GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

INQUIRY INTO SPEED LIMITS IN VICTORIA

May 1992
Government Response to the Parliamentary Social Development Committee Inquiry into Speed Limits in Victoria.

PREAMBLE

Don't fool yourself - speed kills

This is one of the messages that the Government has been conveying to the people of Victoria following the alarming increase in the road toll during 1989. Since that time the road toll has dropped substantially and through 1991 Victoria recorded its' lowest number of fatalities since the early 1950's.

The task given to the Social Development Committee in this inquiry was to gather information on what speeds are safe speeds and how they might be regulated and enforced. Specifically the Terms of Reference were:

- to address the social and economic issues of relevance to Victoria in relation to the setting of appropriate speed limits either across the board or in specific areas and make recommendations on these matters, including designation of these speed limits.

The aspects to be considered in the review shall include:

(a) the merits of applying various speed limits in different circumstances including
   - in city and rural areas;
   - on roads of different function and environs;
   - in times of adverse weather and visibility.

(b) the appropriate levels and techniques for enforcement.

(c) the development of suitable signing techniques to allow for the recommended speed.

The following Government response to the recommendations of the Inquiry ensures that key measures which have the potential to further reduce road trauma are acted upon.

A fundamental problem facing the Committee was that although it is clear that there is a causal relationship between excessive speed and the incidence of crashes the exact nature of the relationship is not known.

Accordingly, the first recommendation of the Committee was that a research study be conducted to investigate this problem. The Government supports this recommendation, provided that a suitable study design can be developed, and will seek interstate and commonwealth partners to help fund a comprehensive study which will have implications throughout Australia.

However, whilst there is little information about vehicle speeds at the point of collision impact, the simple engineering facts are the faster you go, the less time you have to avoid collisions and if a crash occurs, the harder you hit and the more damage you do.
The Committee's report has highlighted the importance of a system of speed zoning that is both consistent and credible, and the Committee strongly endorsed the continuing implementation of the Government's 1987 Speed Management Strategy. The Government is aware that there has been some criticism of the speed camera enforcement program because of perceived inconsistencies in current speed zones. When the recommendations of this inquiry have been put in place, the public will be able to have increased confidence in speed zoning and a knowledge that drivers who exceed the speed limit are penalised fairly. A comprehensive review of all speed zones in Victoria is currently being implemented to ensure that the philosophical approach adopted by the Committee is put into practice. To assist in this review the Australian Road Research Board has been engaged to update the expert system, VLIMITS, in line with the recommendations of the Committee.

The Committee was concerned about safety in residential streets and for school children and recommended lower speed limits to protect them. The Government strongly supports the intent of these recommendations - to lower traffic speeds in quiet residential areas and in the vicinity of schools - however it is concerned that any changes in speed limits be properly co-ordinated and applied in a consistent fashion throughout all local government areas. This requires reference to established road hierarchies, appropriate definitions of residential streets to which lower speed limits may be applicable, determination of the best means of conveying the message to motorists, and consideration of likely costs and enforcement practicality. Through the establishment of a Speed Management Policy Committee convened by VICROADS and involving Local Government, the Victoria Police, and other key organisations, investigations are currently being conducted to determine the most appropriate method of achieving lower speeds in quiet residential streets.

The outcome of this investigation will be available by the end of July 1992 and the Government expects to commence substantial implementation of lower speeds in residential streets by end of 1992. This work will also be incorporated into the current review of speed zones.

The Committee received a number of submissions advocating a maximum speed limit of 110 km/h on high standard freeways. Initially, the Committee favoured this approach. However, it found that early results from a study by VICROADS suggested that the previous speed limit of 110 km/h had been associated with an increase in crashes. The Committee did not want a restoration of 110 km/h maximum speeds to be considered until the final results of the research are available in June 1992.

While the Government supports completion of the relevant research, at this time it is firmly of the opinion that restoring the maximum speed limit to 110 km/h would send the wrong message to Victorian motorists and detract from the effectiveness of the current anti-speeding media campaign which has contributed significantly to the welcome reduction in the road toll over the last two years.

The Committee took a broad view of the scope of the inquiry and made recommendations on issues related to education, training and heavy vehicles. The Government response to these issues can be found under the individual items. The Committee's findings will be influential in encouraging debate on these issues and they are to be commended for their thoughtful work.
Responses to each recommendation follow:

1. The Minister for Transport commission the Monash University Accident Research Centre to carry out a comprehensive study of the relationship between speed and crash involvement in Victoria.

