Australian Road Safety Foundation

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Australia's Road Safety Performance Against the National Road Safety Strategy 2021-30

September 2026

Executive Summary

Australia has received its mid-term report card on its road safety performance, and the results are not very encouraging. In fact, they are extremely concerning.

The bottom line is that the country is not on a credible path to meet its 2030 road trauma reduction targets or it's longer-term targets for 2050.

The National Road Safety Strategy 2021-30 represents Australia's roadmap toward achieving "Vision Zero" and aims to substantially reduce road trauma by 2030. The strategy commits all Australian governments to reducing annual road fatalities by at least 50% and serious injuries by at least 30% by 2030, with an ultimate aspiration of eliminating deaths and serious injuries on Australian roads by 2050.

On the 13th of September 2026, the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sport and the Arts (DITRDCSA) released its mid-term review of the current National Road Safety Strategy.

It stated that despite significant investment and policy initiatives, Australia is currently not on track to achieve several of its key road safety targets. Recent annual progress reports indicate that road fatalities remain well above the trajectory required to meet the 2030 targets, while data limitations continue to hinder comprehensive assessment of some strategic benchmarks.

In addition, the report also stated that the Federal Government has committed funding through the 2026–27 Budget for national research into the causal factors behind road trauma. Three university-based road safety research organisations will be invited to propose research examining the incidence, crash types and causes of road fatalities.

The research is intended to provide a clearer understanding of the factors contributing to crashes across different cohorts, transport modes and crash types.

The Government also stated it is investing more than $14.4 billion over 10 years in safer roads through programs including the Black Spot Program, Roads to Recovery, the Active Transport Fund and the Safer Local Roads Infrastructure Program.

Again, as is often the case, road safety investment focuses largely on the funding for roads and infrastructure. Whilst this is an important part of the road safety picture, it is not the only countermeasure for improving outcomes and it could be argued that our reliance on road funding as a key road safety area is overrated and outdated.

We acknowledge that roads do need work and improvement, however the broader consideration is what are we doing to improve road user behaviour whilst those improvements are happening?

The fact remains that whilst the report talks about some aspects of activity and funding to reduce road trauma, several KPI's show how far behind we are in reversing the nation's current road safety performance trends. In fact, given the current figures and fatality rates, there is no possibility of meeting the Strategy's ambitions.

The evidence outlined in the review suggests that while Australia has made progress in areas such as vehicle safety, enforcement technologies and Safe System implementation, the performance against the NRSS headline target of a 50% reduction in road deaths by 2030 remains concerning, with current trends indicating Australia is nowhere near being on the trajectory required to meet its targets.

This should be a major concern and a clear indication that we cannot continue to simply rely on the traditional approach of infrastructure, enforcement and engineering to improve our nation's road safety performance.

Introduction

Road trauma remains a significant public health and economic challenge in Australia. The National Road Safety Strategy (NRSS) adopts the internationally recognised Safe System approach, acknowledging that human error is inevitable and that the road transport system should be designed to minimise the likelihood of death or serious injury when crashes occur. The strategy focuses on four strategic themes

- Safe Roads
- Safe Vehicles
- Safe Road Use
- Speed Management

The Strategy also sets out a number of key targets for road trauma reductions. In essence, these targets are as follows:

