

Methods of Evaluating Police Performance

**Western Australia Legislative
Assembly's Community
Development and Justice
Standing Committee Inquiry**

Submission from the RAC
20 February 2015



For the better

RAC WA represents the interests of more than 800,000 Western Australians and is a leading advocate on the mobility issues and challenges facing our State. Drawing on our heritage, a primary role for RAC is to act as a voice for our members and to be a strong public advocate about the road safety issues that affect Western Australia (WA).

RAC collaborates with Government and other organisations to ensure safe, accessible and sustainable mobility options are available for our members and the community. Aligned with the mobility themes of safety, accessibility and sustainability, the RAC is an active participant in the Road Safety Council, as a representative of all road users.

RAC has a long and proud history as an active advocate for road safety in WA and welcomes this opportunity to participate in the WA Legislative Assembly's Community Development and Justice Standing Committee (Committee) Inquiry into Methods of Evaluating Police Performance, with particular focus on performance measures used by WA Police to determine the effectiveness of traffic law enforcement and road safety initiatives.

Road safety is a shared responsibility, and all governmental road safety service providers, community representatives and road users have a responsibility to contribute to making mobility in WA as safe as it can be. This shared responsibility also poses a challenge for the effectiveness of the road safety sector, as was identified in the recent Review of Road Safety Governance in WA (Browne Review).

Of importance is the primary role for policing and traffic enforcement in establishing and maintaining three of the four Towards Zero cornerstones - Safe Road Use, Safe Speeds and to a lesser degree Safe Vehicles. The two cornerstones of Safe Road Use and Safe Speeds are projected to contribute 49% of the 11,000 saved fatally or serious injured West Australians over the life of Towards Zero 2008-2020.

Research by the Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Economics (BITRE) reinforces the primary role of policing in reducing fatality rates in all Australian states over the last forty years. The research concluded that seat belt use, random breath testing (RBT) and speed cameras were the effective factors in the very substantial declines in fatality rates¹.

Hence the focus of this Inquiry on methods of evaluating police traffic enforcement and road safety performance is appropriate and indeed vital, both in maintaining the fatality rate improvements in WA and in driving fatality rates towards zero. The Committee should be commended on recognising that this area is critical to maintaining and improving WA's road safety performance.

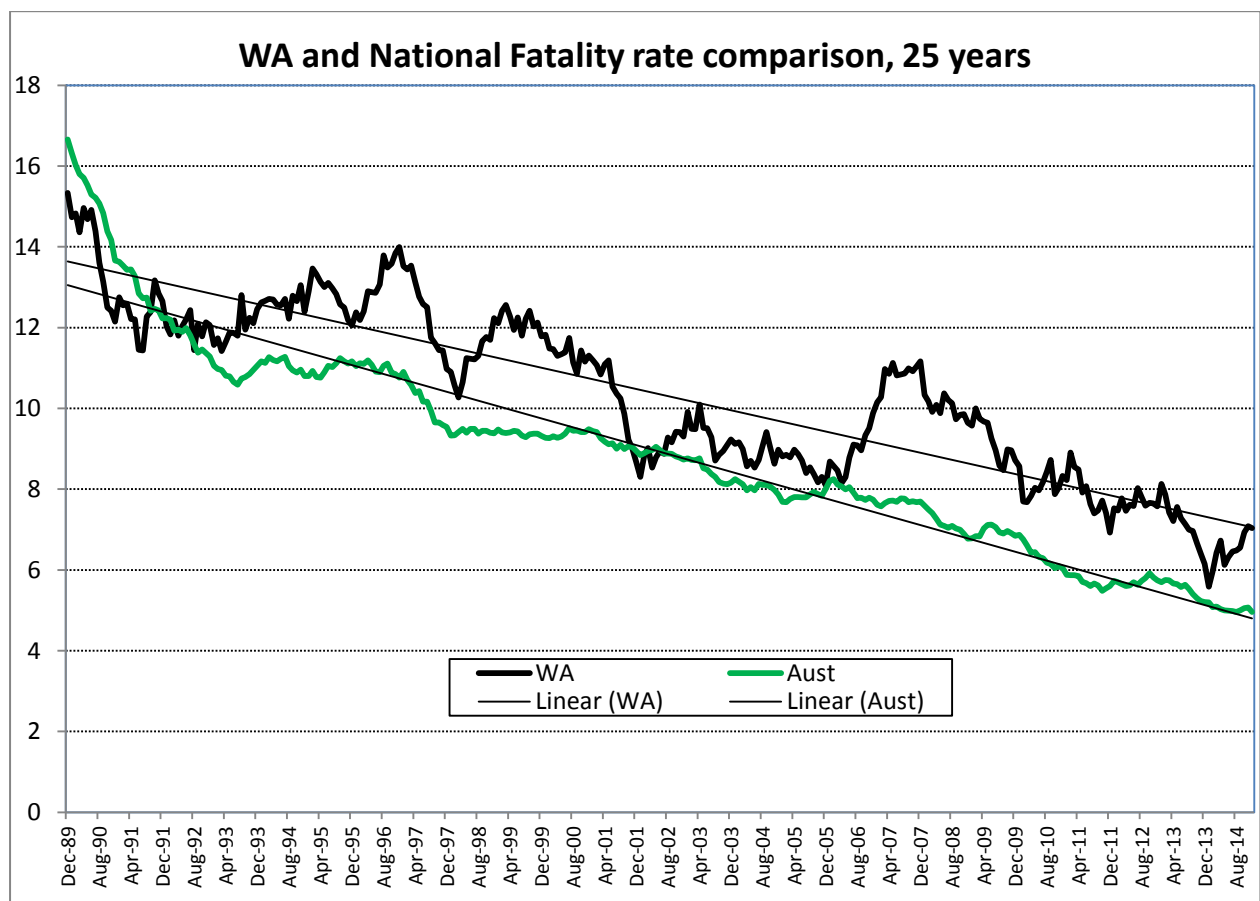
¹ Effectiveness of measures to reduce road fatality rates. BITRE. Information Sheet 39, 2010

