

VACC Submission:

Inquiry into the increase in Victoria's road toll

February 2020



About VACC

The Victorian Automobile Chamber of Commerce (VACC) welcomes the opportunity to present a submission to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee Inquiry into the Increase in Victoria's Road Toll.

VACC is Victoria's peak automotive industry association, representing the interests of more than 5,500 members in over 20 retail automotive sectors that employ over 50,000 Victorians.

VACC members range from new and used vehicle dealers (passenger, truck, commercial, motorcycles, recreational and farm machinery), repairers (mechanical, electrical, body and repair specialists, i.e. radiators and engines), vehicle servicing (service stations, vehicle washing, rental, windscreens), parts and component wholesale/retail and distribution and aftermarket manufacture (i.e. specialist vehicle, parts or component modification and/or manufacture), and automotive dismantlers and recyclers.

VACC is also an active member of the Motor Trades Association of Australia (MTAA) and contributes significantly to the national policy debate through Australia's peak national automotive association.

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VACC Recommendations

Recommendation 1:

That the Victorian Government spend a greater proportion of resources on fixing the dilapidated state of regional roads

Recommendation 2:

That the Victorian Government scale back the use of wire rope barriers and consider replacing them with smooth surface barriers

Recommendation 3:

That the incidence of vehicle collisions with fatalities involving vehicles with prior structural repairs be recorded and investigated as necessary.

Recommendation 4:

That a 40 kilometre per hour accident slow down speed limit be applied to motorists in Victoria when passing stationary tow trucks and breakdown assistance vehicles displaying flashing yellow lights, in addition to emergency vehicles displaying flashing blue or red lights.

Recommendation 5:

That both the luxury car tax and super luxury car duty be abolished to improve the affordability of newer vehicles incorporating driver assist technologies for consumers.

Recommendation 6:

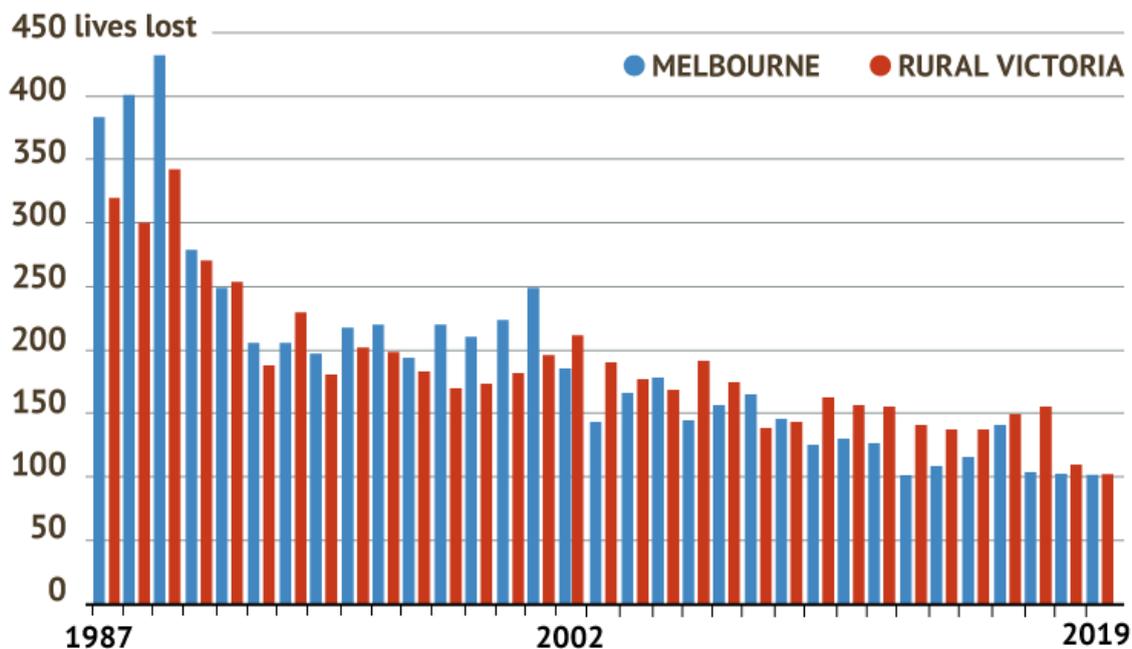
That a national data collection be developed in relation to serious injuries arising from vehicle crashes.

