

20 January 2021

Mr Phil Bullock
Director
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By email: pbullock@ninesquared.com.au

**Submission to 2021 Review of the National Transport Commission under Section 51
of the National Transport Commission Act 2003**

Dear Phil

[Roads Australia](#) (RA) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the *2021 Review of the National Transport Commission (NTC)*. Our submission responds to the Terms of Reference, where relevant, and utilises the provided pro forma.

Introducing 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 has over 150 members and brings industry, government, and communities together to lead the evolution of Australia's roads, integrated transport and mobility.

Your organisation and the NTC

There are two aspects to RA's relationship with the NTC:

1. NTC is a member of RA, as are the state and territory road agencies and related bodies.
2. RA is also involved with NTC as a stakeholder in the strategic transport and regulatory reform agenda.

RA regards the work of NTC and related agencies, including the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications (DITRDC), as critical to improving transport productivity, efficiency and safety, and the required regulatory reform that is required for Australia to maximise the economic and social advantages of rapidly emerging new transport technologies.

RA's engagement with the NTC has been generally at an operational level, providing input to and review of the NTC regulatory discussion papers and industry forums.

While RA appreciates the opportunity to contribute to these discussions, we would welcome greater involvement in contributing to the NTC's strategic agenda. Regular NTC "industry engagement" forums, of which RA has been involved, tend to engage a wide spectrum of participants and generally have an operational focus.

RA suggests that there is an opportunity for NTC to host regular high-level strategic discussions. These should involve key industry and Government stakeholders at CEO level, to help shape and refine the forward agenda.

Overall, the RA experience with NTC has been productive. The NTC's involvement in road law reforms, such as the current work on driver distraction, electric vehicles and connected and autonomous vehicles, is greatly appreciated.

With road law reform specifically, RA considers that the consultation and technical research papers are generally of a high quality. RA recognises that much of the preparatory work is often carried out by road agency technical experts. However, the process and mechanism to raise issues is not as transparent to external stakeholders such as RA, our members, and the community.

Consultation on these complex issues is often extended over several years. The opportunity to streamline this process should be considered, while recognising that consultation is essential. Further, the timeline makes it difficult for smaller organisations, such as RA, to be involved. RA would welcome more targeted engagement at a strategic level at key stages of the process.

As a member of RA¹, NTC staff are provided with opportunities to network at the most senior organisational levels, as well as contribute towards practical outcomes and policy solutions through our range of events. RA can provide further support to NTC by co-ordinating industry engagement where it would be beneficial to the NTC and the outcomes it is trying to achieve.

The NTC's operational effectiveness

The role of NTC and allied organisations, such as the Australian Road Research Board (ARRB), Austroads and industry regulators in pursuing national road law and transport reforms is not always made clear to stakeholders. We note there has been some improvement in this area since the 2015 review of the NTC².

However, to ensure that reforms are perceived as being approached efficiently and effectively, greater clarity is needed to ensure the roles of each organisation are well defined. As the transport environment becomes increasingly more complex, RA suggests that a role for NTC may be to co-ordinate the collaborative activities of other key agencies.

While these organisations have separate governance arrangements, RA believes there is scope for a formal collaboration structure to be established between the key parties. This will ensure a more united approach to national road reform as organisations work towards a common purpose and minimise duplication of activities.

Infrastructure Australia (IA) also continues to extend their scope of work into the reform area and RA suggests that involving IA in the above-mentioned collaborative structure would be of significant benefit.

¹ [RA The Benefits of Membership \(roads.org.au\)](https://roads.org.au)

² [2015 Review of the National Transport Commission \(transportinfrastructurecouncil.gov.au\)](https://transportinfrastructurecouncil.gov.au)

The respective roles and responsibilities of DITRDC and NTC may also need to be clarified in this respect. It is approaching 20 years since the Inter-Government Agreement (IGA) outlining the NTC's role in operational reform in road, rail and intermodal transport was drafted and this review should consider if an evaluation of the 2003 IGA is required³.

The NTC's future role, relationships, work priorities and governance

RA considers that a key objective for NTC moving forward should be facilitating transport reform to meet the challenges and reap the benefits of emerging technologies.

Regarding rail, the role of NTC in the national policy agenda remains somewhat unclear.

We note that the objectives of the 2011 IGA regarding the establishment of national regulators are yet to be fully implemented. While this is outside the scope of this review, RA remains concerned that the effectiveness of the transport reform agenda will be impeded by delays in the full execution of these important parallel regulatory frameworks.

Recommendations:

1. That an opportunity exists for NTC to host regular high-level strategic discussions to help shape and refine the forward agenda. RA would welcome greater involvement in contributing to the NTC's strategic agenda.
2. That the road law reform process be made more transparent, and timelines streamlined where possible. RA would welcome more targeted engagement at a strategic level at key stages of the process.
3. That there is scope for a formal collaboration structure to be established between the key parties to work towards a common purpose and minimise duplication of activities.
4. That consideration should be given to a review of the 2003 IGA.
5. That a key objective for NTC moving forward should be facilitating transport reform to meet the challenges and realise the benefits of emerging technologies.

For more information about this submission please contact me at michael@roads.org.au or 03 9821 5255.

Yours sincerely



Michael Kilgariff
Chief Executive Officer

³ [Legislative arrangements | National Transport Commission \(ntc.gov.au\)](#)