C-MARC is pleased to be able to make this submission to the Australian Government on the Draft National Road Safety Strategy. The strategy is generally commendable and must be supported by all Australian governments, the community and business.

In general the strategy is based on sound information and principles which leads to reasonable conclusions. However, there are some aspects which require considerably more attention, to substantially strengthen the strategy, including the following:

- Develop a strong road safety culture
- Commit to action
- Develop actions for other contributors to road safety, particularly the health system and wider government policy such as transport, land use and economic policy.
- Support increased research to provide effective policies prepared and delivered most efficiently.

The most unfortunate aspect of the draft strategy, however, is that it doesn’t set targets which are serious enough. The number of people dying and being seriously injured on our roads is simply unacceptable and the level of government interest is inadequate. Australians deserve better road safety, so governments, business, industry and the general public all need much greater involvement. The previous strategy aimed for a real reduction of 29%, which was not achieved. The current strategy again sets a real target of 30%. Other developed nations have achieved reductions in excess of these figures. Therefore Australian governments must lead the community by being much more committed to saving the lives of Australians than this draft strategy proposes.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely,

Assoc. Professor Brett Hughes
Director C-MARC
Introduction

The strategy is generally commendable and must be supported by all Australian governments, the community and business.

In general, the strategy is based on sound information and principles which leads to reasonable conclusions. However, there are some aspects requiring considerably more attention, as described below. The strategy needs to be substantially strengthened if it is to achieve its objectives and meet road safety outcomes which Australians deserve.

1. Develop a Strong Road Safety Culture

One of the core issues for road safety in Australia is the level of credence it is given. The strategy notes: “we all need to change the way we think and act about road safety. Each one of us has a role – whether we are road planners, designers or builders, vehicle engineers or fleet operators, policy makers or business professionals, or individual road users going about our everyday activity.”

The general public and the media are more interested in the Queensland floods where 22 people died, than in road safety which claimed the lives of about 200 Australians during the same period.

However, the draft strategy does little to raise the significance of road safety with all stakeholders to its real level of economic and personal consequence. In doing so, it undervalues road trauma and the benefits of improved road safety, allowing governments and other stakeholders to minimise their responses.

There is no doubt that the culture of safety in nearly every area which contributes to road safety is substandard. Safety practice on our roads, including by government agencies, does not meet the standards required for safety in other activities including railways, aviation, mining, offshore petroleum and general workplaces. These situations demand capacity, competency, systems and processes which are not demonstrated in road policy, management and operations. Industries in these fields are required to specifically identify risks and the countermeasures to manage the consequences. These industries even have specific safety regulators for all parts of the industry, which does not occur with roads (e.g. governments are subject to safety regulation for railway infrastructure, but not for roads).

Occupational safety identifies that road transport is the most dangerous industry in Australia, by frequency of death; more than five times any other industry. It has been estimated that up to 30-40% of all road traffic accidents involve somebody who is at work at the time. Yet safety on the roads attracts a lower level of interest, intervention and practice.

The NRSS must include strategies to improve the level of road safety practice by business, government and the community.
2. Commit to Action

Australian Governments need to commit to specific, serious and urgent action. At present the draft Strategy contains many vague actions (generally described as ‘support’, ‘encourage’, ‘investigate’, ‘monitor’, etc). Strategies without concrete plans of action are merely words for governments to hide behind. A program should specify exactly what action is to be taken, the intended outcome, who is responsible, when it is to be achieved and what resources will be applied.

_The NRSS must include a clear program by government, business, and the community, which describes actions, outcomes, responsibilities and timing._

3. Develop Actions for Other Contributors to Road Safety

The ‘Safe System’ approach to road safety provides an excellent foundation for improving road safety. However, it does not recognise all of the aspects which contribute to road safety outcomes. There are other factors and influences which are important to recognise including:

- Social (e.g. the social culture of people from different backgrounds, locations or circumstances puts more or less emphasis on road safety);
- Economic (e.g. taxation arrangements promote higher use of private cars and discourage use of public transport);
- Transport (e.g. many transport projects inadequately identify their road safety consequences, especially if they are not road projects and others have road safety benefits which could be increased); and
- Land Use (e.g. urban sprawl discourages public transport and increases car use).

Transport agencies are to be commended for taking responsibility for road safety. However, they do not have authority for all opportunities to make improvements, so wider engagement is essential.

Many of the consequences of road crashes are dealt with in the health system. Following a crash, emergency response, trauma care, health care and rehabilitation are all essential to minimise the outcomes. Improving road safety reduces the cost of health care and time delays in the health system. Improving the health system reduces road trauma by reducing the number of deaths and the consequences of injuries. Initiatives in these areas must be recognised and included in the NRSS, even though they are not a responsibility of Transport Ministers.

_The NRSS must be expanded beyond the four pillars of the Safe System approach to road safety to include other sectors, factors and influences._

4. Support Increased Road Safety Research

Like transport, road safety research is not intended to be an end itself. If road safety is to improve in Australia we need new policies, programs and practices. There are many possible interventions, and some are introduced without knowing the outcomes, which is wasteful and unproductive. Research contributes to government agencies, business and the community meeting its road safety objectives efficiently and effectively.

High quality research consistently returns good returns on investment by leading to superior policies which are delivered faster, more reliably and with greater community acceptance. Transport research consistently returns very good value for the investment which is made. The excellent research which is done in Australia by governments, universities and others must be increased.

_The NRSS must include increased funding for research to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of achieving road safety outcomes._