VACC Response to Terms of Reference Items

(1) Current Victorian Towards Zero Road Safety Strategy 2016-2020 and progress towards its aim of a 20 per cent reduction in fatalities with 200 or less lives lost annually by 2020;

VACC observes that whilst there has been a significant downward trend over time in road accident fatalities (Chart 1), since the 1990s more fatalities are occurring on country rather than city roads. Of the 263 fatalities in Victoria in 2019, more than half (145) occurred in country Victoria, with 90 in the west of the state alone, despite country Victoria representing only 24 per cent of the state's population.

Chart 1: Lives lost on Victorian roads by location



Source: TACC

For the Victorian Government to achieve its target strategy, VACC recommends a greater focus on country roads. Two areas of immediate attention are:

- The dilapidated state of rural roads, particularly in the Western district, and
- The use of wire rope barriers

VACC member reports indicate that both these are significant contributing factors to the road toll in regional Victoria. Addressing both these issues would not only help lower the road toll but would help support the many regional businesses and communities that rely on road transport for their viability.

It is VACC's view that wire rope safety barriers that are designed to protect motorists are also causing some of the worst road trauma. Wire rope safety barriers have a limited capacity to slow or

absorb the energy of larger vehicles like trucks and buses when compared with other barriers such as a concrete. Motorcyclists in particular, are very vulnerable from wire barriers when riders fall or slide into them.

It's not only motorcyclists who are put at risk where wire barriers are unsuitably installed. Their effectiveness relies on the wire remaining highly tensioned, and even minor contact with vehicles can cause the barriers to slacken. It's expensive and time consuming to "retention" the wire, meaning many remain slack and of little use.

VACC there recommends the following:

Recommendation 1:

That the Victorian Government spend a greater proportion of resources on fixing the dilapidated state of regional roads

Recommendation 2:

That the Victorian Government scale back the use of wire rope barriers and consider replacing them with smooth surface barriers

VACC also observes that an increasing proportion of vehicles involved in collisions have had prior repair work undertaken that has not been of an acceptable standard. Such underfunded vehicle repair work includes inadequate structural repairs to vehicles that can compromise the structural integrity of a vehicle in accident, as well as the use of substandard parts that may affect the performance of a vehicle, both of which can contribute to fatal outcomes.

Consumers are often 'none the wiser' as to the standard of vehicle body repairs undertaken on their vehicles, where a gleaming coat of paint can mask inadequate and underfunded repairs that may be of significant detriment if such vehicles were involved in a future accident. Current strict cost compliance measures imposed on vehicle body repairers by insurance companies, can accentuate such practices, and possibly limit future reductions in the road toll. VACC believes that this issue warrants further investigation.

Recommendation 3:

That the incidence of vehicle collisions with fatalities involving vehicles with prior structural repairs be recorded and investigated as necessary.

(2). Adequacy and scope of the current driver drug and alcohol testing regime;

VACC has no comments regarding the adequacy current drug and alcohol testing regime.

(3). Adequacy of current speed enforcement measures and speed management policies;

VACC contends that a key failure of current speed enforcement measures and speed management policies in Victoria, relates to the absence of 40kph accident slow down legislation for roadside towing operators. Law enforcement and emergency service operators are afforded the protection of a 40 kph speed limit by the public when passing emergency vehicles with flashing blue or magenta lights that have stopped on the roadside. Ironically, tow vehicle operators are not afforded the same protections, and this has resulted in tragic outcomes.