RESPONSE:
The recommendation is conditionally supported. As noted by the Committee there is, at present, no reliable evidence, either from overseas or within Australia on the exact nature of the relationship between speed and crashes. Support for the recommendation depends on the development of a methodology which would provide useable information at a cost which is consistent with priorities in all fields of road safety research. Fundamental research of this type takes a long time to complete and is extremely costly (at least $300,000) in the context of the limited funds available for road safety research. Monash University Accident Research Centre has been requested to prepare a study design and, if an appropriate methodology can be agreed on, funding partnerships will be sought with other States and the Commonwealth since the results would have very wide application. The possibility of funding from commercial organisations such as insurance companies will also be pursued.

2. In order to achieve credible speed limits, a greater emphasis should be given to the 85th percentile speed when setting speed zones with VLIMITS.

RESPONSE:
A review of VLIMITS, an expert system designed to assist in objectively defining speed zones, is currently being undertaken by the Australian Road Research Board in conjunction with VIC ROADS. The revised version will give greater emphasis to the 85th percentile as recommended.

3. VIC ROADS investigate methods of educating road users about the reasons for speed zoning.

RESPONSE:
The recommendation is supported. During the current review of speed zones throughout Victoria, VIC ROADS will investigate the most cost-effective means of informing road users about the reasons for defining speed zones and setting speed limits. Nearing completion of the review, specific attention will be given to highlighting the completion of the review and to explaining the rationale behind Victoria's speed zoning system.

4. VIC ROADS include the condition of a road surface in the VLIMITS program.
RESPONSE: The review of VLIMITS will take account of this factor.

5. VIC ROADS establish guidelines for interpretation of VLIMITS advice.

RESPONSE:
The revision of VLIMITS will take account of this recommendation. As an expert system, VLIMITS is designed to minimise the amount of interpretation required by users. More extensive guidelines for use will be built into the revised software.

6. VIC ROADS complete its study comparing crash rates on freeways and expressways which had speed limits of 110 km/h. This is to be completed by 30 June 1992.

RESPONSE:
This recommendation is supported. The study is underway and will be completed by the suggested date. The study needs to collect data over a sufficient period of time, and to ensure that other factors including economic activity, and changes to truck speed limits are properly included.

7. Following this study the Road Safety Co-ordinating Council examine the suitability of those sections of freeways and expressways where the 110 km/h speed limit may safely be applied.

RESPONSE:
Following an alarming increase in the road toll during 1989 the Government introduced a number of initiatives aimed at improving road safety. Included among those initiatives were a reduction in the maximum statewide speed limit from 110km/h to 100km/h, more widespread use of speed cameras, and a series of hard hitting television and radio messages focussing on the dangers of speeding.

Since that time there has been a welcome reduction in the road toll with the figure of 503 for the 12 month period to 31 December 1991 being the lowest in a calendar year since 1953.

While the Government supports completion of the research as indicated in the response to Recommendation 6, at this time it is firmly of the view that restoring the maximum speed limit on any roads to 110 km/h would send the wrong message to Victorian motorists and detract from the effectiveness of the current anti-speeding media campaign.

8. The speed limit on rural arterial roads remain at 100 km/h.
RESPONSE:  
This recommendation is supported. There is currently no evidence to suggest that any other general limit would provide a better balance between safety and mobility needs.

9. Unsealed rural arterial roads be speed zoned according to road conditions.

RESPONSE:  
This recommendation is conditionally supported. In line with the 1987 Speed Management Strategy a comprehensive review of all speed zones, including unsealed rural arterials, is currently being implemented. As indicated in the response to Recommendation 4 the review of VLIMITS will take account of the condition of the road surface.

10. To achieve national uniformity, 75 km/h speed zones be phased out and replaced with speed limits based on 10 km/h increments.

RESPONSE:  
In line with the Government's commitment to achieving national uniformity in traffic regulations, this recommendation is supported. The phasing out of the 75 km/h speed zones will be completed by July 1993 as part of the review of all speed zones mentioned in the Response to Recommendation 9.

11. The Minister for Transport amend the Road Safety (Traffic) Regulations to set the speed limit for residential streets at 40 km/h.

12. The Minister for Transport amend the Road Safety (Traffic) Regulations to enable local government in conjunction with VIC ROADS to nominate residential streets in which other speed limits will apply.

