



## **ROYAL AUSTRALASIAN COLLEGE OF SURGEONS**

Submission to Parliamentary Road Safety Committee's Inquiry into  
Improving Safety at Level Crossings from The Surgeons of Australia  
& New Zealand

26 September 2007

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# Submission to Parliamentary Road Safety Committee's Inquiry into Improving Safety at Level Crossings

## 1. Background

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons represents over 5,800 surgeons in Australia and New Zealand. Surgeons see the consequences of injury-causing events on a daily basis and support countermeasures to reduce their incidence.

There are approximately 9,400 public railway level crossings in Australia, of which approximately 2,650 have 'active protection, the remaining have 'passive protection or other control or protection ('Active' crossings have signals and/or boom gates which operate automatically when a train is approaching. 'Passive' crossings have signs and/or pavement markings). Therefore the majority of railway crossing are relatively unprotected. Additionally, there are numerous private, occupational and cane railway level crossings adding to this number.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, New Zealand has 1,400 public railway level crossings, 32% of which have active protection. In the first 6 months of 2007, New Zealand has experiences 5 fatalities at level crossings (12 serious injuries)<sup>5</sup>.

There are approximately 100 crashes between a road vehicle and a train in Australia each year, and about 8 per cent of these result in deaths<sup>3</sup>. Between 1997 and 2002, the number of pedestrians on public streets killed due to being hit by a train at a level crossing ranged from 21 to 30<sup>4</sup>. Car occupants account for the remaining bulk of fatalities. While fatalities at railway level crossings are only a small proportion of the road deaths occurring each year, they are one of the most serious safety issues faced by Australia's rail system. Level crossing incidents are often very serious and dramatically portrayed in the media.

## 2. Recommendations

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons recommends that -

1. A program to eliminate level crossings be pursued and, where this is not possible, any measures to restrict access such as automatic boom gates, increasing visibility by using warning signs with flashing lights and illumination of level crossings and trains, alerting drivers approaching level crossing with the use of rumble strips, and speed restriction zones be installed. The Local Governments be encouraged to utilize their local knowledge in this area.
2. A campaign to educate drivers and pedestrians on the dangers of level crossings be pursued.
3. We also suggest that future systems of intelligent car design may incorporate the presence of crossings in any software and automatically slow a vehicle in the vicinity of a crossing. Similarly, the possibility of appropriate transponders on every train would initiate signals to the vehicles, causing adjustments to speed and setting off alarms within the vehicle. This technology is available and has been discussed at National Road Safety Strategy meetings. We believe it could be easily extended to cover railway crossings.

#### 4. References

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4. ATSB, 2002 *Level Crossing Accident Fatalities*.
5. Land Transport New Zealand, July 2007. *Rail Safety Awareness Week 2007 – Facts & Figures* <http://www.ontrack.govt.nz/Portals/1/LXbackgroundinfoJuly07.pdf>



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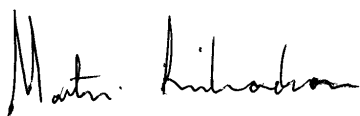
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