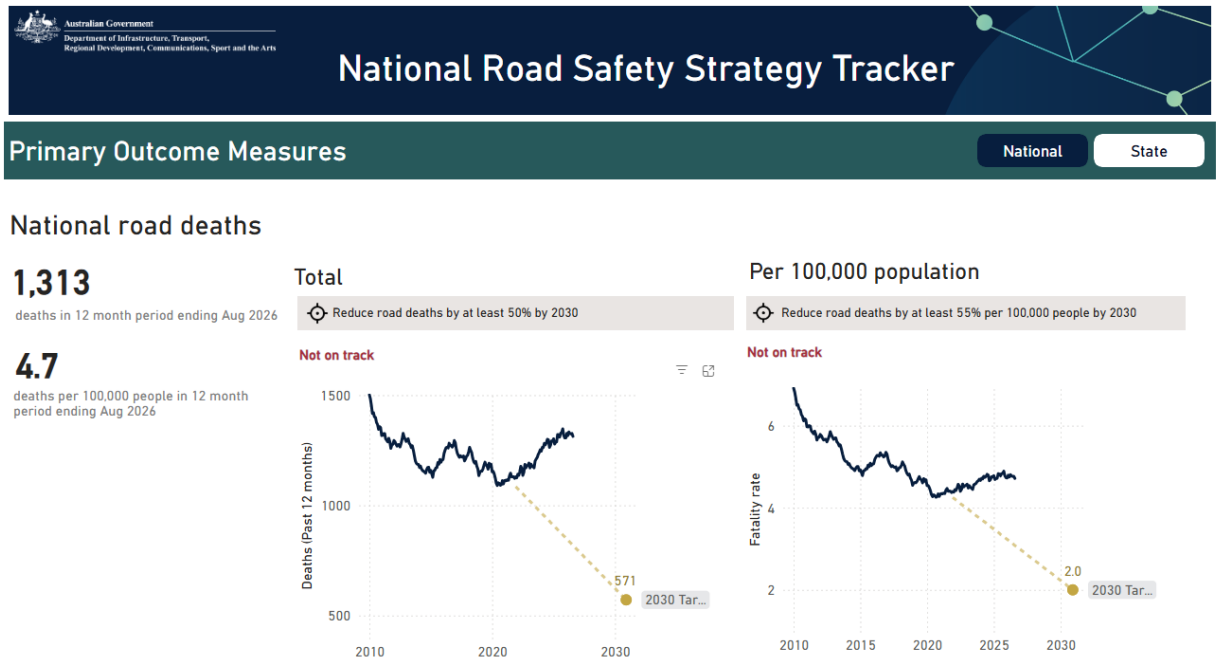
1. Road fatalities - Reduce by at least 50%
2. Serious injuries - Reduce by at least 30%

3. Fatality rate per capita - Reduce by approximately 55%
4. Serious injury rate per capita - Reduce by approximately 38%
5. Zero deaths of children aged 7 years and under.
6. Zero deaths in city CBD areas.
7. Zero deaths on national highways and high-speed roads covering 80% of travel.

These milestones were all to be achieved by 2030 and by 2050 the aims were expanded further to include:

1. Zero fatalities by 2050
2. Zero serious injuries by 2050

All recent national monitoring and reporting has shown that Australia continues to experience a level of road deaths significantly above the trajectory required to achieve any of these targets by the 2030 target deadline.



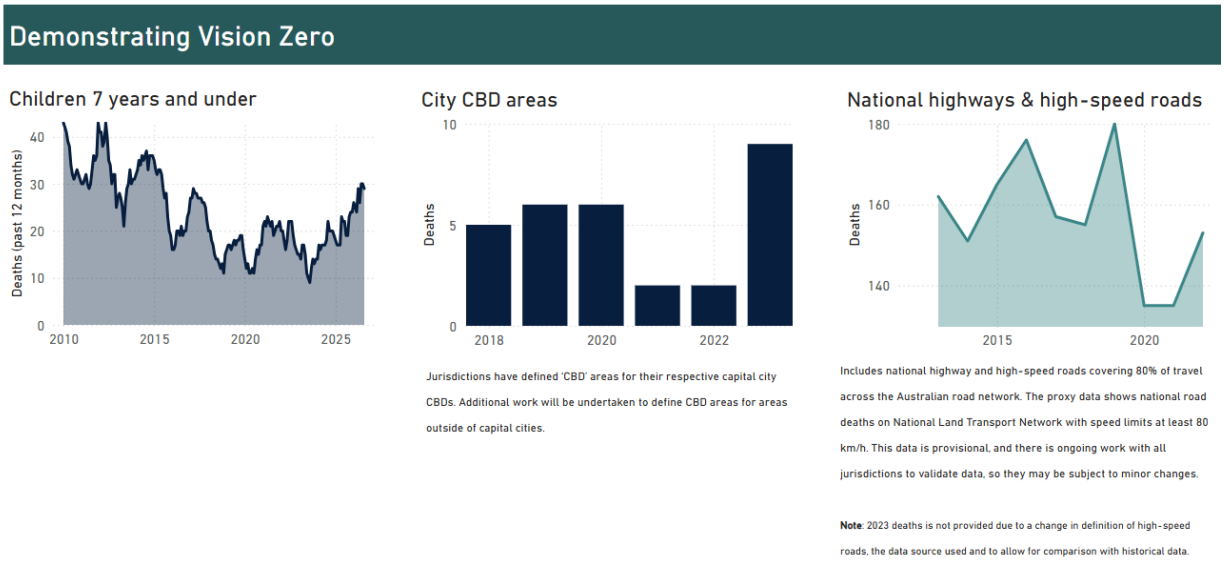
While some annual fluctuations have occurred, overall fatalities have not declined at the rates needed to meet the Strategy's ambitions. And this is the case across state jurisdictions and road user groups, meaning that the country is currently well off-track against the required reduction pathway.

