

BACKGROUND

Today we are facing a crisis in Western Australia in the management and implementation of Road Safety policy. This crisis extends to the reporting, analysis, policy formation, implementation, enforcement and effectiveness of our Road Safety system. We have voiced our and the communities concerns in the past, most recently in August last year when I put forward a motion for an Independent Enquiry on Road Safety, and again in December. Yet this government believes that it is all in hand, that everything is ok.

In the words of Acting Community Safety Officer John Bowler "WA's road safety strategy is on the right track". And from the Minister himself "that we are making very real progress in **road safety**." Tell that to the families of the 387 people involved in fatal and critical injuries last year on WA roads. That's an increase of almost 25% on the previous year and the worst on record for 6 years. (1)

The Government may put this down to a glitch, but that "glitch" is getting worse. This year to date 85 people have been involved in critical or fatal crashes and that is 15% higher than last year.(2) If this trend continues we will have the worst road toll for over 10 years.

While the Government continues to defend its current policies and the current road safety system, more West Australians will die needlessly on our roads.

Public Cynicism and Disillusionment.

The Minister defends the road safety record of the government by quoting the policies and strategies that had been implemented over the past few years. What the government should be doing is acknowledge the very real fact that these policies are not working to reduce the road toll. We could sit here all day and listen to what the government has done on road safety, but this real crisis stems from what has failed to be done.

Both the public and media are cynical and disillusioned about the road safety system. This cynicism is highlighted by the fact that the government has had to spend millions of road safety dollars on defending its speed camera policy, with the current advertising campaign "There is a reason behind everything we do"

I would suggest that if the road safety system was working effectively then these funds would be better allocated to tackling the real problems of road safety not defending the policies. I put it to you that the current road safety strategies and policies are outdated and are having less effect in reducing the road toll. Recent policy announcements are ad hoc and poorly thought out.

The Minister rightly pointed out that the previous Liberal Government established the Office of Road safety. This was established because we saw a need for improvement and change to the road safety system. It is now time to review the current system and make some necessary improvements.

ISSUES

To understand why the system is now in crisis in WA, we need to look at the key areas of the road safety system.

Reporting and Analysis of Key Data

I'm sure the government would agree that without up to date and well analysed data, it would be difficult to propose effective policies. The government recently called upon stakeholders and interested parties to submit their ideas and recommendations on road safety. They need to rely on up to date data.

Two months ago, December 2006 the Office of Road Safety released its current analysis and report on Reported Road Crashes in WA. It may surprise many in the house that this current report is not of accidents that occurred in 2005, or those that occurred in 2004. The most current report is on accidents in 2003.

Is this what the Minister is referring to when he claims we are making very real progress in Road Safety?

How does this compare with other states? It's February 2007 and I can go online and get a thorough 19 page analysis of accidents in NSW for year ended 2006 and a complete analysis for 2005. (3)

Gentleman I put to you that our Road safety system needs an independent review.

Interpretation of Data

The Government's road safety policy concentrates on Speeding, fatigue, drink driving and seatbelts but ignores 2 of the main causes of road accidents and fatalities. Driver inattention and driver misjudgement have been listed in numerous overseas reports as the main causes of accidents and fatalities. They have been actually rated above speed as the major cause of road trauma. But this governments road safety strategy does not present any measures, education or policies to tackle these issues.

The WA authorities actually believe that we are different to the rest of the world and it does not apply here.

The Australian Transport Safety Bureau listed driver inattention and misjudgement as the primary cause of road accidents in their reports of 1996 and 1999 actually above speeding. (4)

Driver inexperience is one of the major causes of young driver fatalities but not enough has been done in this area.

Fake speed cameras and higher fines does not tackle these issues.

Regional Issues

Last year there were 30% more accidents and fatalities on country roads than there were in the metropolitan area. Year to date its 50% higher.

Yet the government continues to have 14 multanova speed cameras in Perth and 2 part time regional ones. The governments latest contribution to the road safety debate is to discuss more speed cameras, even fake ones in Perth.

The current road safety strategies have failed to tackle the regional problem.

In its latest report the AAA has determined that investing in safer and more forgiving roads is the best strategy for reducing the road toll, especially in regional areas. A national evaluation of safe roads in Australia has also been completed. A comparison of the high volume roads leading out from Melbourne to regional areas are far safer than those in WA. (www.aaa.asn.au AusRAP link) (5)

This I would suggest this is the main reason why Victoria has a lower road toll than WA, rather than the higher number of speed cameras as the Office of Road safety would have us believe.

Clearly much more should have been done in this area and is another reason why a review should be undertaken to determine what level of investment is required.

Speeding Strategy

The government fails to understand the public's frustration at its perceived preoccupation with fining drivers for speeding. The big stick approach to road safety. The governments response to this frustration is " don't speed and you wont get fined". How simplistic and analytical!

