

RA President's Report 2021

I am pleased to provide members with this report on Roads Australia's activities and achievements over the course of a busy 2021.

These are set out in the 2021 RA Annual Review, which I now table.

Although we had all hoped that the word 'COVID' was something we could have left behind in 2020, it was not to be.

In some respects, the disruptions have been even more challenging to manage this year, as rules seemed to change more frequently. So I understand that for many in our industry, this has been a difficult year, from a professional and personal standpoint.

I equally understand that involvement in an organisation like Roads Australia is an optional extra – it's something our members take on in addition to their day-to-day business activities.

So upfront, let me say how deeply I appreciate the ongoing support and active commitment of our members. Your support for RA's events (whether delivered in person or online), your active engagement in our policy development processes and your involvement with industry-leading initiatives such as our Future Leaders Program is invaluable.

Moreover, it is helping RA to strengthen its profile and position as a voice of influence among decision-makers.

And it is vital that decision-makers are hearing that voice at the present time, given this industry's central role in supporting national economic recovery and prosperity.

Our economic and social contribution

The full scale of that contribution is made clear in research which RA has commissioned from BIS Oxford Economics, which will be formally launched during a webinar RA is hosting on 8 December.

That report shows that road construction activity is set to peak at \$29.2 billion in 2023-24. Significantly, the road transport sector already directly accounts for 5.3 per cent of the nation's total workforce – some 556,000 people. If one takes into account the indirect and induced effects of road transport, the industry actually supports 1.4 million jobs nationally.

In terms of the economic benefits of road construction activity, the report estimates that **for every \$1 million invested in the Australian road construction industry:**

- 7 workers are employed in the road construction industry and related industries;
- \$2.9 million output is contributed to the economy; and
- \$1.3 million of value is added to Australian GDP

Looking at road transport's contribution to overall economic activity as measured by Gross Value Added (GVA), the road transport industry comprises 4.5 per cent of GVA. For comparison, this places it at around the same level as retail trade, which sits at 4.7 per cent of GVA.

I am not highlighting these figures as a boast – but more to point out just how integral our industry is to the nation's overall economic performance. Bear in mind that the figures I have mentioned pertain to roads only.

Of course, RA members are not merely involved in roads, but in the construction, operation and maintenance of integrated transport infrastructure and services.

The Federal Government's \$110 billion 10-year infrastructure program invests heavily in transport infrastructure. Likewise, the most recent 2021-22 budgets in east coast states are expected to spend record amounts on infrastructure construction. NSW has budgeted for a spend of \$109 billion on infrastructure (62% on transport), Victoria has budgeted for an infrastructure spend of \$78 billion and Queensland has budgeted for a spend of \$52 billion over the next four years.

This massive pipeline makes it even more imperative that we advance the RA policy agenda in key matters such as safety, procurement reform, decarbonisation, road pricing, digitisation and crucially, enhancing the capacity and diversity of our industry's workforce.

Diversity and Inclusion

RA's Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) Program is a key focus across all our event and policy activities.

This year, RA Board Member Gill Miles became chair of our D&I Committee, which has clear terms of reference and is directly accountable to the RA Board.

The D&I Committee is now working to further refine its strategic approach and focus to support RA's strategic values and enable us to cross promote best practice D&I initiatives and thought leadership for the benefit of the entire industry.

During 2021, 33 per cent of the speakers at our events were female, compared with 11 per cent female speakers in 2016.

This year, the RA Fellowship program achieved 50 per cent female participation for the first time – and we are delighted that a majority of our participants in the 2022 Fellowship Program (58 per cent) will be female.

To coincide with International Women's Day in March, RA produced a video and held a special online event that was built around the official theme of IWD 2021 – 'Choose to Challenge'. We also produced a podcast episode which explored how senior industry leaders can support flexible work practices to encourage greater gender diversity and employee retention in our workforce.

Membership

I'm pleased to say that despite what has been another challenging year for many in our industry, our membership has remained steady, with a year-end membership of 153.