RESPONSE:  
The Government strongly supports the intent of these recommendations to reduce traffic speeds to appropriate levels in residential streets. A Speed Management Policy Committee (SMPC) involving Local Government, the Victoria Police, RACV and other key organisations has been convened by VIC ROADS to develop specific proposals for implementing lower speeds on non-arterial roads. A hierarchy of speed zones will be developed involving:

- 40 km/h limit for small residential streets and special areas like local shopping centres or near schools in residential areas.
- 50 km/h limit for collector and sub-arterial roads.
- 60 km/h limit and above for arterial roads.
Through the SMPC guidelines are currently being developed for formally identifying and adopting such a hierarchy on a consistent basis across all Local Government areas. The Government considers it essential that these changes are properly coordinated across the State to avoid any potential difficulties for drivers and will require that VIC ROADS approve any changes to speed limits in local areas prior to their introduction. There are various possible options for informing drivers of the new lower speed zones which will be trialled prior to a preferred method being selected. Cost and practicality will be key criteria in this decision.

The Government expects to receive final proposals from VIC ROADS by the end of July 1992 and to commence substantial implementation of lower speed limits on residential streets by the end of 1992.

13. The Minister for Transport-
   - set school speed zones at 40 km/h in the vicinity of schools; except where a school is on a highway or arterial road and the current speed zone is higher than 60 km/h, the school speed zone should be less than the speed limit.
   - designate the area of the school speed zone as appropriate in consultation with local authorities.
   - in consultation with the school, the regional road safety council and the municipality, set the times and locations at which the school speed zones will operate.

   RESPONSE:
   The intent of this recommendation is strongly supported, however the Government is concerned that the application of school speed zones be done in a consistent fashion and that it complement the other programs, such as Safe Routes to School, which have also been introduced to improve safety in and around schools. The Government therefore believes that the most appropriate and cost-effective approach is to continue to investigate lower speed zones in the vicinity of schools on an individual needs basis. Guidelines will be developed by VIC ROADS to control the use of part time school speed zones. This work will also be coordinated with implementation of lower speed limits in residential streets (see response to Recommendations 11 & 12) and the comprehensive review of all speed zones currently being implemented.

14. The Minister for Transport does not introduce variable speed limits based on adverse weather conditions until the technology is further developed and the existing offence of Dangerous Driving be used by police where circumstances warrant it.

   RESPONSE:
   This recommendation is supported. Variable speed limits for adverse weather are in operation on the Westgate Bridge but the technology is not appropriate for widescale application. VIC ROADS will continue to work on developments in this field. VIC ROADS also provides advice to the public about the need to modify speeds during periods of adverse weather.
15. For country roads, Victoria Police adopt a low-density long-term enforcement program as outlined by Leggett.

16. The Transport Accident Commission fund an evaluation of low-density long-term police presence in reducing speeding and crash rates on urban roads as proposed in the 1987 pilot study.

17. In order to achieve proper control of police participation for research purposes, the Transport Accident Commission fund the additional police hours required for the evaluation.

RESPONSE:
The model outlined by Leggett is just one of the techniques available to the Victoria Police in implementing their enforcement program. However the model was developed and tested in Tasmania before the introduction of speed cameras to the extent that they are now used in Victoria. The Government believes that, prior to any major change to the current enforcement policies adopted by the Victoria Police, the applicability of the Leggett model should be further evaluated for use on Victorian roads as proposed by the Committee. The Victoria Police will develop proposals for an evaluation to be considered for funding by TAC.

18. That Victoria Police apply a 10 per cent tolerance (which must include allowance for technical error of ± 3 km/h) on posted speed limits when using speed cameras.

RESPONSE:
The enforcement tolerances adopted by Victoria Police will continue. These tolerances will be reviewed from time to time as the need arises, for example, following the adoption of national speed limits and tolerances or changes to technology.

19. That the Minister for Police and Emergency Services commission a feasibility study of the practicality of the use of unattended speed cameras.

RESPONSE:
This recommendation is supported. The Government will ask the Road Safety Coordinating Council to investigate further.

20. That the Transport Accident Commission fund a comprehensive and independent evaluation of the effectiveness of speed cameras.
A comprehensive and independent study of speed cameras is currently being undertaken by the Monash University Accident Research Centre. The report will be available before the end of 1992.

