

Motoring Matters

For Every Australian

Democrats responses to AAA's motoring questions

In the lead up to the 2007 Federal Election, the Australian Automobile Association - on behalf of Australia's motoring clubs, their 6.5 million members, their families and all road users - put ten questions to the political parties on important road safety and road infrastructure issues.

1. What is your party's assessment of the state of Australia's road network?

According to the Australian Road Assessment Program, developed by your Association the majority of our roads meet only a three star rating. This is not good enough and above all else our roads must be safe.

2. What is your party's policy on Commonwealth funding of road infrastructure?

Expenditure and planning of Australia's road network must be co-ordinated as part of a National transport strategy. Substantial funding should be allocated for roads but also integrated public transport - rail, light rail and bus networks and transit lanes on urban freeways with a priority for those metro areas where transport services are poor.

3. How does your party intend to fund and accelerate major road infrastructure projects?

Encourage better cooperation between State and Commonwealth governments to ensure the delivery and maintenance of priority infrastructure. Pool Commonwealth and State funds for all transport infrastructure and allocate on the basis of clear criteria that delivers on long term transport reform and safety objectives.

4. Is your party focused on the state of regional roads around Australia?

Yes, the Australian Democrats have a policy for investing in infrastructure to protect and promote public safety, economic prosperity and social wellbeing. Our policy includes a core principle of ensuring there are equitable service levels between rural, regional and urban Australia. This means funding for maintenance regimes of regional roads but also to expand public transport options.

5. What will your party do to keep motoring affordable for Australians, in particular to ensure that fuel prices are competitive and in line with world/regional benchmark prices?

Rising fuel prices along with the cost of living, interest rates and inflation are all contributing to the household affordability pressures and debt levels. To minimise the cost impacts of increasing oil prices means sooner rather than later need to reduce our reliance on a rapidly depleting oil resource and reduce our dependence on oil imports.

Australia must undertake as soon as possible, aggressive actions on both transport supply and demand side. On the supply side, develop all feasible options for producing alternative liquid fuels. On the demand side, Australians should increase the fuel efficiency of the national fleet, increase expenditure, availability and patronage of public transport, mass transit, rail and light rail infrastructure.

6. What is your party's view on the use of alternative fuels in motor vehicles - in particular ethanol?

The Australian Democrats strongly support the roll out and availability of alternative fuels such as biofuels and ethanol and underpinned by a mandatory biofuel target of 20% by 2020.

We advocate the removal of the alternative fuels excise until agreed targets are met, call for tax incentives for fuel efficient and low emission vehicles and the reintroduction of fuel excise indexation which was abolished in 2001.

The Democrats call for E10 to become more widely available and for the ban on higher ethanol content to be lifted. To promote consumer choice we also call for an extension on the Democrats-negotiated alternative fuel vehicle conversion to electric and LNG vehicles of all sizes. Grants for the installation of compressed natural gas, liquefied natural gas should be extended to hydrogen and electricity refuelling infrastructure.

7. Does your party have a view and any policy on traffic congestion and its cost to the national and regional economies?

The cost of traffic congestion is now estimated to be in the tens of billions. However, the answers to traffic congestion does not lie in more freeways, more inefficient cars and bigger trucks but in increased infrastructure expenditure and integrated transport planning, availability and patronage of public transport, mass transit, rail and light rail infrastructure, tax reform, increased fuel efficiency of the national fleet and alternatives to petroleum fuels.

8. What is your party's policy on reducing Greenhouse gas emissions, particularly emissions from private vehicles?

Australia and every country around the world faces an immense challenge to address greenhouse emissions from the transport sector and again our response to reducing our exposure to increasing oil prices. We must develop alternative liquid fuels, increase the fuel efficiency of the national fleet and increase expenditure, availability and patronage of public transport, mass transit, rail and light rail infrastructure.

9. What is your party doing to ensure motor vehicles are safer?

The Democrats promote and protect activities that result in increased motor vehicle safety. This includes vehicle safety standards but also the expansion of funding for road and infrastructure maintenance and rigorous maintenance regimes.

10. What is your party's policy on driver education and training?

The Australian Democrats support driver education and training.