GOVERNMENT STATUS REPORT
AUSTRALIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the Australian Department of Transport and Regional Services' involvement in reducing road trauma both in the domestic and international arena since the 18th ESV Conference held in Nagoya, Japan in 2003.

THE AUSTRALIAN ROAD TOLL

The Australian Road Toll in 2004 was 1596 deaths, down from the 2003 figure of 1621 deaths [1]. This represents an improvement of 1.5% from 2003 to 2004. The road toll change from December 1999 to December 2004 amounts to an average annual reduction of 2.0%.

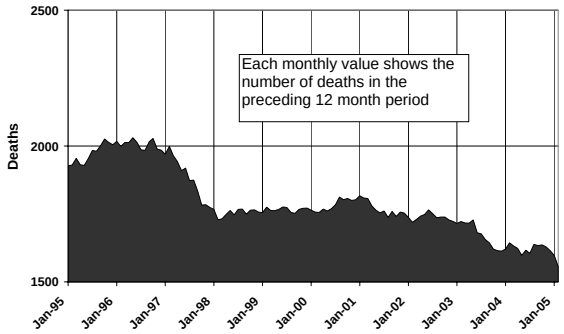

Figure 1. Trends in Australian Road Deaths 1995-2005

As shown in Figure 1, there has been a steady decline in the number of fatally injured road users over the past 4 years, with significant overall improvement in the road toll over the past 10 years.

Males continue to make up the bulk of fatalities in the Australian road toll. Males comprised 71.4% of all road fatalities in Australia in 2004. Female deaths for vehicle occupants were split nearly evenly between drivers and passengers, while male driver fatalities were over three times more frequent in 2004 than male passenger fatalities.

NATIONAL ROAD SAFETY STRATEGY

The National Road Safety Strategy 2001-2010 was approved in November 2000 by Transport Ministers, meeting as the Australian Transport Council. This ten-year Strategy and associated two-year Action Plans provide a framework for coordinating the road safety initiatives of federal, state, territory and local governments, as well as other organisations capable of influencing road safety outcomes.

The aim of the National Strategy is to reduce Australia's annual road fatality rate per 100,000 population to no more than 5.6 in 2010 – this represents a 40 per cent reduction from the benchmark rate of 9.3 per 100,000 population recorded in 1999.

Considerable progress has been made during the first four years under the National Strategy, marked by a steady decline in the absolute number of road fatalities per annum. There were 1,596 deaths on Australian roads in the calendar year 2004, an overall reduction of 12 per cent since 2000, and the lowest national toll on record since 1949.

In population terms, the 12-month fatality rate stood at 7.7 per 100,000 people at the end of January 2005, down 19 per cent since 2000, and only slightly above the rate of 7.6 required for pro-rata progress toward the 2010 target of 5.6.

While fatality rates vary considerably between individual Australian states and territories, there has been a general trend downwards in all jurisdictions except Tasmania. The most conspicuous reduction occurred in the state of Victoria following the introduction of tightened speed compliance measures in 2001–2002.

During 2004, a new two-year Action Plan was developed under the National Strategy framework [2]. The National Road Safety Action Plan 2005 and 2006 identifies the main issues expected to influence road trauma levels in the foreseeable future, and sets out the priority areas for action in calendar years 2005 and 2006.

An important aim of the new Action Plan is to highlight the Safe System concept as an overarching framework for road safety intervention: the broad system components are:

- safer roads and roadsides (infrastructure)
- safer speeds
- safer vehicles
- safer road users
- other supporting measures.

FIELD DATA CRASHWORTHINESS AND AGGRESSIVITY

The Department of Transport and Regional Services, in partnership with a number of state transport agencies and motoring organisations, funds a programme to provide advice to consumers on vehicle safety performance. The programme involves the production of crashworthiness and aggressivity ratings for individual vehicle models, derived from an extensive crash and injury database assembled by the Monash University Accident Research Centre (MUARC).

The database and associated ratings are updated on an annual basis. The latest published report [3] provides crashworthiness and aggressivity ratings for more than 200 vehicle models manufactured between 1982 and 2002.

