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International Insights: Road Worker Safety

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ABOUT ROADS AUSTRALIA

Roads Australia (RA) is the peak body for roads within an integrated transport system, representing an industry that contributes \$207 billion annually to the economy and supports 1.3 million jobs.

RA brings industry, government and communities together to lead the evolution of Australia's roads, integrated transport and mobility.

The nation's only roads champion, RA's 150+ members includes all of Australia's road agencies, major contractors and consultants, motoring clubs, service providers and other relevant industry groups.

RA's current policy focus extends across five activity streams: Safety; Capacity; Transport Reform; Journey Reliability; and Sustainability with Diversity and Inclusion an underlying commitment across each stream.

Visit our [website](#) for upcoming policy events to contribute to the debate.

BACKGROUND

In 2019, Roads Australia formed a Road Worker Safety Working Group (RWSWG) with the objective of raising safety standards among traffic management and road workers. The RWSWG is an initiative that arose from the recognition by the RA Board that our organisation should take a leading role in ensuring the safety of our road worker community.

The key driver of this initiative is the imperative to ensure the safety of road workers at a time of unprecedented transport infrastructure spending. There is a strong pipeline of roads activity underway, with [BIS Oxford Economics](#) estimating a total spend on roads, highways, and subdivisions of \$22.7 billion over the next five years.

There are approximately 1,200 fatalities each year on Australian roads. Although no single reliable source of data exists about what proportion of these fatalities are road workers, it is clear from [Safe Work Australia](#) (Work-related Traumatic Injury Fatalities 2019), that road-related fatalities from the construction industry are disproportionately high, and as such, Safe Work Australia has identified this industry group as a priority area.

The RWSWG is currently focussed on a number of strategic issues, including but not limited to, reforms to the procurement process, pre-qualification requirements and industry image. As part of furthering those areas, the RWSWG is looking to other jurisdictions for guidance on best practice, in particular the UK, which has demonstrated significant leadership in the area of road worker safety.

As part of the RWSWG activities and in support of Australia's [National Road Safety Week](#), RA hosted an International Insights webinar, focussed on road worker safety. The webinar brought together leading experts from across the UK and Australia to share experiences and best practice and to explore the latest innovations in play to help keep those who work on our roads safe.



EVENT SUMMARY

Over 90 attendees joined RA's webinar on 18 November 2020 to hear from the following speakers:

- [James Haluch](#), Managing Director - Highways and Waste Collections, [Amey](#)
- [Mark Byard](#), Health, Safety and Wellbeing Director, [Highways England](#)
- [Andrew Fennell](#), Chief Strategy Officer, [Chevron Traffic Management](#)
- [James Bennett](#), Program Director, [VBA](#)
- [Amanda Tarbotton](#), Director WHS Sydney Division, [Transport for NSW](#)

Speaker presentations are available on the RA [website](#).

The webinar was moderated by [Jeff Doyle](#), RSWG Chair, RA, Safety Policy Stream Deputy Chair, RA and CEO, [Altus Traffic Group](#) and proudly sponsored by [Ventia](#).

KEY INSIGHTS

Mr Doyle kicked off the session by providing an overview of the RSWG and its key objectives, including the desire to identify learnings from our international counterparts.

He also highlighted National Road Safety Week's theme of the day, [Move Over, Slow Down](#) and its focus on emergency services, road-side assist and road workers.

James Haluch, Managing Director - Highways and Waste Collections, **Amey** and **Mark Byard**, Health, Safety and Wellbeing Director, **Highways England**, provided the keynote presentation, focusing on a collaborative approach to safety.

Mr Haluch outlined the two main guides in the UK; Safety at Streetworks and Roadworks – A Code of Practice; and Chapter 8 of the Traffic Signs Manual (2009) Best Practice Guidance. He explained that despite the UK's robust legislative and training systems, challenges still exist. Some of these include silo working on industry safety challenges with limited avenues for collaboration, as well as technological advances that are changing infrastructure and impacting the way the network is being used.

As an example, Mr Haluch introduced the 'naked highway' concept. Regardless of the considerable efforts that have been made to enhance workforce training and competency, some degree of complacency and human error still exists. The naked highway solution would see road workers removed from the road completely through accelerated investment in innovation and modernisation of the network, deploying digital solutions to replace physical assets that will ensure the safety of the road network without the need for workers to be on-site to undertake maintenance activities.

Mr Byard explained that to address these challenges, Highways England introduced a new approach of 'Home Safe and Well' to their 2019 [Health, Safety and Wellbeing Strategy](#), with the objective that by 2040, no one should be harmed when travelling or working on the [Strategic Road Network](#). In order to achieve this, one of the Corporate Actions in the approach was Supply Chain Engagement and Raising Industry Standards. As a result, the [Supply Chain Safety Leadership Group](#) (SCSLG) was formed. Its members comprise senior executives, industry technical experts and leaders and is aimed at raising industry standards through 11 working groups focused on specific safety workstreams.

Mr Haluch explained that one such working group is the Impact Protection Vehicle (IPV) Strike and Traffic Management Incursions Group which focuses on incident prevention and safety innovation in traffic management. The Group's vision is to improve safety performance to stop injuries and deaths on the road network. Through the sharing of data and good practice, the group was able to identify the hot spots where incidents and near-misses occur, to begin to understand areas for improvement and innovations to raise industry standards.

IPV and incursion innovations include the use of automated cone laying and roadside deployment systems, anti-incursion barriers and enhanced mobile carriageway closure techniques, some of which are being made to be fully autonomous. These learnings were incorporated into the IPV and Incursion Group Common Intent document which includes a traffic management decision making flowchart. The flowchart gives traffic management designers a consistent best practice guide, and demonstrates the key role of industry collaboration and technology in delivering on the aspirations of the Home Safe and Well approach.