This simplistic and ill informed view would have us believe all drivers are intentionally speeding and therefore should pay the price.

I would suggest to every driving member in this house that they are unintentionally speeding as some point in time.

Drivers in WA face speed zones of 40, 50, 60, 70, 80, 90, 100 and 110 km per hour, even on the same road. Speed zones change with the time of day and with the every changing construction zones.

Odometers are accurate to only 10% yet our speed cameras allow for only a 5% margin of error. Research has shown that putting up a speed sign alone is not enough advice of a change in speed limit, that it should be accompanied by a change in the road itself. In NSW a change of speed into a country town is often accompanied by a change in the road structure like the narrowing of the road.

The governments' current policy to increase fines and discuss further reducing the speed limit on our roads, shows a lack of understanding of the key problems drivers face on WA roads and only leads to more frustration, cynicism and lack of confidence in the current system.

Speeding is an important issue but just fining drivers and more speed cameras is not the only answer.

Traffic calming and road structure have a positive impact on speed and greater community support.

The current road safety system has failed the majority or safe law biding drivers who support a review of this big stick approach to road safety.

Other Issues for Review

- **Review of the enforcement policy.** The Premier got into the debate of road safety recently and recommended increasing the fines for failing to wear a seat belt. It begs one to ask the question why would someone risk getting fined for not wearing one in the first place? Is it really that the fine is too low ... or is it that the risk of getting caught is too low? The current enforcement policy should be reviewed. Ask those that enforce the policies and they will simply tell you that there are not enough Cops on the Road.
- **Road safety funding.** The method of funding the Office of Road Safety is worthy of consideration. With one-third of Multanova revenue going to fund ORS-initiated programs, a reduction in speeding offences and other non-compliance will result in funding cut to these programs. The funding model therefore rewards fines-collection but not greater compliance by motorists. While not disregarding the policy considerations behind the original decision to allocate Multanova revenue in this way, the outcome is a problematic if only theoretical tension between revenue and safety. The policy to guarantee \$15million to the trauma trust fund does not address this issue.
- **Government is not fulfilling its responsibility.** It is the Government's responsibility to provide the best practice approach to safety. It has an obligation to all road users in Western Australia and these obligations are not being fulfilled.

Many years ago Queensland was at a crossroad, they took a Bipartisan approach, the members of both parties formed a committee to oversee road safety resulting in a positive change.

A PROPOSED SOLUTION

The minister has advised that the Office of Road safety is undertaking a review of road safety policy and will formulate new policies for the years ahead.

However the chairman of the Road safety Council , has stated in several occasions that they are now at a loss as to what they can do to reduce the states rising road toll.

This in itself should be impetus for the government to accept that an independent review of the road safety system is warranted.

The following solutions will address the above issues:

- **An Independent Enquiry.** A call for the Government to support an independent enquiry into road safety and look at improving thorough investigation, correlation and analysis.

A commitment in to an independent enquiry is not an admission of guilt, merely acknowledgement that more needs to be done, a fresh, new and effective approach to road safety and the system.

By declining this motion the Government is saying that the high death toll, loss of support from the media and public and lack of up-to-date analysis and interpretation is ok and therefore the Government is contributing to the fatalities in a silent manner.

This motion has the support of the media and the public and should not be denied.

- **A relocation of funding.** There needs to be a relocation of funding to road safety and the Office of Road Safety to determine what improvements can be made and how it can be made more effective.
- **Improved statistics and reporting.** Road Safety Council recently submitted the statistics of road accidents and fatalities on Western Australian roads not for 2006 or 2005, not even 2004 but in the dawn of 2007 we have in-depth information of road statistics for 2003. No wonder the policies are out of date, what good is the statistics of 2003 for analysis in 2007.

The statistics speak for themselves but what good is it when we are reviewing 4 year old data.

Better collection of data and current interpretation is needed to address the problem at hand as it is happening.

- **Improved enforcement.** The current enforcement program is ill-equipped and is not addressing the problem at hand. The main causes, the actual specifics are not being detailed. Improve enforcement and the results will speak for themselves.

The Office of Road Safety and part of the members of the Police force confirm that the enforcement strategies are not working and are not addressing the issues that confront us.

- **Commitment of resources.** How many more people have to die on our roads before the Government will commit its energy and resources where it is needed most?

Conclusion

We believe that an independent enquiry into road safety will give the Road Safety Structure the answers needed to address the main problems on Western Australia roads. With a renewed and reviewed focus on road safety we believe that the road accidents and fatalities can be reduced. By supporting this motion the government is showing a bipartisan approach to road safety improvement and both parties can seek the best approach to reducing the needless loss on lives on our roads.

Press

See Appendix 1 “Road Deaths Australia Monthly Bulletin April 2006”, Australian Government, Australian Transport Safety Bureau.

