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Empty streets help drive down nation's road toll

- Road safety report shows empty streets drive down road toll in June quarter.
- Despite aberration, national road safety targets likely won't be met by end of year.
- Cyclist deaths double over three years.

Unsurprisingly, with many roads and highways carrying fewer vehicles during the COVID-19 pandemic, Australia recorded a welcome and sharp 14.6 per cent decrease in road fatalities in the quarter ending June 2020, compared with the previous quarter, according to the latest Australian Automobile Association (AAA) Benchmarking Road Safety report.

Surprisingly however, the [AAA's report](#) shows that even with this sharp decline, Australia is not on track to meet its national road trauma targets that are supposed to be achieved by December this year. The targets are part of the National Road Safety Strategy the Commonwealth and all states and territories signed up to in 2011.

The [latest report](#) also shows an alarming spike in cyclist fatalities. The number of cyclists dying on Australia's roads has doubled over the last three years, with 48 fatalities in the 12 months to June.

The AAA's Managing Director Michael Bradley said: "The reduction in traffic due to the COVID-19 pandemic is almost certainly responsible for putting a small dent in Australia's road toll. But it should not take a virus to stop the scourge of fatalities on our roads."

Government data shows traffic volumes have halved across Sydney during the peak of the COVID-19 lockdown; and research by the Australian Road Research Board found there had been an 88-95 per cent reduction in congestion on Melbourne's Monash Freeway for weekday peak periods.

"Therefore, it is unfortunate but likely the recent decreases in road trauma identified in this report are an aberration resulting from the effects the COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on road use and travel volumes", Mr Bradley said.

The decreases in road fatalities are nationwide, except in Queensland.

Over the broader period, the report found that in the 12 months to June 2020, 1,105 people died on Australian roads, a decrease of 7.6 per cent from 1,196 in the 12 months to June 2019.

The AAA which represents over 8.5 million motorists through its member clubs – NRMA, RACV, RACQ, RAA, RAC, RACT and AANT – believes the report shows that the National Road Safety Strategy would almost certainly fail to meet its objective to reduce road deaths and serious injuries by 30 per cent by the end of 2020.

The failure is reflected across the nation, with not a single state on a trajectory to meet its road trauma reduction target.

Mr Bradley said the latest Benchmarking Road Safety report was a timely reminder of the need for all levels of government to redouble their efforts to reduce road trauma.

“Right now, the federal Parliament’s Joint Select Committee on Road Safety is finalising its recommendations for inclusion in the next National Road safety Strategy that will start from the beginning of next year,” he said.

“It is critical that the new strategy does not try to be tricky and water down any of the road safety targets because governments have missed them or failed to even measure them in the past.

“Instead the next Strategy must learn from the failings. By tying funding to road safety outcomes on our roads, offering incentives to states to meet their goals, and ensuring the real-time collection of road safety data consistently across the nation, we can ensure the best and most flexible road safety policy decisions.”

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The Australian Automobile Association is the nation’s peak motoring body, representing Australia’s state-based motoring clubs and their 8 million members. The AAA is an apolitical and technology-neutral advocate for federal transport policy that improves safety, affordability, and mobility.