21. Present signing techniques be continued.

RESPONSE:
This recommendation is supported. The appropriate forum to consider changes to signing techniques is the relevant committee of the Australian Standards Association.

22. The Minister for Transport fund an evaluation of the Driver Education Centre of Australia’s heavy vehicle driver training program.

RESPONSE:
The Government encourages all operators of training courses to obtain independent evaluations of their programs. Public funds are not available for this purpose, however VIC ROADS has expertise in this area and will write to DECA and other operators outlining the Government’s Response to this recommendation and offering to assist with advice on methodology if required.

23. The Minister for Transport establish a working party to evaluate current training programs for heavy vehicle drivers.

24. To achieve national uniformity, interstate consultation on the core syllabus for heavy vehicle training should also take place.

25. That the Minister for Transport raise with the Insurance Council of Australia the introduction of reduced premiums for drivers who successfully undertake post licence advanced training.

RESPONSE:
The intent of these recommendations is supported, however the National Road Transport Industry Training Committee already fulfils this role. It is the peak advisory body on road transport training issues to both the industry and the federal government. It is a tripartite body, comprising membership from employer bodies, unions and the Federal Government. It has formally identified competency standards which will be validated nationally before being submitted to the National Training Board for registration.

26. All future road safety media campaign budgets include adequate funding for evaluation.
RESPONSE:
Evaluation is already a component in all current major media campaign budgets. An investigation of relevant evaluative criteria will be undertaken by the TAC in association with MUARC.

27. The Minister for Transport fund an evaluation of the Driver Education Centre of Australia’s Careful Cobber program.

RESPONSE:
As indicated in the response to Recommendation 22 the Government encourages all private off-road facilities to evaluate their education and training programs. Public funding is not available for this purpose, however VIC ROADS has expertise in this area and will write to DECA and other operators outlining the Government’s Response to this recommendation and offering to assist with advice on methodology if required.

28. The Minister for Transport directs that the VIC ROADS education programs be evaluated.

RESPONSE:
This recommendation is supported. VIC ROADS currently evaluates the usage and perceived value of traffic safety education curriculum programs on a biennial basis. This incorporates data collection on the value of consultancy services provided by VIC ROADS to enhance the uptake and quality of school based Traffic Safety Education programs. Whilst evaluation of some curriculum resources in relation to knowledge acquisition and attitude development has already been undertaken, it is intended that similar studies of more recent resources also be included.

29. The emphasis in road safety education programs in schools be on attitude rather than skills.

RESPONSE:
This recommendation is supported. Both VIC ROADS and the Ministry of Education and Training support and promote attitude development as the major focus of school based traffic safety education programs. This approach is promulgated through the Personal Development curriculum guidelines published by the Ministry of Education and Training and is reflected strongly in traffic safety curriculum resources developed by VIC ROADS.

However skill development such as bicycle handling on-road and pedestrian skills forms a vital and integral component of a quality traffic safety education program in order to maximise the safety potential to young road users. The same applies to
driving skills although these need not necessarily be delivered as part of a school based program but can be achieved through on-road driving experience delivered by parents and driving schools during the learner permit phase.

30. The Ministers for Transport and Education incorporate road safety education into relevant curriculum areas for all students, particularly those in kindergarten and primary schools.

RESPONSE:
This recommendation is supported. School Councils have been given extensive responsibility in the selection and development of curriculum material. The Ministers of Transport and Education and Training endorse this approach through policies, curriculum guidelines and resource development. Through the activity of VIC ROADS regional traffic safety education consultants the inclusion of TSE through an integrated curriculum approach is effectively promoted. Data indicates that this approach is gaining strong endorsement by schools in the development of school based traffic safety programs.

A strategy to harness the support and action of communities to encourage the incorporation of high quality traffic safety education in schools' curriculum is reaching finalisation. Pilot programs are to be undertaken during 1992 in partnership with two Community Road Safety Councils.

31. The Minister for Transport request the Social Development Committee to examine all models of driver training in Australia and to develop a suitable model for driver training in Victoria.

RESPONSE:
The issue of driver training was examined extensively in the First Report upon Road Safety in Victoria produced by the Social Development Committee in May 1984. The Committee's final report, issued in October 1984, included several recommendations regarding driver and motorcyclist training. With the introduction of the revised Graduated Licencing Scheme in July 1990, all of the substantive recommendations relating to driver training have now been implemented.

VIC ROADS will continue to monitor any advances in the field.