The conclusion that the State Government has no interest in developing an approach to road safety that will result in a genuine reduction of the road toll, is becoming increasingly clear to the Western Australian public.

As stated by former Western Australian liberal leader Bill Hassell in his article in The West Australian 19 May 2006:

“It is time for the vast majority to demand of government that it stop trying to kid us that its financial persecution of ordinary motorists is anything to do with road safety”

See Appendix 4 “State Scoops \$10m in Speeding Windfall” The West Australian 24 April 2003

As seen in the article at Appendix 4, quoted above, police acknowledged in 2003 that the road toll was due to factors other than speeding. The trend by the Government to blame speed and pour further resources into catching speeding motorists continued in 2004, where an article in The West Australian stated that:

“Visible policing, better roads, safer cars, better trained drivers and fair application of the laws all work more effectively at improving road safety than speed cameras. But these cost money and take hard effort, something speed cameras don’t”

The article also demonstrates that:

“...road safety is therefore very important, not only in terms of saving lives, but also in terms of economic costs”

See Appendix 6 “Speed Camera and No Action”, The West Australian 19 June 2004

The view that speed was not a major contributor to the road toll was further demonstrated with the release of figures in a November 2004 report in The West Australian, stating:

“fewer drivers are being caught speeding, but the road toll has stayed the same”

See Appendix 7 “Fewer Caught Speeding, But Toll The Same”, The West Australian 15 November 2004

In Queensland, the State Government established the “Travelsafe Committee”, consisting of several current members of the Queensland Parliament, fifteen years ago. The committee monitors, investigates and reports to Parliament on issues relating to road safety and public transport, with relative independence.

In a report by the Travelsafe Committee into the use of speed cameras in Queensland, the report showed that:

“Fatal accidents, caused solely by speed, represent 1.8% of all accidents reported State-wide but only 0.8% of all accidents in Brisbane....inappropriate speed is deemed to be the cause of 4.2% of all reported accidents...”

These figures are very different from the popularly quoted figure of 30% of fatal accidents being caused by excessive speed. The findings of the Queensland Travelsafe Committee suggest our current road safety strategy disproportionately focuses on speed. Research and statistics from more independent bodies than the Western Australia Road Safety Council show that other more important causes of accidents are being ignored in favour of the easier, and more lucrative focus on speed cameras.

Another report by the Travelsafe Committee into Reducing the Road Toll for Young Drivers in Queensland showed that inexperience and inattention were by far the greatest factors contributing to crashes involving Queenslanders aged 17-19. According to the study, inexperience was responsible for 40% of crashes involving young males, and 43% involving young females. Inattention was responsible for nearly 16% of crashes involving males and 14.5% of crashes involving females. Excessive speed for the circumstance, however, was responsible for only 3.5% of crashes involving males and 1.3% of crashes involving females.

See Appendix 8 “Speed Cameras: Should they be used in Queensland”, Parliamentary Travelsafe Committee, Report #15 and Appendix 9 “Reducing the Road Toll for Young Queenslanders” Parliamentary Travelsafe Committee, January 2003.

As seen by the statistics set out above, a road safety strategy would be incomplete if it focused solely on speed or on driver distraction, rather than the wider issues of driver inattention and misjudgement.

Articles by Australian journalist John Cadogan have also questioned the focus of Australian State Governments on speed as the major contributor to the road toll, as has the work of English academic Alan Buckingham, who has spent considerable time in Australia.

See Appendix 10 Cadogan, J, "Big Bang Theories", Wheels Magazine, April 2005 and Appendix 11 Buckingham, A "Speed Traps: Saving Lives or Raising Revenue?" Policy Vol 19 No 3, Spring 2003.

References

(1) Western Australian Police Service
Fatal Traffic Crashes and Fatalities 2006

(2) WA Police service
Media Release on Road Trauma 22 February 2007

(3) NSW RTA Preliminary Traffic Crash Data Monthly Bulletin January 2007

(4) Australian Transport Safety Bureau

Primary cause of fatal road crashes (1996, 1999)

[Online] Available: http://www.atsb.gov.au/road/road_fatality_statistics/index.aspx ATSB

(5) AAA Report - What needs to be done?

<http://www.aaa.asn.au>

(6) Australia Road Assessment Program (AusRAP)

www.aaa.asn.au links to AusRAP

AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety - www.aaafoundation.org
The role of driver distraction in traffic crashes (2001)

National Highway Traffic Safety Administration – www.nhtsa.dot.gov
The impact of driver inattention on near crash / crash risk (2006)

Innovations Report –
Findings released on real-world driver behaviour, distraction, crash factors (2006)
[Online] Available: <http://www.innovations-report.com/html/reports/logistics/report-58285.html>

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<http://www.police.wa.gov.au/AboutUs/AboutUs.asp?FatalCrashStatistics>