



**AUSTRALIAN
AUTOMOBILE
ASSOCIATION**

Constituent Members



RAC members are happier



AAA POSITION PAPER ON SPEED LIMITS

JANUARY 2010

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WORLD WIDE AFFILIATION THROUGH THE AIT AND FIA



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BACKGROUND

AAA represents the interests of over six million motorists through its constituent State and Territory motoring Clubs and Associations. AAA surveys motorists on a wide range of motoring issues, including road safety and speed limits. AAA has a strong interest in ensuring that speed limit policy and practice is robustly determined and implementation is well planned and executed. AAA has also initiated world-leading research on road safety infrastructure through the Australian Road Assessment Program (AusRAP) that star rates roads for safety based on a road's design features.

PRINCIPLES

AAA is a strong advocate for improved road safety and recognises the need to enhance Australia's road safety performance in order to achieve national and state road safety targets.

AAA supports the Safe Systems approach to road safety of safer drivers, in safer cars on safer roads, and we acknowledge the critical role of speed management in achieving Safe System objectives.

AAA notes that the National Road Safety Strategy endorsed by the Australian, State and Territory Governments shows that the greatest gains in road safety will come from improved road infrastructure. Consequently, AAA considers that the first/best approach to providing the community with safe mobility is to improve, wherever possible, the inherent safety of roads.

AAA recognises that individual research studies looking at the impact of speed on crash occurrence and severity vary somewhat in their conclusions. It is, however, apparent that the international body of research consistently demonstrates that lower travel speeds lead to reduced crash severity and, to a lesser extent, reduced crash occurrence. It is noted that a reduction in the speed limit may not necessarily result in the same reduction in actual travel speed, especially where the speed limit is not self-reinforcing and/or where enforcement is limited.

AAA accepts that lower speed limits may be appropriate in certain circumstances, including targeted reductions to address a specific speed-related problem which cannot be addressed by infrastructure improvements, and those instances where limited funds to improve infrastructure in the short-term are not available and this would otherwise result in significant and demonstrable road trauma.

AAA notes that the constituent Clubs and Associations have a strong understanding of member views on speed management issues, through formal market research and day to day contact. It is apparent that the role and principles of speed management are not well understood in the community, and there is a strong disconnect between community perceptions of safe speeds and those indicated by a pure Safe System approach. This is most apparent when considering issues surrounding 'acceptable' speed limits, particularly speed limits which are lower than at present.

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AAA notes that the focus to date on speed management has been in developing 'technical' tools (such as speed limit guides and signs, and enforcement methods), and that governments have not yet engaged with the community in a substantive discussion on the role of speed management (including the rationale for speed limits), possibly because this is a controversial topic. AAA believes this discussion with the community must occur, and it must be informed and open.

AAA believes that given the current gulf between community attitudes towards speed management and Safe System indications of appropriate speed limits, speed management should be viewed, and programs delivered, within a framework of cultural change. AAA draws parallels with cultural change in other areas of society such as seat belts, drink driving, littering and the like. Lessons learnt in these successful long-term campaigns should be applied to this area of speed management.

AAA notes that AusRAP can play an important role in stimulating informed public discussion on the appropriateness of changes to existing speed limits. Motorists who are able to recognise what it is about a road's design that makes a section of road more risky (for example narrow lanes and dangerous roadsides) are more likely to understand and accept the need for that road to have a reduced speed limit.

POSITION

AAA advocates infrastructure improvement programs are the first/best approach to providing the community with safe mobility, through improvement wherever possible of the inherent safety of road infrastructure.

AAA supports an informed and open national discussion on speed management. Australian Motoring Clubs and Associations are prepared to play a leading role by engaging their members in this discussion.

AAA considers that more effort is required by governments to communicate the rationale behind, and benefits of, appropriate speed limits and appropriate travel speeds.

AAA advocates that governments should take a longer-term view on further moving general speed limits towards Safe System speeds, to allow genuine community discussion, and associated cultural change to take place.

Notwithstanding the above, and in the context of recognizing that speed management and speed limits are a vital road safety measure, AAA encourages road authorities to regularly review speed limits to ensure they are appropriate and credible. This may include further introduction of targeted speed limit reductions, which are scientifically based and explained to the community in the above contextual framework.

AAA considers that reductions to general speed limits are unsustainable in the absence of demonstrable improvement to current speed limit policy and practices. In particular, road authorities have much work to do in improving the credibility and consistency of current speed limits before attempts to further introduce lower general speed limits are considered.