Federal Office of Road Safety

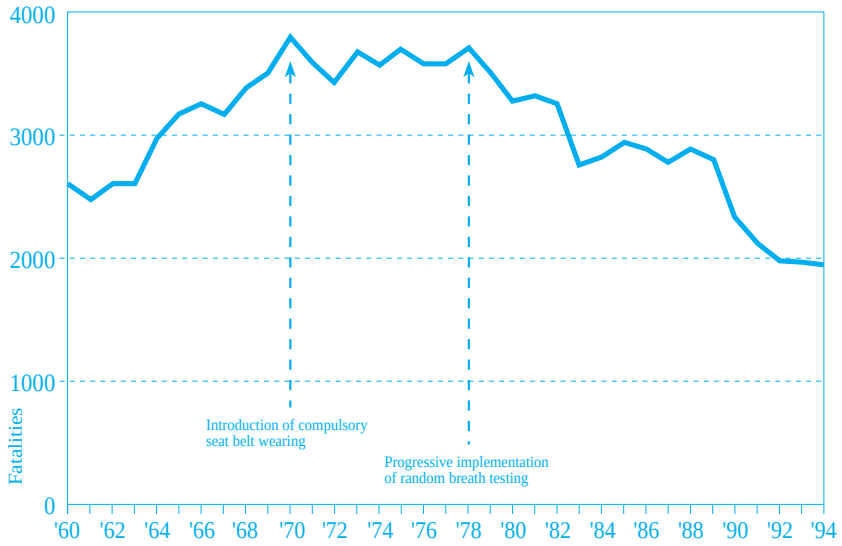
TRENDS IN ROAD FATALITIES

Number of people killed

The number of people killed on Australian roads has fallen by 49 per cent from a peak of 3798 in 1970 to 1940 in 1994 . The 1994 road toll was the lowest since 1954.

Road fatalities in Australia 1960 - 1994

Police enforcement of seat belt wearing, random breath testing and speed limits played a major part in the steep decline in the road toll.



In addition, other significant features in reducing the road toll over this period included continuing improvements in vehicle design and improved roads.

The 49 per cent decrease in fatalities from 1970-94 is even more impressive in view of growth in the population and the number of registered vehicles over the period. The population rose by 40 per cent from 12.7 million in 1970 to 17.8 million in 1994 and the number of registered vehicles rose by 118 per cent, from 4.9 million in 1970 to 10.7 million.

Recent trends 1989 - 1994

Over the past five years, Australia has experienced a major reduction in the level of trauma on the roads. The number of people killed has fallen from around 2900 to 1940.

Significant reductions have also been achieved in the number of road users seriously injured. These reductions have been achieved through the introduction of a number of programs by federal and state governments such as uniform drink drive regulations, a zero blood alcohol level for young drivers, and compulsory wearing of bicycle helmets. The initial phase was accompanied by a downturn in economic activity.

Levels of police enforcement were increased significantly and were accompanied by intense public media campaigns in some states. As a consequence, the road toll fell below 2000 for three years despite increased economic activity in 1993 and 1994.

A range of measures has recently been put in place which should contribute to further reductions in road trauma in coming years, including a National Road Safety Strategy and Action Plan, an upgrading of Australia's motor vehicle safety standards to world's best practice and, in some states, the establishment of broad-based community safety programs.

Number of fatalities per 10,000 registered vehicles - OECD countries 1993

Country	Rate	Rank
United Kingdom	1.30	1
Netherlands	1.86	2
Australia	1.90	3
Japan	1.94	4
Canada	2.03	5
Italy	2.04	6
USA	2.06	7
Germany	2.19	8
Belgium	3.38	9
France	3.44	10
Spain	3.58	11
Greece	6.59	12
Hungary	7.91	13

From International Road Traffic and Accident Data (BASt) January 1995

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Lives at risk

The reduction in the number of people killed is important, but road safety should also be considered in a health context. Road trauma as a cause of death, in terms of the number of deaths per 100,000 of population, has fallen from 30.0 in 1970 to 10.9 in 1994. The fall has been dramatic compared to other countries.

In 1970, Australia ranked 20th of OECD nations in terms of road safety. In 1993, it ranked 10th.

