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14 April 2021

Committee Secretary
Transport and Resources Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Secretary

I write in relation to the Transport and Resources Committee *Inquiry into Vehicle Safety, Standards and Technology, including Engine Immobiliser Technology*. The purpose of this letter is to help inform the Committee of what Austroads believes to be key opportunities around vehicle safety and technology to support Queensland's efforts to reduce or prevent illegal and dangerous motor vehicle use.

Austroads is the peak body for Australasian road transport and traffic agencies. As an organisation owned by all Australia's roads or transport departments and the Australian Local Government Association, Austroads assist our members and Australia's local government agencies to adopt harmonised road safety practices. We support the Australasian road transport and traffic agencies by:

- supporting safe and effective management and use of the road system
- developing and promoting national practices, and
- providing professional advice to member organisations and national and international bodies.

We welcome the opportunity to make a brief submission to the Committee, noting that we will address those terms of inquiry that are directly relevant to Austroads.

On options to reduce or prevent illegal and dangerous use of vehicles, and lessons learnt from other jurisdictions

Engine immobilisation technology is a primary measure that addresses unauthorised vehicle use including theft. Immobiliser devices are electronic switches fitted to vehicles that require an electronic transponder, or key, to unlock a vehicle's ignition. We will refer to these as *fixed immobilisers*.

Remote engine immobiliser technology introduces an ability to control a vehicle's ignition from a distance using digital wireless technology, which we will refer to as *remote immobilisers*. It is also important to recognise that fixed immobilisation prevents a vehicle from starting, while remote immobilisation can also operate on a moving vehicle.

The success of fixed engine immobilisation technology as a theft reduction measure led to Australia introducing a regulatory requirement for electronic immobilisers on all new cars from 1 July 2001. Western Australia requires most newly registered and re-registered vehicles, including those manufactured prior to the Commonwealth regulation, to be fitted with an immobiliserⁱ. A paper published by the Australian Institute of Criminology (Rick Brown, June 2013)ⁱⁱ examined the role of electronic immobilisers in theft reduction. We would like to draw the Committee's attention to the many references contained within this article and the discussion of implementation and policy issues.

Aside from their theft reduction function, fixed immobilisers have also been used to address some high risk and unauthorised driving. A prominent example is the use of alcohol interlocks.

Remote immobilisers offer potential to provide additional levels of protection against theft and may prove a useful countermeasure against unauthorised and high risk driving. This technology has been investigated by law enforcement agencies, though Austroads understands that the technology has limited potential for widescale application currently.

The key interest for Austroads in immobilisers is for their potential to address high-risk or extreme driving behaviour. Examples of high-risk and extreme behaviour are excessive speeding, impairment with alcohol and/or drugs, and unlicensed driving. A 2020 Austroads publication, *Effectiveness of Drink Driving Countermeasures: National Policy Framework*ⁱⁱⁱ, notes the potential for immobilisers to reduce recidivism for drink drivers and recommends increased use of vehicle immobilisation for all drink driving offenders. An Austroads research report, *Developing Measures to Reduce Unlicensed Driving*^{iv}, notes the deterrence role of immobilisation when administered as part of a sanction regime.

To date, remote immobilisation has not been used in law enforcement in Australia. We recommend careful consideration of the health and safety benefits against the costs and complexities involved in wide-scale use of remote immobilisers. While likely to be highly beneficial in targeted settings, the overall contribution to road safety outcomes is likely to be low. Austroads has recently undertake a rapid research exercise aimed at understanding the state of knowledge on the relationship between extreme high-risk behaviour of drivers and riders and road trauma. The literature on this subject is extensive, but variable in its quality, coverage and relevance. While extreme high-risk drivers and riders have a significantly greater likelihood of crash involvement, the overall contribution to road trauma has not been conclusively understood and is likely to be dwarfed by other causation factors.

On the effectiveness of proposed measures

Austroads' primary contribution to Australia's road safety effort is through the conduct of research on road safety risks and countermeasures, and the publication of authoritative guidance. Austroads is in regular communication with its members around Australia and New Zealand and its peers in Europe and North America in relation to law enforcement, licensing and vehicle safety, and sets a leading research agenda including a focus on technology. Austroads would welcome further investigation of potential applications of remote immobilisation to support law enforcement efforts in relation to extreme and high-risk driving and riding behaviour.

Please contact Michael Nieuwesteeg, Program Manager Road Safety & Design, or [REDACTED] if you wish to discuss or if you have any questions.

Yours sincerely



GEOFF ALLAN
Chief Executive

ⁱ <https://www.transport.wa.gov.au/licensing/immobilisers.asp>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.aic.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-05/tandi453.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Austroads publication AP-R613-20, February 2020 <https://austroads.com.au/publications/road-safety/ap-r613-20>

^{iv} Austroads publication AP-R424-14, June 2013 <https://austroads.com.au/publications/road-safety/ap-r424-13>