Based on current national road safety data, Australia is very unlikely to achieve the National Road Safety Strategy 2021-2030 road trauma reduction targets. Rather than

declining towards the target of fewer than 571 fatalities per year by 2030, road deaths increased to 1,300 in 2024 and increased again to 1,314 in 2025.

While some reductions have been observed in serious injury rates, progress remains insufficient to meet the Strategy's objectives.

The demonstration targets of zero deaths among children aged seven years and under, zero deaths in CBD areas, and zero deaths on major highways have also not yet been achieved. And are highly unlikely to happen at all.



These points all show that we need to change both our direction and level of action urgently.

It is admirable to set ambitious targets for improvement. But those ambitions must be balanced with leadership, focus, action and investment. The review does its best to paint a positive summary for how we are tracking, but the raw figures and trends shown in that review clearly demonstrate that we are well off course.

The Report Card Snapshot

Overall, current trends indicate that significant additional improvements will be required if Australia is to meet its 2030 targets and ultimately achieve the Vision Zero goal of eliminating road deaths and serious injuries by 2050.

Target	2030 Goal	Current Position	Assessment
Road fatalities	Reduce by 50% (from ~1,142 to fewer than 571 deaths p.a.)	1,314 road deaths in 2025	Off track
Serious injuries	Reduce by 30% (from ~40,472 to fewer than 29,000)	Serious injury rates are declining slowly, but not at the pace required	Behind target
Fatality rate per capita	Reduce by ~55%	Fatality rate increased to 4.78 deaths per 100,000 population in 2024	Off track
Serious injury rate per capita	Reduce by ~38%	Some improvement, but reductions remain modest	Behind target
Zero deaths of children aged 7 and under	Zero by 2030	Deaths still occur	Off track
Zero deaths in city CBD areas	Zero by 2030	Deaths still occur	Off track

These trends suggest much stronger interventions and levels of action will be required if Australia is to achieve the intended 50% reduction by 2030. Clearly, it will take a significant reversal of the current trends and cultural attitudes to achieve a significant change in the nation's road safety performance. This is also even more challenging considering the remaining time frame.

And, at this point in time, those changes don't appear to be overly high on the national agenda.

Taken as a whole, the midpoint review of the National Road Safety Strategy presents a concerning picture. Rather than reflecting isolated events or short-term fluctuations, the rise in road trauma across jurisdictions and road-user groups since 2020 points to a broader and more persistent national challenge.

Evolving the Safe System Mindset

The review reaffirms the Safe System approach, encompassing safer roads, safer vehicles and safer people. Its findings also demonstrate, however, that improvement in one area cannot offset weakness in another.

Lasting progress depends on treating road safety as an interconnected system in which infrastructure, vehicle standards, enforcement, education, human behaviour and wider social conditions are addressed together.

Government investment remains essential, particularly in safer infrastructure and road design, but infrastructure alone cannot deliver the required change. Funding and policy attention must be balanced across all elements of the Safe System, with clear priorities, measurable outcomes and sustained implementation rather than reliance on any single intervention as a solution.

