Safe Speed Interest Group

Promoting safe walking and cycling by reducing traffic speed

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Submission to the National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020

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The Safe Speed Interest Group

Membership of the Safe Speed Interest Group includes the Heart Foundation, Victoria Walks, City of Darebin, Baw Baw Shire and Deakin University. The main purpose of the group is promoting vehicle speeds which prioritise the needs of pedestrians and cyclists in urban environments where active transport is a viable option.

Why is it important to support walking and cycling?

Physical activity plays a key role in achieving and maintaining healthy weight, as well as preventing chronic disease and promoting social connection. Achieving the recommended level of physical activity to maintain good health is not difficult – an accumulation of 30 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity (such as a brisk walk) on at least five days a week. However, approximately half of all Australian adults do not achieve these recommendations[1].

Making local environments safer and more attractive so that everyone feels comfortable out walking or on their bikes (including kids and older people), is a key step in encouraging more active transport.

Recommendations

1. The Safe Speed Interest Group considers that the current National Road Safety Strategy (NRSS) is inadequate for the following reasons:

- The strategy is based on the assumption that road safety primarily revolves around vehicles, and does not place firm emphasis on the equitable distribution of road safety for all road users, particularly pedestrians and cyclists. Since the 1960's transport planning has given greater attention to mobility by car with minimal consideration for walking and cycling[2]. Road safety should be equitable for all road users and this should be the foundational premise of the NRSS.

- There is little or no mention of health and wellbeing in the consideration, development or suggested application of safety contingencies. Accident, injury and fatality are very important considerations, but so too is the health benefit of increased levels of active transport which can be stifled by unsafe roads. Road safety must include concern for community health and wellbeing in regard to speed, vehicle emissions, safe and amenable urban design, strategic traffic calming and transport planning which includes infrastructure considerations and safety provisions for pedestrians, cyclists and connectivity to public transport.

- Safety initiatives should promote and facilitate a modal shift from the dominant car culture to active transport. Over dependence on car travel has serious consequences for personal health and community wellbeing by reducing uptake of walking, cycling and public transport use. In Australia direct healthcare costs attributable to physical inactivity exceed $400 million[3]. Engaging in regular physical activity reduces the risk of diseases such as cardiovascular disease, type II diabetes, osteoporosis, colon cancer and obesity. In addition, physical activity has been shown to alleviate depression and anxiety and increase social interaction and integration[4]. Increased promotion of active transport modes will provide a safer road environment in and of itself.

Introduction

The Safe Speed Interest Group (SSIG) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the draft National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020. In making this submission, our aim is to further inform and enhance the work done to date, and ensure that safety and the health and wellbeing of Australians is at the forefront of government thinking in the development of strategies, recommendations and actions for the National Road Safety Strategy.

This position builds on the advice of the World Health Organisation (WHO), which suggests that reducing motor vehicle speeds in areas where the road user mix includes high numbers of pedestrians and cyclists, is particularly important in developing a safe road system. The WHO specifies that human tolerance to car injury is exceeded if the vehicle is travelling at more than 30km/h[5].

The setting of speed limits in urban areas in Australia is based mainly on achieving a balance between vehicle mobility and injury reduction. 30km/h speeds have significant injury reduction benefits, however despite widespread support for speed reduction, progress in Australia has been slow and urban speed limits remain high by international standards. In addition, little consideration has been given to the additional non-injury benefits, including increased active transport and reduced motor vehicle use.

The SSIG's specific interest in the impact of vehicle speed on walking and cycling is based on the recognised benefits of active transport – defined as purposeful walking, cycling or public transport trips which usually require a short walk to and from stops/stations. Multiple benefits include:

- Health benefits of increased physical activity, including reductions in chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity, and improved health and wellbeing;
- Transport benefits of reduced car congestion and costs associated with infrastructure provision;
- Environmental benefits of reduced air, noise and visual pollution;
- Energy use reductions through fewer car numbers, lower fossil fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions;
- Community strengthening through increased social interactions on streets and within neighbourhoods;
- Improved community safety as 'peopled' places are safer places.

