

## President's Report 2020 – AGM Speech

It is my great pleasure to report to you on the activities and accomplishments of Roads Australia over the course of 2020.

I'm sure I don't need to tell anyone present today that 2020 is a year which has presented challenges unlike any seen for generations.

When we gathered for last year's AGM, barely any of us had heard of COVID-19. Over the past year, it has forced changes to the activities of every organisation and individual.

At the outset, I would like to thank all Roads Australia members for their continued support during what has undoubtedly been a difficult year for every business.

I understand that membership of an industry association is not compulsory – and is an especially significant commitment to make during economically challenging times.

Roads Australia is enormously grateful for your continued membership and we are determined to continue working to make certain your investment in us delivers the outcomes you need.

### **Membership**

I am enormously proud to say that despite the economic challenges presented by COVID, RA's membership has remained steady, with a year-end membership of 154.

I would like to make particular mention of our 13 new members in 2020:

- A-Ha (A Human Agency)
- ARTC Inland Rail
- Aus Group Alliance
- CIMIC Group

- Cross River Rail Delivery Authority
- EIC Activities
- FSC Group
- Infrastructure SA
- Pacific Partnerships
- Repurpose It
- Thiess
- UGL
- Willow

Welcome to all of our new members – and we look forward to your participation and engagement with Roads Australia’s policy and networking activities.

### **Roads Australia Strategic Plan 2020-2022**

The launch of RA’s Strategic Plan 2020-2022 in May was a particularly significant moment for the organisation.

The Strategic Plan reinforces RA’s existing strengths, such as bringing people in government and industry together, while setting out a clear pathway that will allow the organisation to take an even greater policy leadership role.

The Strategic Plan affirms RA as the peak body for roads within an integrated transport system – bringing industry, government and communities together to lead the evolution of Australia’s roads, integrated transport and mobility networks.

The four core values and objectives set out in the Plan – for RA to be the Leader, the Collaborator, the Facilitator and the Champion – are the basis of all our actions and activities and clearly encapsulate RA’s mission for our members and for the wider community.

## Policy Achievements

The Strategic Plan also maps out a clear policy agenda for RA to achieve via each of our policy streams of Safety, Capacity, Transport Reform, Customer Experience and Sustainability.

Despite the challenges resulting from the COVID pandemic, each of our policy streams has undertaken a significant program of work during 2020 that has elevated RA's position as a voice of influence in public discussion on transport and infrastructure issues.

Throughout the year, our **Safety Stream** has placed a particular focus on identifying opportunities to enhance regional road safety as well as the safety of road workers, with the active participation of RA's Road Worker Safety Group. A number of online events were held to highlight issues in these areas, including an International Insights webinar that provided participants with access to UK-based experts on road worker safety. RA was also proud to once again lend its support as a Principal Partner for National Road Safety Week from 15-22 November.

The **Capacity Stream's** watershed achievement this year has been the development and publication of the Roads Australia Procurement Reform Report, which was publicly released at the end of September. The Report was the culmination of a year-long process of industry and government consultation and briefings about priorities for reform.

Through its 21 recommendations, our Report provides a comprehensive blueprint for meaningful procurement reform that will enable more effective delivery of projects and allow industry to get the best use of its capital and its people. RA is continuing to actively engage with Ministers and relevant departments across all jurisdictions to build collaborative partnerships capable of delivering on the Report's recommendations.

With RA's planned Study Visit to the UK and Europe postponed due to COVID, the **Transport Reform Stream** instead used online platforms to provide RA members with direct access to international experts and policy trends via our new International Insights series of webinars.

These sessions included perspectives from the International Transport Forum at the OECD in Paris on the transition from internal combustion engines to electric vehicles, as well as insights from Delft University about how active transport is integrated into the Netherlands' multi-modal transport system. Next month will also see RA host a webinar that will explore the role of hydrogen fuel cell technology in public transport systems.

During 2020, our Journey Reliability Stream was renamed to **Customer Experience**, and many of its activities addressed the impact of COVID-19 on our integrated transport system. These included webinars examining Mobility as a Service (MaaS) and how to re-engage with customers and encourage them to return to public transport services following COVID-19. There was also a significant focus on the role of buses in our integrated transport system, with two separate pieces of work now underway to develop reform proposals for our bus networks, and to make buses a preferred transport mode within a multi modal transport system.

The **Sustainability Stream** has focussed on the resilience of road infrastructure, in the wake of the devastating east coast bushfires at the beginning of the year. The Stream partnered with the Infrastructure Sustainability Council of Australia (ISCA) and Infrastructure Australia (IA) to lead a number of webinars addressing priorities and solutions for a more integrated and resilient transport infrastructure network. Work has also commenced on a major report to showcase best practice in the environmentally sustainable development and operation of transport infrastructure. This will be further developed during 2021.

RA's contribution to policy discussions have been further strengthened in 2020 through the publication of our **Policy Insights** pieces that build on the issues explored during our online policy events, as well as the launch of our **podcasts**.

More details on these and other policy activities are available as part of the **2020 Roads Australia Annual Review**, which is available to you here today.

## **Member Events**

Our diverse range of events for networking and policy engagement has always been one of Roads Australia's greatest strengths.

Although the COVID-19 pandemic regrettably curtailed our ability to deliver our usual program of events in a traditional face-to-face format, there has been no reduction in RA's commitment to providing our members with access to industry leaders, engaging speakers and policy insights.

Given the restrictions imposed by COVID, the bulk of RA's events in 2020 have been delivered via online platforms.