Andrew Fennell, Chief Strategy Officer, **Chevron** presented on traffic management as a career path, and how technological advances are assisting to protect road workers.

It was explained that Chevron has a large focus on training, development and career progression of their employees. The [Chevron Academy](#) was established to help facilitate this - a tailored learning and development platform that offers a range of courses specific to particular areas of traffic management. Through the courses available at the Academy, employees are able to enhance their skills and progress their careers, with their elective and mandatory training being monitored, ensuring they are legally compliant.

It was emphasised that introducing high quality, consistent and structured training, has resulted in professional career pathways and opportunities for those engaged in traffic management. It has also reinforced Chevron's commitment to upskilling its workforce, as well as their competitors.

Mr Fennell then provided a short overview of the use of technology to reduce road worker exposure to safety risks. For example, the use of digital twins that map the worksite and employ sensor technology to monitor real time movement and speed on worksites. This can be used to immediately notify road workers of incursions, allowing immediate intervention. It was suggested that implementing digital assets on worksites and collecting real time data is helping to significantly improve safety in traffic management.

He concluded by highlighting that Chevron Traffic Management has maintained 9.5 million hours of work without a serious accident – a testament that well-trained, traffic management professionals can make a difference in keeping worksites safe.

Amanda Tarbotton, Director WHS Sydney Division, **Transport for NSW** (TfNSW), provided a domestic context, which was focussed on the safety challenges and opportunities being faced in Australia.

She pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic has seen new challenges, specifically with the significant infrastructure spend towards the development of road networks in greater metropolitan areas. Whilst the positive economic and social impacts of this investment are recognised, it creates a need for road workers on the road - a critical aspect of delivering works, but an increased safety risk on the network. As part of this, Ms Tarbotton noted that whilst alternate

modes of transport are promoted to support a sustainable transport solution, more interfaces are being created in the road corridor which inevitably requires the use of road workers.

Ms Tarbotton provided a snapshot of TfNSW's activities around road safety, including their commitment to delivering the [Safer Roads Program](#) through the Centre for Road Safety. COVID has presented an opportunity to fast-track the completion of a number of road safety treatments, such as widening shoulders, wide centre lines, trials of audio-tactile lines and the installation of medians and roadside safety barriers. She also spoke of emerging technology that is being trialled and used to improve road safety, including drones, autonomous vehicles, and mobile phone detection cameras. Ms Tarbotton emphasised the importance of the quality of training of traffic management workforce to ensure the best safety outcome in delivering these works.

Ms Tarbotton concluded by urging the audience to be proactive in the steps we can all take to better protect the safety of our industry's workforce and reinforced the message that road safety is everyone's business.

James Bennett, Program Director, **VBA** built on the theme of the importance of industry collaboration to drive best practice and spoke of his experiences working in the UK compared to Australia.

When comparing his experience to the UK, he noted that similar challenges exist in terms of poor driver compliance, accidents, near misses and road worker abuse. He noted that with major infrastructure builds on both sides of the world, inevitably road workers are exposed to safety risks, regardless of their training and diligence.

Mr Bennett reflected on the noticeable difference in Australia with the transient, casual nature of the workforce, whereas in the UK, Traffic Management is considered a safety-critical and respectable career. He emphasised that this difference demonstrates the need for cross-jurisdictional consistency in qualifications for road workers in Australia, however acknowledged [Austroads'](#) work to unify standards to improve the safety and efficiency of temporary traffic management on road worksites. To add to this, he spoke of the potential for tenders that advocate improved safety measures to be rejected in favour of lower cost bids, which he noted, can seriously compromise safety.



Mr Bennett suggested that road agencies and other organisations must not only consider best value, but also best safety practice, and should reject the lowest cost proposal if safety is not adequately addressed.

Mr Bennett also pointed out Australia's lack of technology on worksites. He noted that adopting those being used in the UK, as highlighted by Mr Haluch and Mr Byard, will be a big step towards enhancing the safety of both motorists and road workers by enabling road workers to perform duties away from live traffic.

Mr Bennett echoed the other speakers' sentiments of the power of industry working together, suggesting that the SCSLG was a great example of industry championing change rather than waiting for regulators. He encouraged the audience to look at international examples of collaboration and best practice and work to use them within the Australian setting.

Christian Frost, Group Executive - Safety Health Environment & Quality, Ventia, concluded the session with a Vote of Thanks to reinforce Ventia's commitment to road safety and road worker safety. Mr Frost highlighted the challenges being faced in Australia, particularly around procurement and the casualised nature of the traffic management workforce.

Mr Frost further highlighted the opportunities available to assist in reducing and eliminating road worker injuries and deaths through the use of technology, innovation and a commitment from industry to drive positive change.

EVENT OUTPUTS & NEXT STEPS

A snapshot of the event was promoted through Roads Australia's [LinkedIn](#) channel, with the presentations available on the RA [website](#).

RA will continue its commitment to progressing the work of the RWSWG, which will include hosting further International Insights webinars on road worker safety to explore best practice and review lessons learned.

In addition, RA's flagship safety event, Spotlight on Safety will be held on 6 May 2021 in Brisbane. Attendees from government, industry and the community will convene to hear from those at the front line and showcase some of the latest innovations in road safety.

With the next [National Road Safety Strategy to 2030](#) currently being developed, there is no better time to shine a spotlight on those key themes that will help frame this Strategy, including safe roads, safe vehicles, safe road use and safe road workers.

Further details will be available on the RA [website](#) in early 2021.