Australia's progress in vehicle safety, supported by strong design rules and ANCAP standards, provides an important foundation. Nevertheless, advanced technology cannot replace attentive and responsible road use. Safety ratings and driver-assistance systems must be supported by effective education, credible enforcement and a culture that does not allow confidence in technology to become complacency.

It must also be noted that whilst we have demonstrated a strong level of progress in passenger vehicle safety there are also a number of vehicle sectors that are lagging well behind. This includes motorcycles and e-bikes and commercial vehicles.

During the period examined by the review, fatalities involving light commercial vehicles increased by 12.1 per cent compared with the baseline period, while heavy vehicle fatalities increased by 7.2 per cent and motorcycle-related fatalities increased by 28.3 per cent compared with the baseline period.

Passenger car fatalities increased by 0.3 per cent.

Leadership and Accountability

The central unresolved issue is one of leadership and accountability.

Although the review recognises the importance of federal leadership, it does not establish a sufficiently clear national mechanism for coordinating action, assigning responsibility and measuring progress. This gap is particularly significant at a time when road safety appears to have lost political visibility and resourcing, while the consequences of the pandemic, economic pressures and wider social change have made the task more complex.

Ultimately, reversing the current trajectory will require more than incremental measures. Australia needs renewed national leadership, stronger coordination across jurisdictions and a shared public narrative that recognises road trauma as an urgent and preventable social harm.

Success will depend not only on safer roads, vehicles and enforcement, but also on sustained cultural change and collective responsibility. Without that broader commitment, the nation risks normalising a level of death and serious injury that should never be considered acceptable.

Where Do We Head to From Here

The mid-term review of the National Road Safety Strategy presents governments with a timely opportunity to reset the national agenda. Its central message is clear: Australia can build on the lessons learned since the strategy was released, but doing so will require sharper priorities, stronger accountability and a renewed commitment to coordinated action.

Data must be the essential thread running through this next phase. Better modelling, consistent definitions and transparent reporting would allow governments to establish priority standards and direct resources towards initiatives with the greatest expected contribution to reducing fatalities and serious injuries.

The National Road Safety Data Hub has a critical role to play, but its value will depend on the quality, consistency and accessibility of the information it brings together.

That evidence base should guide funding decisions. Road safety initiatives should be ranked by their likely impact, rather than by institutional habit or short-term visibility. The review indicates that sustained investment has reduced harm compared with a do-nothing approach; however, the trajectory of fatalities and serious injuries also shows that substantially more investment is needed.

National leadership is therefore indispensable. The Australian Government must do more in this regard. It is best placed to set the strategic direction, define national priorities and articulate what good practice looks like and facilitate a greater policy focus on this critical public health issue.

It should also clarify who is accountable for outcomes and ensure that the Office of Road Safety has the authority, visibility and resources required to coordinate action across jurisdictions.

Stronger federal leadership does not diminish the responsibilities of states and territories. Rather, it should provide a clearer framework within which each jurisdiction can strengthen its own programs.

Road safety is a holistic challenge, demanding coordinated action across infrastructure, vehicle standards, speed management, enforcement, public education and community behaviour. It also requires meaningful engagement with local communities, the not-for-profit sector, road safety organisations and individuals.

The next National Road Safety Action Plan should operate as an Australian Government-led framework with clear priorities and expectations. It should retain the Safe System approach while refining the links between its themes, actions and accountabilities. It should also create more space for non-government organisations to contribute.

These organisations have historically played an important role, but that commitment has arguably weakened since 2020.

The review points to five practical priorities: stronger national leadership; annual funding commitments through a dedicated road safety fund; road safety-focused infrastructure investment across all levels of government; clear, measurable performance indicators; and technology-based initiatives that support safer speeds and improved vehicle safety.

History shows that Australia makes its strongest road safety gains when national leadership is visible, ministerial commitment is sustained and collaboration is properly resourced.

Over the remaining years of the strategy, governments must recalibrate the agenda, sharpen their priorities, strengthen performance and implementation, and improve public awareness. The challenge is not a lack of knowledge about what works; it is ensuring that evidence, funding and accountability are aligned strongly enough to deliver it.

Russell White
Founder and Chair
Australian Road Safety Foundation

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