As well as producing vehicle safety ratings, the database assembled for this programme has been used for a range of other studies, including an ongoing examination of crashworthiness trends in the Australian vehicle fleet by year of vehicle manufacture, and investigation of the relationship between real crash outcomes and the results of vehicle crash barrier testing.

A recent study explored the relative safety performance of different light vehicle market groups in different types of crashes. Building on this work, an integrated model was then developed to examine the influence of cross-sectional changes in the composition of the fleet on the total injury burden. This included an analysis of the effects of historical changes in the fleet mix, and the potential effects under various future change scenarios.

VEHICLE FLEET COMPOSITION

The composition of the Australian vehicle fleet is surveyed on an annual basis by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and the findings of this survey are published in the Motor Vehicle Census, Australia [4].

There were 13.5 million motor vehicles registered in Australia at 31 March 2004. This represents an increase of 10.3% since the 1999 Motor Vehicle Census, when there were 12.3 million vehicles registered in Australia. The average age of all vehicles registered in Australia at 31 March 2004 was 10.3 years, slightly younger than the 10.6 year average age recorded in 1999.

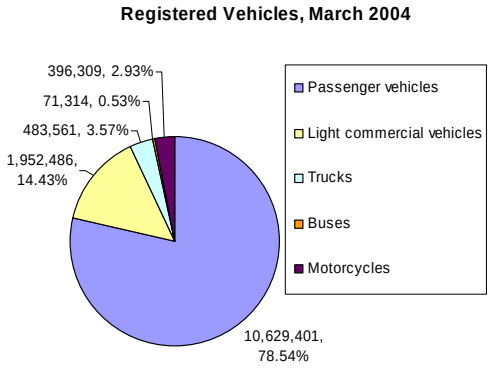

Figure 2. Registered vehicles in Australia, March 2004.

The composition of the Australian vehicle fleet is shown in Figure 2. However, this aggregated data does not indicate the subcategories of passenger vehicles for further detailed analysis.

The Motor Vehicle Census reported in 2004 that the number of registered light commercial vehicles had increased by 13.4% between 1999 and 2004. This is compared to an increase of the total vehicle fleet of 10.3% between 1999 and 2004. Due to the differences in vehicle classification between the Motor Vehicle Census and new vehicle sales data, these figures cannot be directly compared to each other. However, each set of data independently illustrates the current trend towards higher numbers of light commercial and light truck numbers on the roads.

NEW VEHICLE SALES TRENDS

New vehicle sales in Australia have continued to increase between 2001 and 2004. In 2001 there were 772,681 new vehicle sales, compared with 955,229 new vehicle sales in 2004.

As shown in Figures 3 and 4, sales of Sports Utility Vehicles (SUVs) or All Terrain Wagons have grown from 15% of total vehicle sales in 2001 to 17.1% in 2004. Sales data prior to 2002 identifies All Terrain Wagons, while data from 2002 onwards identifies Sports Utility Vehicles. For the purposes of this report, these categories may be considered to be analogous.

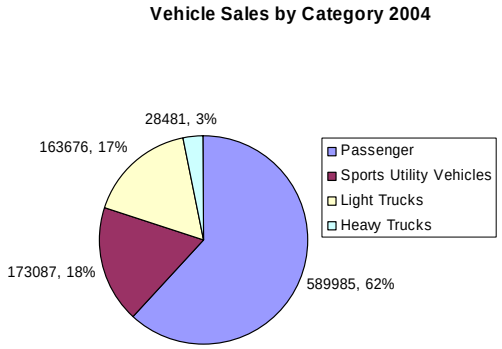

Figure 3. New Vehicle Sales in Australia 2004.

