes.
- The State Government should introduce the reporting of 'severe injury' crashes as a subset of 'serious injury' crashes.
- Crash data should be released quickly to ensure campaigns, research and the priorities for infrastructure safety programs use the best available information.

3. Identify cost effective countermeasures.

RACV advocates the use of a 'safe system' approach that takes into account safe road users in safe vehicles on safer roads. Road safety initiatives should be based on available evidence.

Safe drivers, safe roads and safe vehicles are all important factors in reducing the severity of injuries. RACV makes significant contributions to several programs intended to produce safer people, safer roads and safer vehicles.

Driver behaviour

Drink driving, aberrant speed behaviour, fatigue and distraction continue to be the main contributing factors in many crashes. Education and enforcement campaigns should be focused on these key issues in an attempt to change people's behaviour. This is a challenging task, as it can be difficult to change the high risk behaviours of some road users.

Recommendation:

- Road safety education and enforcement campaigns should be evaluated to ensure that they are effective and provide value for the investment made.

Safer Roads

To achieve safer roads, RACV is a partner in the Australian Road Assessment Program (AusRAP), which is the part of the International Road Assessment Program (iRAP). Whilst in most developed countries, Road Assessment Programs (RAP's) are funded by Governments, in Australia the AusRAP program is an initiative of the Australian Automobile Association (AAA) and its member clubs, the automobile clubs of Australia. Globally there are about 70 RAP's at present. RACV has had a lead role in the development and implementation of iRAP, currently chairs the AusRAP Technical Working Group and on behalf of AusRAP is an invited observer on the Global Technical Committee as one of the founding member programs in iRAP.

The primary output from AusRAP is the star rating of roads. The star rating is like that used for accommodation – a one star road is a risky road to drive on, whereas a five star road is significantly safer and a driver that makes a mistake whilst driving in an otherwise safe manner, in a safe vehicle, is unlikely to die from their mistake. In mid 2013 the RACV will be releasing the latest star ratings for Victoria's national highway network and some State roads.

The Federal Government has made a major contribution to funding the collection and analysis of star rating data for the National Highway Network for the 2013 year. However there has not been a commitment to continue that funding to ensure that the data remains up-to-date beyond 2013.

The process for determining a star rating for a road is by rating the physical features of the road and roadside, including road and lane width, the presence of shoulders, whether they are sealed, if there are passing lanes and if there are barriers to prevent motorists who inadvertently leave the road from crashing into trees or other roadside objects. By systematically rating existing roads according to their physical characteristics, road managers can develop an understanding of the level of risk that is 'built in' to the road network. This provides a basis for targeting high-risk sections of road for improvement before people are killed or seriously injured. Star ratings are especially useful when crash data is unavailable or unreliable, like on Victoria's rural highway network where crashes are spatially distributed in low numbers across a large road network.

AusRAP also provides reports based upon the crash history of sections of the highway network. These reports give details of the actual crash rate and can be used in conjunction with the star rating reports.

The benefits of the star rating system are considerable. They include:

- Identifying the risk of crashes on particular lengths of road
- Determining investment plans to address the identified risks, at a network level (i.e. the quantum of investment required to lift the star rating by reducing one or more types of risk)
- Advising travellers on the relative safety of particular routes, or lengths of road
- Tracking investment in roads over time, to show whether the investments have increased safety
- Enabling roads to be 'star rated' at the design stage, to reduce the opportunity for risks to be 'built into' roads when they are constructed. International practice is for organisations funding roads to specify that the funding is conditional on the road being constructed to a particular star rating.

Once the whole highway network has been star rated, it is a smaller task to update the star rating once physical changes occur to the road. For example, factors that improve star ratings might be new crash barriers and shoulder sealing, or a star rating may be reduced by the construction of a new at-grade intersection where previously there wasn't one. Results should be published within three months so that drivers are aware of the risk built into the roads that they travel on.

Safer Road Investment Plans will be produced for Australia's National Highway network for the first time this calendar year, based upon the iRAP methodology. They will indicate the quantum of investment required to lift the star rating to a specified level. RACV is funding the collection of data, the assessment of star ratings and development of investment plans for a number of State highways. The methodology has already been successfully trialled in Queensland on the Bruce Highway by the RACQ.

Future directions for the AusRAP program may include star rating urban roads in rural communities located on major highways, and the introduction of motorcycle star ratings.

Based upon the previous AusRAP report dated February 2008, approximately 72 percent of Victoria's highways are rated as three stars or better. The updated methodology being used in AusRAP, using more comprehensive research will see that percentage decrease. RACV believes that the State's goal should be that all undivided highways are at a three star standard, and all divided highways and freeways are at least four stars.

Reports that explain AusRAP and its outputs are attached to this submission.

Recommendations:

- The State Government should encourage the Federal Government to continue investing in AusRAP for the National Highway network beyond 2013, including funding the update of the star ratings.
- The State Government should fund the collection of the data necessary to produce and update star ratings for the complete State highway network across Victoria.
- Increased investment should be allocated to improve all highways with a rating of less than 3 stars.
- All new road projects should be designed for at least a star rating of three stars for undivided roads, and at least four stars for divided roads.

Safer Cars

RACV is a major contributor to and member of the Australasian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) which conducts controlled laboratory crash tests to provide information to consumers about the occupant protection performance of new cars. The Used Car Safety Ratings (UCSR) program which records the in-service safety performance of a wide range of cars based on actual crash statistics is also a program in which RACV is a contributor. Occupants have twice the chance of being killed or seriously injured in an ANCAP one Star rated vehicle compared to an ANCAP 5 Star rated vehicle.

It is expected that in the next few years new vehicles will be released that make increasing use of Intelligent Transport Systems such as 'vehicle to vehicle' and 'vehicle to infrastructure' communication technology to augment their safety and navigation systems. In addition Intelligent Speed Assist trials are being undertaken by various Government institutions. Vehicle safety systems are also rapidly developing; technologies such as forward collision avoidance, lane departure warning, blind spot warning and intelligent cruise control are rapidly filtering down from high end models to mainstream models. It is important that the advance of such technology is anticipated and facilitated by any future road safety policy and legislation. Overseas trends should be monitored.

Pedestrian avoidance systems are also rapidly emerging that use camera, radar or laser technologies to sense the presence of pedestrians in the path of the vehicle and reactively apply the brakes if necessary. This technology is increasingly being incorporated into new vehicles either as a stand-alone feature or combined with forward collision avoidance systems. RACV believes these systems have great potential and their development and adoption should be promoted.

Recommendations:

- The State Government through its agencies should continue the support of the ANCAP and UCSR programs.
- Government fleet purchasing policy should mandate a 5 star safety rating for their vehicles.
- Non-Government fleets should be encouraged to review their purchasing policy to specify a 4 or 5 star vehicle safety rating as part of OH&S.
- Current initiatives by the State Government to evaluate and promote emergent vehicle safety technologies should be continued and expanded.
- The State Government should ensure that road safety policy and regulation takes account of overseas technology advances and facilitates the uptake of these in Australia.