Western Australian context

In recent decades, WA has not succeeded in progressing the programs and initiatives that will help keep road users safe as effectively as most other Australian jurisdictions. At a number of points in the past 25 years, WA has had a fatality rate² better than the national rate, yet it is currently higher and has been since mid-2002. WA which was once the best is now the worst when it comes to its road safety record.

The following figure below shows the WA and National fatality rate since 1990. Whilst the trend downwards in fatality rates has occurred both nationally and in WA, the WA fatality rate has some distinctly different features.

At the end of 2014, the national fatality rate was 5.0, whilst WA was 7.2. If WA shared the national fatality rate, an additional 56 lives would have been saved. The gap between WA and the national road safety leaders, such as Victoria, is even greater. If WA had the 2014 Victorian fatality rate (4.3), 74 fewer lives would be lost.



² Expressed in terms of fatalities per 100,000 persons

The characteristics of fatalities and fatal crashes in WA in 2014 are relevant to the deliberations of the Committee. One of the relevant features of fatalities is the geographic distribution of crashes. In 2014, 56% of fatalities occurred outside the Greater Perth area, despite only 22% of the population residing outside the Greater Perth area. The fatality rate in Greater Perth is approximately 4.4 whilst the fatality rate for the population outside Greater Perth is approximately 20³.

RAC analysis indicates that fatality rates are inconsistently distributed between rural and remote areas. For instance, the highest fatality rates occur in Wheatbelt⁴ (rural), the Wheatbelt rate being almost triple Kimberley (remote) and four times Pilbara (remote). Whilst districts with relatively low populations do tend to display greater variability in fatality rates, Wheatbelt consistently has the highest fatality rates. Yet districts with which it shares boundaries, and presumably similar geographic and demographic characteristics, have significantly lower fatality rates.

Fatal crashes in WA in 2014 were dominated by single vehicle run off road type crashes. Across the whole state 62%⁵ of fatalities occurred in crashes of this type, higher in Regional WA (72%) than metropolitan (48%).

Another key feature of fatalities of concern to RAC is the road user types most involved in fatal crashes vary by geography. In 2014, vulnerable road users dominated in metropolitan Perth, 60% of fatalities were in these vulnerable road user groups, that is motorcyclists, pedestrians and cyclists. The influence of vulnerable road users is much lower in Regional WA (20%), where unsurprisingly drivers (55%) are the most commonly fatally injured road user grouping.

Motorcycle riders in particular are a cause of concern. This group accounted a third of fatalities in metropolitan Perth and in 17% of fatalities in regional WA, substantially above their share of licensed motorised vehicles (approximately 5.5%). The disproportionate involvement of motorcycles is even more marked when the relatively low kilometres travelled by motorcycles is considered.

The inextricable link between road safety and traffic enforcement

Enforcement is a core road safety initiative and Police, as the agency responsible for enforcing WA's traffic laws and regulations, are therefore a principal and unique driver of road safety outcomes. This is not to suggest that there is a simple cause and effect relationship, however it is an imperative that Police adopt and visibly acknowledge road safety as a core function of the organisation.