Towing operators are often the first responders to arrive at a vehicle accident scene, which is usually on a freeway or major intersection. VACC has received numerous reports of personal injuries involving loss of limbs or life involving tow operators. For example, on 14 November 2017 a towing operator lost his arm while attempting to remove a broken down vehicle on Melbourne's Peninsular Link. Surgeons attempted to reattach the arm, but this operation failed.

It has been reported to VACC that this is one of many accidents that have occurred in recent years relating to roadside towing operators. It is reported that multiple near misses are recorded regularly and injuries are not uncommon.

VACC has concerns that roadside towing operators are facing increasing risks while undertaking their work and, without the protection of 40kph vehicle slowdown legislation or the ability to use flashing blue or magenta lights at an accident scene as per other emergency vehicles, places roadside towing operators at a heightened risk of serious accidents or death.

VACC notes that other jurisdictions including New South Wales and Western Australia, have enacted a change to their road rules to apply a 40kph accident slow down speed limit to motorists when passing stationary tow trucks and breakdown assistance vehicles displaying flashing yellow lights, in addition to emergency vehicles displaying flashing blue or red lights. VACC strongly urges that Victoria adopt the same approach.

Recommendation 4:

That a 40 kilometre per hour accident slow down speed limit be applied to motorists in Victoria when passing stationary tow trucks and breakdown assistance vehicles displaying flashing yellow lights, in addition to emergency vehicles displaying flashing blue or red lights.

(4). Adequacy of current response to smart phone use, including the use of technology to reduce the impact of smart phone use on driver distraction

VACC has no comments regarding the adequacy current response to smart phone use to reduce the impact of smart phone use on driver distraction.

(5). Measures to improve the affordability of newer vehicles incorporating driver assist technologies

It is an unfortunate fact that a large proportion of new vehicles incorporating driver assist technologies such as lane departure warning, autonomous emergency braking, adaptive cruise control and other semi-autonomous functions remain unaffordable for many people.

A key problem is that many vehicles incorporating these features are subject to a large tax impost both federally and at state level, which raises the price of these vehicles immensely for consumers. Such taxes include:

- The Luxury Car Tax (LCT), imposed at the rate of 33% for vehicles above the luxury car threshold (\$67,525). LCT is paid by businesses that sell or import luxury cars (dealers) and passed onto consumers. LCT is also paid by individuals who import luxury cars.
- The imposition of Super Luxury Car Duty in Victoria. Since July 1 2019, Victorian consumers are required to pay super luxury car duty for new or used vehicles valued above \$100,000.

VACC believes that the combination of both these taxes unfairly inflates the price of vehicles incorporating contemporary driver assist and safety technologies and this acts to limit the affordability of such vehicles for many consumers. VACC views these taxes as being unnecessary and discriminatory and recommends that they be abolished for the benefit of car dealers and consumers.

Recommendation 5:

That both the luxury car tax and super luxury car duty be abolished to improve the affordability of newer vehicles incorporating driver assist technologies for consumers.

(6). Adequacy of current road standards and the road asset maintenance regime

As per the response to Terms of Reference item 1, VACC maintains that country Victoria is over-represented in regards to Victoria's road toll, and that the poor condition and maintenance of rural roads and the extended use of wire rope barriers are key factors that limit the adequacy of current road standards and the road asset maintenance regime.

(7). Adequacy of driver training programs and related funding structures such as the L2P program

VACC has no comments in relation to this item.

(8). Adequacy of road collision data collection

VACC contends that whilst data relating to road fatalities is adequately measured, there is a paucity of data relating to serious injuries from vehicle crashes. The rate, type, vehicle classification and contributory causes of serious injuries are items that should be measured consistently and at a national level. This would provide a richer dataset to evaluate trends and implement policies pertaining to the reduction of road collisions.

Recommendation 6:

That a national data collection be developed in relation to serious injuries arising from vehicle crashes.