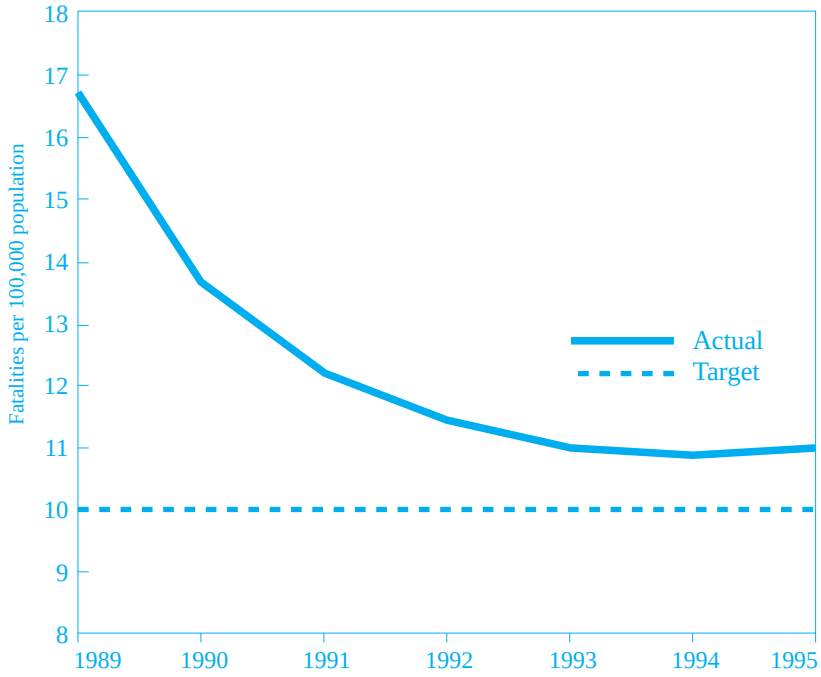
The extent of motorisation is another factor in assessing a nation's road safety record. Australia's record in terms of deaths per 10,000 motor vehicles is excellent. Of the larger OECD nations (those with a population over 10 million), Australia ranked third in 1993 behind the UK and the Netherlands.

The future

There is a commitment from the federal, state and territory governments through The National Road Safety Strategy to reduce the fatality rate even further.

In April 1992, it was agreed to "strive for a progressive reduction in road toll, as measured by the international standard of deaths per 100,000 population, to below 10 by the year 2001." (p.11 National Road Safety Strategy).

In 1992, this target appeared within reasonably easy reach. The rate per 100,000 of population had fallen from 16.7 in 1989 to 11.3. However, by 1994, the expectation of achieving the strategy's target of less than 10 had not been met.



The chart above illustrates the actual trend from 1989 to 1994 and a projection for 1995 based on results to 30 September 1995.

Trend in fatality rate 1989 - 1995

The chart above shows that the significant reductions achieved from 1989 to 1992 stalled at a rate of 11 per 100,000 population. The projection for 1995 suggests a slight increase in the fatality rate for that year. On this trend, the strategy's target will not be achieved by 2001.

The contribution of states and territories to these results varies considerably. The following table outlines the fatality rate for each jurisdiction.

- By 1994, only Victoria and the ACT had achieved the national target of less than 10 deaths per 100,000 population.
- New South Wales, South Australia and Tasmania are likely to achieve the target by the year 2001.
- The Northern Territory may not achieve the target by 2001. However, the largest decline in fatality rate over the past five years has been in the Northern Territory. This significant decline will contribute to the achievement of the target nationally.

Fatalities per 100,000 of population 1990-94

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	% decrease 1990 to 1994
NSW	13.7	11.2	10.9	9.7	10.8	21.2%
VIC	12.5	11.4	8.9	9.7	8.4	32.8%
QLD	13.8	13.3	13.7	12.7	13.2	4.3%
SA	15.8	12.7	11.3	14.9	11.1	29.7%
WA	12.2	12.7	12.1	12.4	12.4	-1.6%*
TAS	15.4	16.5	15.8	12.3	12.3	20.1%
NT	41.5	40.5	32.3	25.4	23.4	43.6%
ACT	9.2	5.9	6.8	4.0	5.7	38.0%
Australia	**13.7**	**12.2**	**11.3**	**11.1**	**10.9**	**20.4%**

** Indicates an increase in fatality rate.*

- Queensland and Western Australia appear unlikely to achieve the goal. In 1990, both states had fatality rates below or very near to the national average. In 1994, both were well above the national average.

As a public health risk, the probability of being killed in a road crash in Queensland is 57 per cent higher than in Victoria; and the probability in Western Australia is 48 per cent higher.