The issue of 'safe speed' has not yet been addressed in a significant way in Australia, with Australian speed limits generally being well above the rest of the industrialised world[6]. European countries are leading the way with lower speed limits (usually 20-30km/h). The SSIG is very pleased that the draft National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020 identifies the merit of 30km/h, however it is noted that there is no mention of actioning speed limit reductions. The main barriers to speed reduction are perceived rather than actual. Evidence indicates that increases in vehicle travel time due to lower speed limits and the associated costs, are substantially overstated. Small travel time benefits e.g. 9 seconds/km[7], come at a substantial cost in terms of the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities.

This submission

The National Road Safety Strategy calls for public comment on actions and future steps of four areas of road safety:

- Safe Roads
- Safe Speeds
- Safe Vehicles
- Safe People

In addition, submitters are asked to respond to five questions relating to the overall consultation draft of the NRSS:

1. What road safety issues are most important to you?
2. Is there anything important that you think is missing from this draft strategy?
3. Are there things that are not explained or where you think there should be more information?
4. What do you think is good about this strategy?
5. What can we do differently to improve this draft strategy?

The Safe Speed Interest Group's submission makes comments and recommendations in relation to each of the four areas of road safety, and provides a response to each of the five questions regarding the overall NRSS. Our response is guided by the potential health and safety impacts these changes may bring.

This submission is forwarded to the Standing Committee on Transport with approval and support from the following SSIG members:

- City of Darebin
- Baw Baw Shire
- Victoria Walks
- Dr Alison Carver – Postdoctoral Research Fellow, Centre for Physical Activity and Nutrition Research, School of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences, Deakin University
- Heart Foundation (Victorian Division)

Safe Roads

The consultation draft of the NRSS does not contain any actions or future steps that mention pedestrian safety in relation to Safe Roads.

Recommendation:

Under *'First Steps: Actions for the first three years', Item 4: Target infrastructure treatments and supporting measures addressing safety issues for vulnerable road users, for example: motorcyclists for popular motorcycle routes; infrastructure improvements for older road users; people accessing public transport; bicyclists*: include

- infrastructure treatments and supporting measures addressing safety issues for pedestrians in all residential areas[8].

Recommendation:

The strategy should consider wider health and sustainability issues in road rule changes and road safety strategies[9].

Recommendation:

Under the heading *Future Steps: what else will be considered*, second dot point: *Working with local governments to develop and deliver infrastructure improvement strategies that include cost effective safety treatments (for example flexible barriers, roundabouts, shoulder sealing, rumble strips*, include:

- working with local governments to conduct demonstration projects that incorporate 30km/h areas and strategic traffic calming measures to address safety issues for vulnerable road users.

From a health perspective, people need to incorporate physical activity into their everyday lives[10]. Physical inactivity is a risk for cardiovascular disease and many other chronic diseases. The built environment, including road networks, has an enormous influence in determining people's levels of physical activity and consequently, their health and wellbeing.

Recommendation:

Actions should include the introduction of design standards or guidelines for road authorities at all government levels to ensure compact, connected urban environments where people are encouraged to walk or cycle for transport[11].

Recommendation:

Other actions should include urban design requirements for cycling and walking being embedded into the provisional requirements of key transport planning agencies[12].

Safe Speeds

The Safe Speed Interest Group agrees with the draft NRSS that *Australia has relatively high speed limits across much of its road network compared with the speed limits on similar roads in most OECD countries* (p.32). Generally, speed limits should be lowered to increase safety, reduce stress and improve public amenity in urban areas for all road users and the broader community.

Recommendation:

Actions should include the development of guidelines for calming roads and streets[13].

Recommendation:

Actions should include the application of 30km/h speed limits in areas such as shopping strips, residential areas and major trip generator locations such as schools and hospitals. The draft strategy acknowledges 30km/h as the survivable impact speed for pedestrians and motorcyclists but does not introduce compliance with 30km/h for motorists where appropriate[14].

Recommendation:

In considering the application of speed limits, speed must reflect road design and the dynamics of community interaction with roads and streets. Increase health and social considerations[15].

Recommendation:

Under the heading *Community* acceptance on page 34, amend the second dot point to include the following underlined items:

- *a national community dialogue which explains the safety rationale for* modifying speed limits, *speed management actions and the complementary* health, social, *environmental and economic benefits including reduced emissions, fuel consumption and noise and* an increase in liveability.

