

31 August 2021

The Hon Rosemary Armitage MLC
Chair
Legislative Council Select Committee – Road Safety in Tasmania
Parliament of Tasmania

Via email: rst@parliament.tas.gov.au

Dear Ms Armitage

Legislative Council Select Committee: Road Safety in Tasmania

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Legislative Council Select Committee's inquiry into Road Safety in Tasmania. This submission has been prepared by the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) on behalf of the local government sector. LGAT is incorporated under the *Local Government Act 1993* and is the representative body and advocate for local government in Tasmania. Where a council has made a direct submission to this process, any omission of specific comments made by that council in this submission should not be viewed as lack of support by the LGAT for that specific issue.

Tasmania's councils are majority custodians of Tasmania's road network, collectively managing 80% of our public road infrastructure. Our councils and their road management teams make daily decisions regarding road safety, operation and maintenance and are the principal partners of the Tasmanian and Commonwealth Governments in achieving road safety objectives, certainly for infrastructure, but also for effective local community engagement.

We made a submission to the Australian Government Office of Road Safety's draft National Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030¹. Our submission can be found on our website².

We consulted our member councils, and their road management professionals, to better understand the sector's perspectives on road safety. Road safety improvements and crash reduction have stagnated for several years, not just in Tasmania, but in Australia and many

¹ National Road Safety Strategy: <https://www.officeofroadsafety.gov.au/nrss>

² See 2021 submissions: <https://www.lgat.tas.gov.au/media-and-publications/reports-and-submissions>

developed nations. Significant change is required as we reach diminishing returns in our efforts to achieve zero serious injuries and fatalities on Tasmania's roads.

Funding Model Must Change

Councils report that the current Commonwealth and Tasmanian Government funding streams for road safety such as Blackspot, Vulnerable Road User Program, Safer Rural Roads Program and others, are no longer fit for purpose. The limited submission timeframe in an annual return cycle creates a limited planning horizon for submissions and limits their ability for strategic investment. Their nature tends to push councils to address road safety on a site-by-site basis and limits the ability to link with neighbouring and interconnected road management authorities as they search for eligible projects to nominate. It is now difficult to find projects that meet funding eligibility criteria, as these programs have been running for many years, with the easy wins and low-hanging fruit having been addressed. We are seeing diminishing returns of efforts to achieve on-ground improvements in road safety.

The current funding regime does not support long-term, collaborative, strategic and network approaches and as a result limits Tasmania's ability to properly address road safety. To seriously address road safety the programs need to be reviewed as a whole, rather than individually, to lift the effectiveness of investment and move road safety forward.

Investment needs to move from tactical to strategic; from site specific to network; from short or annual horizon to a multi-year view; from road managers acting in isolation, to collaboratively assessing road network safety needs and informing investment across the whole of the road network. We recommend that funding models directly support collaboration between road managers for funding decisions, the development of road network safety plans, and multi-year investment with a whole-of-road network view.

Sustainable Revenue for Road Safety and Infrastructure

Improving road safety requires more funding. Usefully, there are two existing funding sources that come from road users – speeding fines and the heavy vehicle motor tax.

Speeding Fine Revenue

Speeding fine revenue is an ideal funding source to reinvest into road safety initiatives, as it is directly linked to unsafe driving behaviour. It works like a user charge, increasing revenue while people drive at unsafe speeds and decreasing as people drive safely, so investment changes proportionately with risky behaviour. It also means that speeding offenders pay for these road safety projects, rather than people driving safely within speed limits. This is probably why other Australian states do exactly this, reinvesting fines related to unsafe road behaviour into achieving road safety, and why Tasmania should join its

interstate counterparts in doing the same. LGAT is not alone in calling for this³, the Royal Automobile Club of Tasmania also calls for the same logical reinvestment of speeding fine revenue⁴.

Heavy Vehicle Motor Tax

The second revenue source is the heavy vehicle motor tax (HVMT) that is charged to heavy vehicle road users to recover the road construction and maintenance costs attributable to heavy vehicles. As it is charged to cover the costs of impact to road infrastructure caused by heavy vehicle road usage across the network it is ideal to be redirected back into road infrastructure accessed by heavy vehicles, where it could be used to support safer infrastructure and a safer Tasmanian road network.

