

TABLED 18 June 1996

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO THE REPORT OF

THE PARLIAMENTARY ROAD SAFETY
COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO

THE REVISION OF SPEED LIMITS

INTRODUCTION

The setting of speed limits and the resultant traffic performance in terms of speeds and crashes has always been a significant issue for drivers of motor vehicles, other road users and people who own, occupy or use land and buildings along roads.

On 13 November 1991 the Social Development Committee tabled in Parliament the report of its inquiry into speed limits in Victoria. It contained 31 recommendations. The Government response to the report was tabled on 19 May 1992. The response indicated general agreement with the main thrust of the recommendations and resulted in a total review of speed limits throughout Victoria, the main new components of which were:

- establishment of 110 km/h speed limits on the safest, highest standard rural freeways,
- elimination of 75 km/h speed limits and rationalisation of speed limits on urban traffic routes to 60, 70 and 80 km/h, and
- allowing local government to apply to VicRoads for 50 km/h signposted speed limits on residential streets (this was extended by the Government with a new regulation to provide for 50 km/h speed limits in local residential precincts).

The speed management principles underlying this review were to provide a credible system of speed zoning which met driver expectations while achieving a balance between safety, mobility and local land use amenity, and retaining the integrity of the law enforcement process.

Physical implementation of the review started in February 1993, with the signposting of the 110 km/h freeway speed limits, and it finished in November 1994, with the rationalisation of urban traffic route speed limits in rural cities.

The Road Safety Committee initiated an inquiry into the implementation of the review in 1994 to inform the Parliament and the community of the status of implementation of the earlier recommendations, the results, details of any evaluations carried out and any lessons to be learned from the process. The report of this inquiry was tabled in Parliament on 11 April 1995 and contained six recommendations. The Government's responses to those recommendations are as follows:

RECOMMENDATION 1

"VicRoads undertake research as soon as possible into the effect on accident rates of the revision of speed limits."

Response:

This recommendation is supported. The results of a research project to study the effect on accidents of increasing speed limits to 110 km/h on rural freeways is expected to be available in Fmid 1996. A separate project to study the effect on accidents of changing to 70 and 80 km/h speed limits on urban traffic routes has commenced and is programmed for completion in May 1996.

Less than twenty individual streets have been signposted with 50 km/h speed limits to date and this is too few for any meaningful evaluation. A regulation has been made which allows 50 km /h speed limits to be established in local traffic precincts. A driver, passing a 50 km/h local traffic precinct sign on entry to a precinct, has to observe that speed limit until an end local traffic precinct sign is passed on exit. As a result of the making of the regulation and when local government establishes 50 km/h speed limits in local traffic precincts on a sufficient scale, a separate evaluation will be undertaken. It is anticipated that it may be two years before this can be achieved.

A three year post implementation period (ie. ending 1997) would allow more reliable conclusions to be drawn, particularly for the effects on crashes of the 70 and 80 km/h speed limit changes, but the studies described above will proceed and may be supplemented by additional data at a later date.

RECOMMENDATION 2

"Funding should be provided for fundamental research into the effect of speed on crash causation."

Response:

This recommendation is supported subject to a benefit cost analysis being undertaken prior to any research being undertaken. The Government also agrees with the view of the Committee that the issue of speed and crash causation is of national significance.

The relationship between crash speed and severity has been well established internationally. Some relationships have also been identified which show higher crash risks for vehicles travelling at speeds well away from the average of a traffic stream. However, a definite relationship connecting higher speeds with higher crash risk has not been established, as noted in the Committee's report. A good summary of this research is found in "the Speed Review: Road Environment, Speed Limits, Enforcement and Crashes, September 1993", a report prepared by Monash University Accident Research Centre for the Federal Office of Road Safety.

Information about the speeds at which vehicles are travelling prior to being involved in crashes is not usually available from Police accident reports in Victoria. To enable reliable conclusions to be drawn, a large quantity of data is required, involving information from many crashes, and until now this would have had to be obtained using high cost accident reconstruction techniques. Consequently, the cost of data collection has inhibited local research into this subject.

Recently, as part of the National Strategic Research Program of AUSTROADS, ARRB Transport Research Ltd has been commissioned to develop a low cost "black box" which can record the speed of a vehicle prior to impact in a crash.

The second stage of this project requires the "black boxes" to be installed on a large number of vehicles. The speed data obtained from vehicles fitted with these devices can then be analysed to determine if drivers of vehicles which crash, adopt different speed patterns from drivers who are not involved in crashes.

A detailed study plan for the second stage of this project is to be prepared when the development of the speed measuring and recording devices has been completed, which is scheduled to be June 1996. Current estimates are that stage two may cost about \$3,000,000 nationally and have a duration of four years.

RECOMMENDATION 3

"There be further education of road users on the reasons for speed zoning. "

Response:

The Government supports the need to further educate the community on the reasons for speed zoning. The Government's current approach to educating or informing road users of speed limits and what they mean has involved:

- providing educational resources at a secondary school level to raise the awareness of speed limits to teenagers;
 - driver licensing tests in which those who are tested are required to demonstrate their understanding of speed zones and the laws governing speed limits;
 - media advertising of statewide changes in speed limits;
 - publicity campaigns to remind the community of speed limits and the consequences of speeding.
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To further educate road users with respect to the reasons for speed limits the Government will:

- review "Streets Ahead", a curriculum unit for primary school aged children, and redevelop it for use by 1997, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of speed zoning principles,
- undertake a comprehensive review of traffic safety education curriculum resources and, by July 1996, establish a redevelopment strategy for them which will include speed education issues, and
- develop an inter-active, multi-media, CD-ROM educational tool, for use by secondary school students, to educate them in safer road user behaviours,- including speeding and speed limits. This will be trialed in November 1996 and fully implemented by July 1997. It involves the use of new technology which the Government is introducing into schools in support of best practice in education.

RECOMMENDATION 4

"The road safety experience of the current 110 km/h roads be determined before extending this limit to any other roads."

Response:

This recommendation is supported. The Government selected only the safest, highest standard rural freeways for this speed limit and the current guidelines restrict 110 km/h speed limits to new roads meeting those standards. The accident performance of the freeways on which 110 km/h speed limits currently operate is being evaluated, as stated in the response to Recommendation 1.

RECOMMENDATION 5

"As a matter of speed management principle, speed limits on local streets should be lower than on traffic-carrying arterial roads."

RESPONSE:

This recommendation is supported. As indicated in the introduction to this response, the third element of the review of speed zones provides local government with the ability to have lower speed limits established on residential streets but, at the same time, preserves limits of 60 km/h and above on streets performing a traffic function. The Government has introduced an amendment to the Road Safety (Traffic) Regulations 1988 to permit 50 km/h speed limits in local traffic precincts. This amendment makes it easy and economical for local government to establish lower speed limits in residential streets.

RECOMMENDATION 6

"Victoria await the outcome of the Austroads urban speed management study and subsequent discussions at the Australian Transport Council before taking any action to change urban speed limits."

Response:

The principle of the recommendation is supported.

AUSTROADS has developed some technical guidelines but the details have yet to be finalised. It is likely that the issue of common speed limits will be dealt with through the development of a national set of road rules for Australia. This work is in progress and is the responsibility of the National Road Transport Commission.