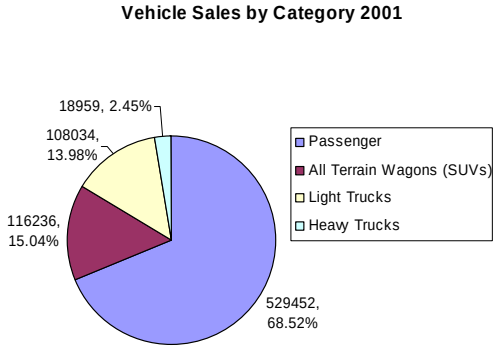

Figure 4. New Vehicle Sales in Australia 2001.

In addition to the increasing market share taken by SUVs, light commercial vehicle sales have increased between 2000 and 2004. Between 2000 and 2004, light truck sales grew consistently as a proportion of total vehicle sales, from 13.8% in 2000 to 17.1% in 2004.

Light truck sales (including SUVs and light commercial vehicles) have increased from 224,270 vehicles in 2001 to 336,763 vehicles in 2004. In 2004 light trucks comprised 35.3% of all vehicle sales.

The Australian government is currently conducting research in to both occupant protection in light commercial vehicles, and in to vehicle compatibility issues raised by these changes in vehicle sales.

INTERNATIONAL HARMONISATION

Australia continues to strongly support research activities within the working groups of the International Harmonised Research Activities (IHRA). Australia's vehicle standards research programme is specifically aligned to support activities of the IHRA Side Impact Working Group and the IHRA Vehicle Compatibility and Frontal Impact Working Group.

The side impact research undertaken by the Australian Government is focused on evaluation of the test procedures drafted by the IHRA SIWG, in particular, the mobile deformable barrier to vehicle test and vehicle to pole impact test.

Australia has chaired the IHRA Side Impact Working Group since its inception in 1998. This group has enjoyed strong support and enthusiasm from members and has reported significant progress at this ESV conference [5].

Compatibility research has also been undertaken by the Australian Government, conducting vehicle to vehicle and offset barrier testing using the Progressive Deformable Barrier (PDB), with results fed into international efforts to develop a compatibility test procedure. In the past this work has focused primarily on passenger vehicles, however, extension work is being undertaken to include light commercial vehicles.

Australian government policy is to align, whenever possible, with international standards, specifically those of the UNECE. Australian resources for vehicle standards research are aimed at development of new and amended vehicle regulations to promote an increase in vehicle safety. With this in mind, Australia would hope to see outputs from research activities such as IHRA fed into the UNECE process for consideration in the development of international vehicle regulations.

REGULATORY INITIATIVES

Australia has considered the case for introducing a regulation for audible seat belt warning devices for light vehicles. A draft Regulation Impact Statement was prepared in July 2004, which concluded that regulation would not be appropriate. This draft was circulated to stakeholders for feedback and comment. Comments closed on 30 November 2004. All comments received supported the draft.

A Regulatory Impact Statement is also being prepared, assessing the case for truck under-run barriers. This draft RIS will be released for public comment in the near future.

NEVILLE REPORT

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services released a report [6] containing 38 recommendations across a range of road safety subject areas. The Australian government is currently considering the content of this report.

REFERENCES

[1] Road Deaths Australia, Monthly Bulletin, January 2005, ISSN 1449-1168, http://www.atsb.gov.au/road/stats/current.cfm

[2] National Road Safety Action Plan 2005 and 2006, http://www.atcouncil.gov.au/pubs/ACTION_PLAN_05_06.pdf

[3] Vehicle Crashworthiness and Aggressivity Ratings and Crashworthiness by Year of Vehicle Manufacture: Victoria and NSW Crashes During 1987-2002, Queensland, Western Australia and New Zealand Crashes During 1991-2002, Newstead, S.V., Cameron, M.H., Watson, L.M. http://www.monash.edu.au/muarc/reports/rpts04.html

[4] Motor Vehicle Census Australia, Australian Bureau of Statistics, November 2004, www.abs.gov.au

[5] International Harmonised Research Activities Side Impact Working Group Status Report, Paper No 05-0460, 19th ESV Conference, Washington DC, 2005

[6] National Road Safety – Eyes on the road ahead, House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services, http://www.aph.gov.au/house/committee/trs/roadsafety/report/fullreport.pdf