In the course of this calendar year RA will deliver some 90 events - 29 in-person and 61 online events - to more than 12,000 registrants.

Taking COVID into consideration, this compares favourably with 2019, when we held 94 events attended by 10,059 participants.

This outcome could not have been achieved without the understanding and support of our patrons and corporate sponsors, who worked closely with us throughout the year to refine our event model. I extend my thanks to each of them for their support to the RA Events team as we worked to shape a COVID-Safe event delivery platform.

Despite all the constraints presented by COVID-19, we were still able to deliver a significant program of speakers, including the Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack (twice), as well as transport and infrastructure portfolio ministers from NSW, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory.

In addition, all state and territory transport agency heads were also represented on our program of speakers throughout the year.

Of course, we are delighted that over the past two months we have been able to return to hosting in-person events in places where restrictions have eased, and we look forward to delivering a greater proportion of our 2021 events on an in-person basis.

Be assured that RA takes its obligation to protect the health of its members very seriously – and all our events are conducted in a manner consistent with state and territory COVID-Safe guidelines.

### **RA Future Leaders**

In 2020, RA brought our Fellowship and Emerging Leaders programs together under a new, unified banner – Future Leaders.

The Fellowship Program is one of RA's signature initiatives, with up and coming leaders from government and industry each supported by individual mentors drawn from the top echelons of our membership. Despite the impacts of COVID, the commitment of our Fellows and their Mentors - past and present - was diminished. Participants had the opportunity to take part in online leadership webinars with senior industry leaders offering their insights and advice.

Given the experience of the year and its especially severe impact on younger cohorts in the workforce, it was fitting that our Fellows group project for 2020 focussed on redesigning work to improve mental health outcomes.

I'm especially pleased to note that due to increased demand, RA is again expanding its intake for the 2021 Fellowship Program, which highlights its value to our industry.

I'm also delighted to note that the intake for 2021 has achieved **50 per cent female participation** for the first time.

We are indebted to John Holland Group for its continuing sponsorship of this landmark program.

Our Emerging Leaders program also sought to provide participants with practical insights and advice to help them deal with the challenges of an extraordinary year.

Our two 'Talking Heads' webinars together attracted nearly 250 participants, while our major knowledge-sharing webinar on the West Gate Tunnel Project and group mentoring session for participants provided a boost during what has been a difficult year.

## **Diversity and Inclusion**

The Australian engineering and construction sectors have relatively poor records in

A key goal of RA's Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) Program in 2020 was to enhance communications and visibility of our commitment in this space, as well as to strengthen our position as a leader on D&I issues.

To help drive this agenda, RA formally established a new D&I Committee, (chaired by RA Board member Craig Laslett) which has clear terms of reference and accountability to the RA Board.

As the COVID-19 pandemic endured throughout the year, RA conducted a number of D&I focused online events which allowed women in infrastructure to connect and share their experiences and advice for managing the effects of COVID lockdowns, as well as sessions that addressed inclusive procurement and the uptake of flexible work practices in a post-COVID environment.

More broadly, we also continued to prioritise D&I across RA's national events program. Female attendance at round table events increased by 100 percent through 2019/20, and female speakers at RA events reached 55 percent (compared to 11 per cent in 2016).

## Acknowledgments

Firstly, I would like to thank my fellow Board members for their support, advice and assistance during what has been an extraordinary year. Obviously, all the members of our Board have very significant day-to-day responsibilities and time constraints in their professional lives. The fact they are all willing to commit to actively serving on our Board and contribute to our policy development process and events is something for which I am enormously grateful.

Could I especially thank my two Vice-Presidents over the past year, Marko Misko and Scott Olsen, for being a source of reliable counsel during my first year as RA President.

I'd also like to publicly welcome Aneetha de Silva as a new Vice-President today. Aneetha's dedication to achieving policy reform has been a tremendous asset to our Board and will undoubtedly be an even greater one as she takes on her added responsibilities as one of our Vice-Presidents.

I also want to thank our Policy Stream Chairs and their Deputies - Clare Gardiner-Barnes, Aneetha de Silva, Marko Misko, Scott Olsen, Rodd Staples, Becky Wood, Jay Stricker, Kay Salvair Smith and Jeff Doyle.

I also acknowledge Craig Laslett's service as Chair of our Diversity & Inclusion Committee – a very important initiative that demonstrates our commitment to building an industry that is welcoming and inclusive for all.

Our CEO Michael Kilgariff has ably led our team of professional staff throughout the COVID crisis. Naturally, the pandemic has disrupted everyone's usual office operations in 2020, and RA was no exception, particularly as our Melbourne-based office was subject to a longer and more stringent lockdown than applied in other parts of the country. However, thanks to Michael's dedication and attention to detail, our team was able to continue delivering for members.

In thanking Michael, I also want to acknowledge the collective efforts of our small RA staff team, who have found new ways to deliver events and build RA's policy profile despite the challenges of COVID.

I thank Rachael Rooney, Hannah Sauvarin, Quentin Crombie, Marlie Curtis, Thao Nguyen, Veronica Ong, Emily McLean, Sophie Chalmers, Prue Northey, Alex Smith and Rowena Moran for everything they have done to support our members over the past year. We also recently welcomed Simon Morgan to the team as RA's new Director, Corporate Affairs.

I conclude where I began – by sincerely thanking all our Roads Australia members for your support over the course of an often unpredictable and challenging year.

I am enormously grateful for your continued engagement with RA – and I look forward to working with you in 2021 – and hopefully having more opportunities to see you in-person at our events!