The relationship between enforcement activities and crash reduction (outcomes) is not necessarily direct. Enforcement activities influence community attitudes and most importantly driver behaviour. In-turn, attitudes are a key influencers of road user behaviour, and road user behaviour is the key determinant of crash rates. Other factors also contribute to maintaining and changing road user attitudes and behaviour, however none are as central and vital as Police and traffic enforcement.

Outcome-based performance measures are widely accepted as a practical and sensible way to link activity to strategic priorities. Police's commitment to road safety should be reflected in key performance measures including with the Minister for Road Safety, for both Police as an agency and

³ Preliminary calculations, subject to change.

⁴ Defined by WA Police District boundaries

⁵ Pedestrian crashes have been excluded from this analysis.

for senior leadership. In noting the non-exclusive relationship between traffic enforcement and road safety outcomes, road safety outcome measures should be qualified by intermediate measures which capture the impact of traffic enforcement on road user attitudes as well as behaviour.

Meeting community expectations of traffic enforcement

Openness and transparency are vital ingredients in building and maintaining strong relationship between the community and WA Police. Overwhelmingly, the community has positive experiences when in contact with Police Officers, as evidenced by survey data⁶ and it is common for the community to call for more policing on our roads. Access to high level enforcement input and activity data will reassure the community that, in acknowledgement of the impact of road trauma on the lives of Western Australians, Police are meeting the expectation that traffic enforcement services are being prioritised alongside other operational activities and consistently provided.

Noting a need for transparency around the allocation of resources between general police duties and traffic policing, at the next level down, the otherwise welcome introduction of various camera types and modes has the capacity to disguise a shift in the balance of speed enforcement away from police officers in patrol cars to camera based modes. This is particularly true for freeway-located fixed cameras which provide a significant boost in the volume of vehicles monitored. Whilst the use of cameras is an important enforcement measure, a shift away from traditional methods may reduce the deterrence effect associated with highly visible policing.

With regard to alcohol testing, for which RAC supports an increased rate of 1.5 breath tests per licensed driver per year (or an extra one million tests), the balance between high volume bus based testing and road side testing by patrol vehicles potentially has significant impact. Both are valid and indeed critical enforcement activities however, increased bus testing, which is typically metropolitan, must not substitute testing by patrol vehicles, particularly in rural or remote regions.

The provision of appropriate lower level enforcement data will provide WA Police with an opportunity to demonstrate to the community how and where enforcement is being prioritised. Data about enforcement activity is already collected as part of existing administrative data collection systems, and only a modest cost would apply for WA Police to produce a comprehensive report in a timely manner.

The production of traffic enforcement information has the capacity to influence the allocation of resources to traffic enforcement. External and third party funding of traffic enforcement inputs has been a part the WA Police funding framework under the Road Trauma Trust Fund and more recently Road Trauma Trust Account. Whilst this funding has largely operated under a submission based model, there is scope for other funding models such as direct purchasing. This issue was canvassed in RAC's response to the Browne Review, where a funding body determines a particular strategy, for instance one alcohol test per driver per year, and directly contracts WA Police for the delivery of a specified number of alcohol tests. A history of published performance measures will assure funding partners that they are receiving the contracted service.

Police Annual Reports have traditionally been a successful mechanism for delivering performance information to the community. The published performance measures have been relatively stable

⁶ National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Police Services

allowing analysis over a reasonable period of time and the nature of the agreement over measures has provided relative confidence over the information quality. However, the traffic enforcement performance information in the Annual Report has declined in recent publications and in particular the loss of the Statistical Appendix has reduced the value of the Annual Report.

The Annual Report continues to be a statement of WA Police's financial position. However as a tool to succinctly deliver traffic enforcement performance information the Annual Report is no longer delivering information that would allow a reader to gain a comprehensive understanding of traffic enforcement in WA. The Inquiry may be an opportunity for this deficiency to be identified and a performance reporting framework established, with a view to reinstating the Annual Report as an effective resource for the community.

What traffic enforcement information should be reported to the community?