Unfortunately, this revenue is not distributed across the road network – state and local – fairly. The Tasmanian Government has allocated the same amount, \$1.5 million per annum for local roads for the last 25 years. This means that the proportion of HVMT revenue provided for local roads today is less than half of what it was in 1996, even though heavy vehicle road access has increased dramatically over this time. This continued reduction in proportional distribution to local roads is not caused by a lack of revenue, as since its introduction the HVMT has more than doubled. This because it is a sustainable user charge that increases proportionately with increased heavy vehicle road usage. The effect of this disproportionate funding allocation is that local roads bear the costs and impacts of heavy vehicle access, while the Tasmanian Government collects the revenue that this access supports. This also forces councils to divert more ratepayer funding for road safety improvements that should be supported through this existing sustainable revenue stream.

The opportunity to support road safety that is provided by the HVMT is not being realised because it is not being equitably distributed across the Tasmanian road network. LGAT calls on the Tasmanian Government to stop reducing local road funding and to start distributing the HVMT revenue to local roads according to heavy vehicle usage across Tasmania's road network.

A Better Understanding of Crash Causes and how to Treat Them

Councils report that the availability and usefulness of relevant crash data has diminished over recent years. While the Department of State Growth provides information when requested, access to it is not regular and readily-accessible posing an unnecessary limitation on building local government understanding of underlying road safety issues. The available data lacks critical details, such as contributory factors to accidents. Providing road manager access to detailed police reports, while managing privacy, would help local

³ See Road Safety: <https://www.lgat.tas.gov.au/member-services/lgat-advocacy/state-election-2021>

⁴ See Priority 1: <https://www.ract.com.au/community/advocating-change/state-election-2021>

government professionals develop a more complete understanding of crash patterns and road infrastructure issues and help inform appropriate treatments. We support an open data approach to all non-sensitive road crash data, as has been done in other states⁵.

The ability of councils to properly interrogate this data is variable and limited, in part due to data accessibility and quality, but also by access to the right technical expertise and experience within a council. There is also very limited opportunity to collaborate between road managers, both state and local, to share lessons learnt and build a strategic understanding of crash causes, appropriate responses and treatments, as well as how to prioritise these responses in the resource-constrained environment that road managers operate within.

Finally, a proper understanding of crash causes may require a dedicated unit within the State Government or with cross-organisational collaboration. Councils draw attention to the December 2020 RAC Foundation report, *International Review of Road Collision Investigation Approaches*⁶, to help inform this response.

Growing Specialist Skills

For a number of years recruiting skilled engineering, civil design staff, experienced road management and safety professionals has been difficult for all sectors in Tasmania. This includes the consultancies that councils rely on to bring in specialist skills. This is a combined capability and capacity issue and Tasmania needs a strategy to grow these skills locally.

This is likely to remain a challenge into the medium term. Given that, collaboration between road managers remains the most efficient way to share skills and improve capability and capacity issues.

Driver Behaviour Requires Culture Change and Collaborative Leadership

Driver behaviour has a fundamental role to play in road crashes and their causes. While driverless vehicles are on the horizon, we are many years from widespread adoption and passenger vehicles are not the only vehicles or road users. We cannot wait for autonomous vehicles, nor would it be appropriate to rely on them in the future.

Driver and road safety awareness programs could be improved by embedding them into existing training and education systems, such as vocational training or similar. This could complement existing programs aimed at targeting at-risk groups in the community, such as new drivers emerging from secondary schools.

⁵ See: <https://www.data.qld.gov.au/dataset/crash-data-from-queensland-roads>

⁶ See: <http://www.forensic-ai.co.uk/2020/12/10/rac-foundation-international-review-of-road-collision-investigation-approaches-report/>

Leadership – Networks of Road Management

Tasmania's councils are motivated to improve road safety for their communities and drive the state's road crash statistics to zero. However, barriers remain to effectively achieving this, including resourcing, technical capability and/or capacity, access to quality data and analysis. Councils report that the Tasmanian Government has been relatively remote in its approach to local road safety for several years and could be better resourced to engage with, and achieve meaningful improvements at, the local level. To achieve sustained improvements in road safety requires the Tasmanian Government to provide effective leadership and foster collaboration between state and local government across the entire Tasmanian road network. A collaborative and open approach from the Tasmanian Government will assist to create the required culture change and focus required to improve road safety. This will also help to identify capacity and capability gaps, and support councils in developing their responses.

Tasmania's response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and its leading approach to heavy vehicle access management, demonstrates what can be achieved when State and local government collaborate and work together effectively. Properly addressing road safety in Tasmania requires a similar approach, with LGAT ready to work with the Tasmanian Government for an effective road safety response.

If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact Michael Edrich at michael.edrich@lgat.tas.gov.au or on (03) 6146 3740.

Yours sincerely



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