I would like to make particular mention of our new members in 2021:

- Ghella
- Bamser
- MOITS
- CMW Geosciences
- Hiway Group
- Winslow
- CaSE International
- GS Engineering & Construction
- SYSTRA Scott Lister
- Mooven

We are delighted to have you all on board – and we look forward to your active participation in RA's activities going forward.

RA Strategic Plan 2022-2023

During the opening of the 2021 RA Transport Summit on the morning of 17 June, I launched the RA Strategic Plan 2021-2023.

The Strategic Plan was developed with the active input of our members, including through our Board Strategic Workshop, held in Melbourne in March.

It commits RA to four strategic values – to be the Leader, the Collaborator, the Facilitator and the Champion. As you read through this year’s Annual Review, you will see clear examples of the ways RA is living these values through our actions.

I think it is especially worth noting that RA has led collaboration with allied industry bodies throughout the past year to make joint submissions and representations to governments and undertake joint initiatives around key policy issues, including procurement, road worker safety, skills training and sustainability issues.

RA seeks to be a voice of influence – and that voice grows more powerful when others join us to pursue policy reforms that will ultimately benefit the whole industry.

For the first time, the Strategic Plan also grouped RA’s policy objectives around four key themes: Resilience, People, Place Making and Data & Technology.

Together, these themes reflect our continuing evolution, as we strive to meet changing community expectations and embrace emerging industry opportunities.

Policy Activities

As the Annual Review shows, our policy streams have worked consistently throughout the year to build recognition and support for RA’s policy objectives and achieve the reforms our industry needs.

Safety remains RA’s number one policy priority – and our **Safety Stream** has reflected this by showcasing the significant role RA members are playing in the delivery of strategies and innovations that are making our roads safer. This included staging our *Spotlight on Safety* event, held in Brisbane on 6 May.

With the support of our Road Worker Safety Working Group throughout the year, RA has also hosted online events, made submissions and met with policy makers around the nation to highlight the need for urgent action to protect the lives of on-site road workers.

Our **Capacity Stream** has focused on the challenge of looming capacity constraints, which were recently underscored by Infrastructure Australia's Market Capacity Report. During our recent appearance at a public hearing of the House of Representatives inquiry into procurement, RA highlighted how recommendations in the RA Procurement Reform Report can be part of the solution.

RA also worked to pursue changes to the Priority Migration Skilled Occupation List to include specialist skills critical to the delivery of major road and rail construction projects. This met with some success in June, when 22 new occupations were added, many of which are relevant to our industry.

As decarbonisation becomes more urgent, the **Transport Reform Stream** has driven RA's efforts to hasten the uptake of zero emissions vehicles in the Australian market, and pursue a fairer, nationally consistent road user charging model offering greater certainty around funding for road infrastructure.

While there was some progress on both fronts this year, Australia continues to lag behind comparable markets. The Transport Reform Stream's session at the RA Transport Summit around the convergence transport, energy and technology - as well as its recent policy webinar dealing with how we use, manage and pay for roads - set out successful international approaches that could be adopted in Australia.

The **Customer Experience Stream** has continued its focus on shifting customer demands and expectations around the delivery of integrated transport services. This included convening a session at the RA Transport Summit exploring how placemaking puts the needs of the customer at the heart of planning and delivering modern transport infrastructure.

Separately, the Customer Experience Stream is working to deliver a research project that will deepen appreciation among policy makers and the community for the critical role buses will play in our transport network going forward.

For the **Sustainability Stream**, the focus for 2021 has been demonstrating how our industry is aligned with growing community expectations around sustainability – and is at the leading edge of the movement for change.

This was reflected in the public announcement of an industry-first partnership initiated by RA that will deliver a report setting out ways government and industry stakeholders can accelerate decarbonisation throughout a transport asset's lifecycle, by reducing embodied, operating and enabled emissions).

Member Events

After COVID-related interruptions saw the bulk of RA's face-to-face networking program in 2020 converted to an online format, 2021 has been somewhat more forgiving and allowed us to deliver an extensive program of in person networking events for our members.

Although we were not entirely spared from COVID restrictions, during 2021, the balance of our events returned to an in-person format, delivering some 48 live events - supplemented by 26 online events - to an estimated 10,800 registrants.

