

30 January 2020

Reducing trauma on local roads

To the Joint Standing Committee on road safety (STAYSAFE),

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into the inquiry into reducing trauma on local roads.

As the peak body representing people over 50 in NSW, we conduct community consultations on a regular basis that highlight the issues that are of importance to older people. Concerns relating to the theme of getting around dominated most consultations in both metropolitan and regional areas. A consistent refrain for participants across many of the groups was the impediment of a lack of footpaths and/or poor footpath maintenance. In some locations where there are no footpaths, particularly in regional and rural areas, people stated that they were forced to walk on the local roads. This is an obvious risk to pedestrian safety and of particular concern for vulnerable members of the community.

The *Pedestrian Trauma Trends* report published by Transport for NSW Centre for Road Safety highlighted that the largest proportional increase in pedestrian fatalities by age and gender over a period of five years were females aged 70 or older – with an annual average of 5.3 in 2008-10 increasing to 10.3 in 2014-16. Additionally, this age cohort was also the highest percentage of female pedestrian fatalities by age.

The vulnerability of older pedestrians is increased by factors such as visual acuity, physical frailty and reduced mobility. Older people tell us that the length of time to cross at signalised pedestrian crossings, vehicle speed and adequacy of the footpath network are some of the factors that prevent them from getting around their communities.

COTA NSW recognises the difficulties that local government face in addressing infrastructure backlogs. To improve the coverage of the footpath network in NSW it will be necessary for additional funding from the NSW State government. In our most recent pre-budget submission, COTA has called on the government to modify the guidelines of the 'Walking and Cycling Program' to allow eligibility for footpath infrastructure under 'Walking Communities' funding stream. This would be coupled with a 10% increase in funding of the 'Walking Communities Capital Program' for the sole use of new footpath infrastructure.

The Transport for NSW Road Safety for 65Plus program aims to raise awareness on issues such as safely crossing the road through the Local Government Road Safety Program. The position of Road Safety Officer in local government, currently available for subsidy of 50% of the cost, is crucial in their ability to deliver targeted awareness campaigns and projects in local communities. COTA NSW strongly supports this program and its continued subsidy by Transport for NSW. However, a significant community shift is required to improve safe pedestrian behaviours in this cohort. Further research is needed with older pedestrians to understand motivations and possible strategies to encourage change of behaviour, particularly around crossing on local roads.

A key objective of the NSW Ageing Strategy is that 'Older people in NSW travel safely and appropriately to participate in social and economic life and access services.' COTA NSW welcomes a continued commitment by the NSW Government and it's agencies to explore policies and programs that facilitate this outcome.

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