

ROAD SAFETY AND PRODUCTIVITY

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“It’s all my fault” says Lachlan McIntosh of the Australasian College of Road Safety, pointing at me.

State governments, their bureaucracies and motorists associations say we just need to pour more and more money into new roads.

International experts say more money should be poured into low cost safety improvements.

The politicians get confused and usually bend to the self interest of their bureaucratic structures – the more money, the more work, the longer their jobs last, preferably on a Federation model so no-one notices the difference.

Three case studies

1. CANADA

Canadian Pacific is a major rail company in northern America.

Years ago the directors were complaining that the media coverage of employee deaths was hurting the shareholders' perception of the business.

More importantly the deaths were affecting the staff and the bottom line due to trauma and disruption.

The staff safety expert recommended a director attend every subsequent funeral of a Canadian Pacific employee.

Didn't take long for the directors to say – no more funerals – get this fixed.

Canadian Pacific now has an enviable safety record, a highly productive workforce and strong bottom line results.

2. USA

In the US one of the biggest road killers is truck drivers falling asleep.

The strong advice given to me by the pre-eminent people in the US industry was “safe rates”.

It is the only major structural reform to handle road fatality and trauma they said.

3. FIJI

In this small country with appalling roads, dreadful cars, polluted fuel and kava, the road agency, without any real money, took a very different approach.

If you have a good driving record they said we will cut your registration costs by 50% and provide cash incentives for safe driving, as whatever it costs is less than hospital care.

So how are we going?

Some years ago I attended a senior meeting of transport officials.

When I asked why the road safety report was being sent to the national meeting of transport Ministers for “noting” when in fact we were not meeting any of the road safety targets, all hell broke loose. How dare you, don’t you know how many brand new shiny roads are saving lives, etc etc flew the abuse.

More recently in a discussion about the national road safety strategy I asked whether officials should not provide a range of advice for different outcomes or scenarios.

If the current trends were to be maintained what you would need to do, increase or decrease overall costs, what different action, if you went to Vision Zero what radically different advice and steps could be provided etc. I also asked what would happen if road safety responsibility was transferred from transport Ministers to Health Ministers.

Troublemaker, just being difficult, easy from the ivory tower etc were the taunts.

Setting targets only sets us up for failure and the resultant media criticism said some of the polities.

My goodness gracious me I said.

How about instead of nine separate self serving transport bureaucracies we actually set up an independent national body of experts to give Ministers advice along this scenario planning – how in road safety do we get the best bang for the buck, they would address.

The bureaucrats were in a frenzy. Things aren't too bad. Change?

Are you mad?

Ministers to their credit said no this seems sensible – let's create the National Road Safety Council to do this work. Our efforts aren't too bad but we could always do better.

Well that didn't last long.

So stepping back from this mess

What's the goal?

Apply the Infrastructure Australia model.

What's the problem?

- Problem assessment
- Problem analysis
- Option generation
- Option assessment
- Solution prioritisation

Of course as a strategist I am attracted to stepping away from the current models and look for alternative structures with different outcomes.

I am a supporter of the Vision Zero approach. I recognise the current shambles doesn't work.

So what would I do?

1. Create a national road portfolio manager, starting initially with the freight backbone that would look to prioritise our road system for safety and productivity outcomes.
2. The national portfolio manager would seek to attract road operators to finance these roads and their outcomes e.g. 30 year concession on the Hume Highway to lift productivity by a third, maintain zero safety incidents and be rewarded accordingly in a true public private partnership – governments, industry, motorist associations and community all involved.
3. Once the model was established and tested, draw together all the low level Council road asset management plans and again start calling for financiers to fund long terms concessions on economic roads as distinct from “social” roads.

Take at least some of the problem away from local government.

Australia's Economic road management



National Portfolio Manager – rates of return on investment, acquisition and divestment decisions. Public reporting on KPI's – safety and productivity.

National Asset Managers (private sector) – asset management plans at a broader scale focussed on safety and productivity with responsibility for major and periodic maintenance plans.

Local managers – organising pot holes to be filled and grass cut (current model).

Position of Federal, State and local governments to be spilled with private sector to be invited to tender for total asset management (not just mowing the grass).