Following the disappointment of 2020's forced cancellation, we were especially pleased to be able to once again deliver our two flagship events in 2021, with the RA Transport Summit and the John Shaw Dinner held in Sydney on 17-18 June.

After what has been a challenging second half of 2021 for many in the eastern states, we are also delighted at RA is able to present its series of Annual Lunches as in person networking events to conclude the year, including today's lunch here in Melbourne.

RA Future Leaders Program

RA's Future Leaders banner incorporates two of our most vital and heavily subscribed industry initiatives – the RA Fellowship Program and our Emerging Leaders Program.

As the COVID situation affected different jurisdictions at different times over the course of the year, the 2021 RA Fellowship Program was delivered via a mix of in person and online mentoring and event opportunities for participants.

Our Fellows also made an important contribution to ongoing industry efforts to create a more diverse and welcoming workforce culture through their research projects. These assessed whether particular options for job-redesign can potentially reduce job stressors, and hence make it easier for our industry to attract and retain staff.

We are especially proud that the 2022 intake of RA Fellows will be our largest yet, with 40 participants.

RA wishes to especially thank and acknowledge John Holland as the sponsor of the RA Fellowship Program. Their continued support is essential in permitting RA to offer this industry-leading mentoring initiative each year.

Throughout 2021, RA's Emerging Leaders Program continued to offer those in our industry with fewer than 10 years of experience (or aged under 35) with access to exclusive opportunities to engage with respected industry leaders and glean insights from their experience.

Acknowledgments

Firstly, I would like to thank my fellow Board members for their support, advice and assistance during what has again proved to be a challenging year for our industry.

Obviously, all the members of our Board have very significant day-to-day responsibilities within their respective organisations. The fact they are all willing to dedicate their knowledge and time to RA's activities is an invaluable asset that helps RA to speak with clarity and authority.

Could I especially thank my two Vice-Presidents over the past year, Aneetha de Silva and Scott Olsen, for their support, advice and dedication to supporting RA's cause across the industry.

I acknowledge the extraordinary dedication of all our Policy Stream Chairs and Deputy Chairs:

Safety - Juan Santamaria & Graeme Silvester

Capacity – Scott Olsen & Kay Salvair Smith

Transport Reform – Aneetha de Silva & Mandi Mees

Customer Experience – Sergio Cinerari & Chris Jackson

Sustainability – Marko Misko & Jay Stricker

I also thank Gill Miles for her commitment as Chair of our Diversity & Inclusion Committee, and Anna Andrews and Jill Boag for their leadership of our Future Leaders Committee.

As we say at each and every Roads Australia event, we could not deliver our program without the generous support of our sponsors.

Could I especially acknowledge our 2021 Patrons - Arcadis, Arup, Aurecon, John Holland, SMEC and WSP for their generosity.

I extend that gratitude to the many RA members (of whom there are too many to mention individually now) who have sponsored individual events throughout the year.

A special word of thanks to Cardno as the long-standing sponsor of our RA Insider newsletter, which this year became a weekly publication, going to more than 18,800 recipients.

I wish to recognise and thank our CEO Michael Kilgariff for his efforts in guiding the organisation through another challenging year during which restrictions and lockdowns rendered 'business as usual' impossible. Michael's energy and clear focus on advancing the interests of our members are a tremendous asset for RA.

In thanking Michael, I also pay tribute to efforts of our small RA staff team, whose agility and willingness to find solutions has enabled us to keep delivering during challenging times.

My thanks to Royce Christie, Rachael Rooney, Simon Morgan, Veronica Ong, Prue Northey, Thao Nguyen, Jason Romney, Chloe Robertson, Alex Smith, Daniel Mellow and Aaron Liew for their efforts. Recently, we welcomed Georgie Fidge as RA's new Director – Membership, and we look forward to having Georgie as part of our team. Georgie is with us today, so make sure you say hello!

In closing, I again offer my deepest thanks to all of you for your support and involvement with RA.

I look forward to working closely with you in 2022 as we work to deliver critical policy reforms and champion a diverse, inclusive, sustainable and values-led organisation and industry.