



## Getting serious about safety

By Roads Australia President, David Stuart-Watt

Last Friday, Roads Australia hosted a very special event in Melbourne to mark both the launch of our new Safety policy stream, and the announcement of our Platinum Partnership with the SARAH Group and National Road Safety Week 2019.

But the event was about much more than that.

On the eve of National Road Safety Week, and against the backdrop of 1200 lives lost on our roads last year, our Spotlight on Safety event was an attempt to connect the dots between what we do as an industry to embed safety into our roads and workplaces, and why we do it.

The 'what' came across in the case studies and presentations on vehicle safety, safer infrastructure, heavy vehicle safety, road worker safety, workplace mental health issues, and regulation, compliance and education.

The 'why' came out in the human stories - the devastating experiences of Peter Frazer and Chris Latimer, both of whom have lost loved ones to road accidents; Tim Bishop's courageous sharing of his mental health journey; and the daily challenges faced by Ambulance Victoria staff as they go about their work saving lives.

As hard as they are to hear, these personal stories must be told.

Because when we put a human face to 'safety', we're reminded - in no uncertain terms - of the importance of our role and responsibilities as road designers, builders, operators, regulators, employers and workmates.

It also underscores the importance of messages like 'drive so others survive' and 'R U OK'. It's easy to dismiss these as simple catchphrases, but when you hear them in the context of real human stories, they resonate strongly.

Here's just a few of the important messages and key points that came out of our Spotlight on Safety:

### **We need to look out for each other at work. R U OK?**

It's estimated that 190 Australians working in our industry take their lives each year.

A recent Swinburne University survey into the mental health of people working in the infrastructure construction sector revealed:

- 85% per cent suffer moderate to high stress
- 64% work 50+ hour weeks
- Work-related stress accounts for an average of 23.9 days of lost time per affected worker.

Sometimes the simplest interventions can make a difference. Stop your day and ask a workmate: 'Are you OK?' And if you're struggling, reach out and ask for help.

### **The impact of road trauma is more far-reaching and insidious than we imagine.**

Road trauma accounts for 40 per cent of all trauma work for Ambulance Victoria. Apart from the economic cost, it has a devastating impact on first responders. Suicide by paramedics is four times higher than the Victorian average.

### **We still have much to do to keep our roadworkers safe.**

Clients and their principal contractors need to actively embed safety into the procurement process. For employers, worksite safety should be part of a comprehensive systems-based approach. New technologies (robotics and automation) are coming and will make a difference.

As an industry, we need to get better at planning works. Nothing frustrates drivers more than driving through a speed-restricted workzone where absolutely no work is being done.

We can and should continue to talk to the community. The Ventia Boral Amey JV is taking the message to schoolkids, encouraging them to be advocates and influencers of their parents' behaviour around workzones.

### **Vehicle automation might be the magic bullet...but not for a while yet.**

The average age of the Australian vehicle fleet is 10 years. That's a long time in terms of vehicle safety technologies.

New technologies like Auto Emergency Breaking (AEB) and Lane Support Systems (LSS) are infiltrating the new car market, but will obviously take a long time to filter through to the national fleet.

Employers and commercial fleet owners need to be more aware of their responsibilities to the safety of their employees on the road.

### **From a safety standpoint, not all technology is good technology.**

Driver distraction is a factor in 16 per cent of crashes in Australia. Our vehicle dashboards are increasingly overflowing with technology that can be very distracting - touch-screen, in-car entertainment and GPS systems, for example.

There remains a huge disconnect between driver perception and reality when it comes to the risk associated with mobile phone use.

### **We have solutions to make roads safer – we just need to apply them.**

Relatively simple and cost-effective interventions can make a big difference in terms of road safety outcomes – things like better line markings, safety barriers, roundabouts, etc. We have many of these solutions at hand – we just need to apply them more widely.

Inconsistent standards and specifications across jurisdictions acts as a brake on investment in new, safer infrastructure.

### **As an industry, we do it better by doing it together.**

We can only make industry-wide improvements by sharing our wins and learnings at events like the Spotlight on Safety. RA's new Safety stream will provide a national platform for this to happen.

Right now, at the mid-point of National Road Safety Week, a lot of us have safety on our minds - perhaps more so than usual. The challenge is to maintain that focus every single day, in every aspect of our personal and work lives, on and off the road.

That's how each and everyone of us can make a lasting difference.

Show your commitment to road safety today by making the [online pledge](#) at the SARAH Group website.