Recommendation:

Under the heading *First Steps: Actions for the first three years, item 11: State and territory road authorities will work with local governments to expand the number and scope of projects that implement safe speed limits in areas of high pedestrian and cycling activity*, include:

- that State and territory road authorities will work with local governments to *develop a road user hierarchy with corresponding safe speed limits to ensure consistent and appropriate application of speed limits.*

This can correspond with the initiative mentioned in dot point *4 of Future Steps: the development and implementation of new risk-based national speed limit guidelines for different road categories/functions.* In this way, the consideration of health and social impacts can be incorporated into an effective risk management strategy for road safety.

Safe Speed cont'd

Recommendation:

Change laws and licensing systems to establish the principle that cars must yield to pedestrians and cyclists, i.e. the onus is on the driver to ensure the safety of pedestrians and cyclists[16].

Safe Vehicles

Recommendation:

Actions should include initiatives to utilise train based freight transport in preference to the use of trucks and heavy vehicles. This alone would make streets safer for other users including cars and has health, social, environmental and economic benefits[17].

Recommendation:

Actions should include public awareness campaigns to encourage the purchase of small cars over large vehicles and 4WD in urban areas. Triple bottom line safety advantages of small cars include better manoeuvrability, better fuel efficiency, and fewer resources used in production; as well as accident prevention technology, impact countermeasures, improved control through reduced mass and improved stop distance. Small cars are safer for all road users[18].

Recommendation:

Actions should also include removal of incentives for car use through fiscal reform. Currently, Fringe Benefit Tax (FBT) for employees' private car use has the result of providing an incentive for increased car use[19], which correlates with increased road traffic injuries[20].

Recommendation:

Actions should include enforcement of regulations to prohibit bull bars on vehicles which are predominantly used in urban areas where public exposure is high[21]. Australian Design Rules prohibit the fitting of *any object or fitting, not technically essential, which protrudes from any part of the vehicle so that it is likely to increase the risk of bodily injury to any person*.

Safe People

People, their health and the social aspects of interaction with roads should be priority and basis from which the NRSS is developed.

In view of the health, environmental and liveability benefits that come from a mode shift from car use to walking or cycling, these must not be undermined by increased rates of injury from vehicle use. Achieving road safety improvements by discouraging walking and cycling would result in an overall health risk to the Australian population.

Initiatives that improve pedestrian and cyclist safety (e.g. safer speed, improved urban design and transport infrastructure planning) also improve safety for other road user groups including car drivers and passengers. This results in a 'safety multiplier effect' as pedestrians and cyclists are less likely to cause death or injury to other road users[22].

Recommendation:

Currently there are no actions that address educational road safety programs for children[23]. This needs to be included in *First Steps: Actions for the first three years*.

Roads are a cooperative system and a common public space in communities where people interact. Driver behaviour and road conduct on the roads impacts on the quality and liveability of Australian communities[24].

Recommendation:

Under the heading *Future Steps - what else will be considered?*, include:

- the introduction of a public awareness campaign on sharing the road.

1. **What road safety issues are most important to you?**

    - The health benefits of modal shift from car use to walking and cycling must be valued and protected through appropriate measures.
    - Road safety measures must be equitably applied across all road users.
    - Speed limit reductions should apply in shopping strips and major trip generating locations with the base speed being 30km/h or less, depending on community characteristics such as age and ability range.
    - Healthy urban design measures must be embedded in policy and/or regulations to ensure compact, connected urban environments.
    - Guidelines for calming roads and streets should be developed.
    - A road user hierarchy should be developed that will correspond with speed limit guidelines.

2. **Is there anything important that you think is missing from this draft strategy?**

    - The draft NRSS assumes drivers have priority on roads. This needs to be modified to place health and social considerations at the core of strategy development.
    - Little mention is made of health and triple bottom line considerations, which, if included, would change the emphasis of the strategy development.

3. **Are there things that are not explained or where you think there should be more information?**

    - In its current form, the strategy does not reflect a holistic understanding of road use, road safety and road safety requirements as it lacks content around the health and environmental benefits associated with active transport, doesn't contain initiatives for modal shift to alleviate an overdependence on vehicles, and is written from a perspective that predominantly considers car user safety over pedestrian and cyclist safety.

4. **What do you think is good about this draft strategy?**

    - The draft strategy is an important opportunity to improve road safety on a national scale, encourage modal shift and achieve equitable safety measures for all road users.

5. **What can we do differently to improve this draft strategy?**

    - Please see previous comments and recommendations made under the headings: Safe Roads, Safe Speeds, Safe Vehicles, and Safe People.

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