Reducing the fatality rate

The decrease in the fatality rate evident since 1970 has stopped, and a rise in the rate may have begun. It appears unlikely that the national target of 10 deaths per 100,000 of population will be achieved by the year 2001.

In the immediate future, the scope for further reductions in the road toll will depend on the extent to which all states and territories adopt best practice.

In particular, any significant improvement in road safety nationally will depend on improved performances by Queensland and Western Australia. If Queensland and Western Australia could achieve reductions in fatality rates similar to those achieved by other jurisdictions, the national target might yet be achieved.

The past five years have shown what can be achieved if sufficient resources are provided for well-designed and well-managed enforcement and public education programs. All states and territories should attempt to match the outcomes achieved by Victoria and New South Wales.

Proven successful strategies in reducing road trauma include:

- improving police enforcement in rural areas;
- upgrading identified black spots in the road network;
- enforcing speed limits generally; and
- introducing a 50 km/h speed limit in urban residential areas while perhaps increasing speed limits on very safe roads.

The development of new road safety technologies could also lead to a general decline in road fatalities. Air bags in vehicles, intelligent transport systems etc have the potential to reduce the road toll. The impact of these initiatives, however, is likely to be many years in the future.

Until the arrival of significant new technologies, the National Road Safety Strategy and Action Plan sets down a wide range of road safety initiatives to be implemented as part of an integrated approach to reducing road trauma. These measures have the potential to ensure that Australian roads will continue to be among the safest in the world.

It is important that the community as a whole, and individual Australians when they use the road, continue to support the efforts of governments to reduce one of the most significant public health concerns of the past 50 years.

National Statistics

Fatalities by road user group 1990 - 1994

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Driver	935	910	815	859	813
Passenger	634	554	570	512	504
Motorcyclist	262	248	197	203	191
Pedestrian	420	343	350	331	371
Bicyclist	80	58	41	45	59

Fatality Rates for Australia 1990 - 1994

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Fatalities per:					
(a) 100,000 population	13.7	12.2	11.3	11.1	10.9
(b) 10,000 registered vehicles	2.3	2.1	1.9	1.9	1.9

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State/Territory Statistics

Fatalities 1990 - 1994 by road user group

New South Wales

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Driver	310	304	287	274	260
Passenger	200	172	176	135	182
Motorcyclist	90	58	59	46	57
Pedestrian	177	119	121	117	129
Bicyclist	20	10	6	8	23
TOTAL	**797**	**663**	**649**	**581***	**651**

Victoria

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Driver	232	216	146	193	169
Passenger	144	124	92	112	89
Motorcyclist	55	57	56	43	45
Pedestrian	93	94	89	73	64
Bicyclist	24	12	13	14	11
TOTAL	**548**	**503**	**396**	**435**	**378**

Queensland

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Driver	153	162	167	188	176
Passenger	113	106	113	101	108
Motorcyclist	50	45	43	47	45
Pedestrian	65	66	74	49	79
Bicyclist	18	16	18	10	13
TOTAL	**399**	**395**	**416***	**396***	**421**

South Australia

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Driver	88	82	66	85	69
Passenger	75	44	52	64	38
Motorcyclist	25	24	14	30	20
Pedestrian	32	24	31	33	31
Bicyclist	6	10	2	6	5
TOTAL	**226**	**184**	**165**	**218**	**163**

Western Australia

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Driver	81	81	88	78	90
Passenger	47	60	78	62	58
Motorcyclist	28	42	14	27	19
Pedestrian	31	16	19	37	38
Bicyclist	9	8	1	4	4
TOTAL	**196**	**207**	**200**	**209***	**211***

Tasmania

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Driver	37	39	36	24	27
Passenger	15	18	27	19	16
Motorcyclist	6	8	6	7	2
Pedestrian	12	12	4	7	11
Bicyclist	1	0	1	1	2
TOTAL	**71**	**77**	**74**	**58**	**58**

Northern Territory

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Driver	21	22	17	12	12
Passenger	34	26	26	18	10
Motorcyclist	5	7	2	1	1
Pedestrian	8	11	9	10	17
Bicyclist	0	1	0	2	1
TOTAL	**68**	**67**	**54**	**43**	**41**

Australian Capital Territory

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994
Driver	13	4	8	5	10
Passenger	6	4	6	1	3
Motorcyclist	3	7	3	2	2
Pedestrian	2	1	3	4	2
Bicyclist	2	1	0	0	0
TOTAL	**26**	**17**	**20**	**12**	**17**

** Total includes fatalities where road user classification is unknown*