Publishing the following range of information in a consolidated and consistent form would be significant step forward in the community understanding the nature and delivery of traffic enforcement. The information could include:

- Primary enforcement inputs and activities
 - Traffic hours,
 - Random Breath Testing hours, deployments,
 - Random Drug Testing hours, deployments,
 - Mobile camera operation hours,
 - Fixed camera hours, and
 - Fixed speed-red light camera hours.
- Secondary enforcement output measures
 - Speed- briefs, infringements, cautions,
 - Seatbelts- briefs, infringements, cautions,
 - Other traffic- briefs, infringements, cautions,
 - Mobile camera- vehicles monitored, exceeding limit, infringed,
 - Fixed speed camera- vehicles monitored, exceeding limit, infringed,
 - Fixed speed-red light camera- vehicles monitored, exceeding limit, infringed,
 - Non camera speed infringements,
 - Random Breath Tests,
 - Random Drug Tests,
 - Other preliminary breath tests conducted,
 - Vehicle stops,
 - Work orders issued, and
 - Impoundments.
- Outcome measures
 - Fatality counts and rate,
 - Serious injury count and rate,
 - Speed, alcohol and other high risk behaviours in fatal crashes, and
 - Driver attitudes as measured by National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Police Services (NSCSP) survey questions relating to speed, alcohol, restraints, and other behavioural variables.

The level at which the information is released is highly relevant. The high level whole state information presents one picture of the state of traffic enforcement. Other dimensions present an opportunity to add demonstrable value to the collection:

- Geography- in considering the causation of significant differences in fatality rates between WA Police Districts, there is a need to understand the amount and type of traffic enforcement and driver attitudes at district level.
- Temporal- endowing the information with a time series has the capacity to allow a depth of analysis that could significantly improve understanding of the nature and success of traffic enforcement.

Information as a tool to improve road safety outcomes

Earlier in this Submission, it was identified that WA has a higher fatality rate and has not been as consistent in lowering the fatality rate as other Australian states. Quality information is critical to unlocking the strategies and means by which leading states have been more successful.

Maintaining a range of measures is a vital step in the process of isolating and interpreting the relative impact of strategies, programs and initiatives, delivered across the road safety sector. For example, to evaluate the impact on driver attitudes of community education campaign on drink driving, the deterrence effect of enforcement and other attitudinal influences must be isolated and examined. In essence robust outcome monitoring, that identifies a causal link to between activities and behaviour change, is critical to facilitating informed choices between alternate strategies and to enabling the more effective use of scarce road safety financial resources.

The National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Police Services (NSCSP) is an important strategic tool in facilitating intra and interstate comparisons. The long term and robust nature of the survey allows valuable comparisons. The results at whole state level are currently released as part of the Report on Government Services process and in the WA Police Annual Report. Where statistically reliable, the survey results should be released at Police District level to understand lower level variability and the relationship between inputs and activities, and driver and community attitudes.

Summary

The fatality rate in WA is currently one fifth the rate it was in 1970. WA's road safety record is improving, but not as quickly as it could be. WA's annual fatality rate at the end of 2014 was 7.2 fatalities per 100,000 persons. This is above the national rate of 5.0 and well above Victoria's national leading rate of 4.3. Other Australian states have reached lower fatality rates more quickly and have sustained them. In simple terms, they have done a better job of keeping their communities safe on the road.

Safe Road Use and Safe Speeds are two cornerstones of Towards Zero, WA's Road Safety Strategy which, over the life of the Strategy from 2008 and 2020, will account for almost half the projected injury savings. Police and traffic enforcement is a central and vital strategy to maintaining and changing road user attitudes.

There is benefit in enhancing the level of access, by all parties including the community, to detailed performance reporting. The openness and transparency underpinning the provision of this information, as well as a greater understanding of Police activity to reduce road trauma in Western Australia, will strengthen ties between community and its Police service.

RAC thanks the Committee for the opportunity to participate in this Inquiry and puts forward the following key points for consideration:

- Enforcement is a core road safety initiative and Police, as the agency responsible for enforcing WA's traffic laws and regulations, are therefore a principal and unique driver of road safety outcomes.
- Police's commitment to road safety should be reflected in key performance measures including with the Minister for Road Safety, for both Police as an agency and for senior leadership within the organisation.
- In noting the non-exclusive relationship between traffic enforcement and road safety outcomes, road safety outcome measures should be qualified by intermediate measures, which capture the impact of traffic enforcement on road user attitudes as well as behaviour.
- Access to high level enforcement input and activity data will reassure the community that, in acknowledgement of the impact of road trauma on the lives of Western Australians, Police are meeting the expectation that traffic enforcement services are being prioritised alongside other operational activities and consistently provided.
- Data about enforcement activity is already collected as part of existing administrative data collection systems, and only a modest cost would apply for WA Police to produce a comprehensive report in a timely manner.
- Robust reporting and tracking of enforcement information is critical in identifying those road safety strategies that will be most effective in reducing the social and economic impact of road trauma in our State.