



PRIME MINISTER

SPEECH BY THE PRIME MINISTER
NATIONAL ROAD SAFETY SYMPOSIUM,
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Road safety is a matter of continuing national concern.

The road toll is one of our most horrific social problems.

In fact more Australians have been killed on our roads in the last 12 years than died on active service in World War II.

Putting the same point another way, more Australians died on our roads in the first four months of 1984 than during action in both the Korean and Vietnam wars combined.

These dramatic comparisons highlight starkly an appalling waste of life. The annual cost to the community has been estimated to be approximately \$3000 million.

To improve road safety is a national imperative. It is a responsibility we all share.

None of us can afford to ignore the human and economic cost of the tragedy being played out daily on our roads. All Australians should be getting together to put an end to this carnage.

There is no room here for parochial jealousies or jurisdictional disputes. All Australians should be more conscious of the dimensions of the problem and should join together in identifying and implementing the best means of remedying it.

In the past 18 months the Government has initiated the most comprehensive overhaul ever undertaken of Australia's national transport system. This is a fundamental contribution to improved road safety.

On road construction and maintenance alone we have increased our spending by 46 per cent to a record \$1245 million.

The improvements made are evident to all who travel our highways, particularly the national highway system which the Federal Government funds totally.

The benefits to the economy in creating employment, providing more efficient transport services, and ultimately in saving lives and avoiding injuries are there for all to see.

We also have spent \$7 million this year specifically on road safety administration, research and promotion. This I believe is an excellent investment and is but a small price to pay for effective action in this critical area.

However, money alone won't solve the problem - it takes much more. No matter how much we spend on better roads, no matter how much we spend on regulating for safer vehicles, the behaviour of the person behind the wheel or the handlebars is still the greatest problem.

The message we have to get across to our fellow Australians, particularly the younger generation is: "stop killing each other".

In the hands of the inexperienced and the impetuous, the motor vehicle can be a lethal weapon. When added to this there is the driver attitude of "she'll be right", or "it can't happen to me", then we really have cause to worry.

Such attitudes must be changed. Too many Australians take the road toll for granted. They seem strangely insured to the tragedy being played out around them. We need to put an end to the grisly pattern which, regrettably, is now all too familiar.

Over the past few years we have quite rightly seen a concentration on the human aspect of road safety. The Federal and State campaigns waged successfully to combat drink-driving are excellent examples.

As a consequence of these campaigns, public attitudes to drink-driving are changing - with excellent results for families. The load on our hospitals - who have to repair the damage - has also been proportionately reduced.

But at an even more fundamental level we need to be sure our drivers know how to drive. We should be teaching our young drivers more effectively than we do at present; we should also be doing as much as we can to maintain and develop higher levels of driving skills among those who have gained their unrestricted licence.

An increasing proportion of the Government's research and promotion budget is being directed to this end.

The graduated driver licensing scheme by which those under 25 progress through four stages of supervision and instruction over a two year period, has been developed and put to the States as a practical attempt to ensure that new drivers are more competent.

I was pleased to see that the South Australian Government has adopted the concept and will be implementing a pilot program next year.

Government action in this field will, however, never be enough. We all have to work together, especially within the family, our schools and community groups to secure better driving standards.

We need to teach our new drivers - and many older ones - that driving safety is much more than being able to change gears, steer, park, and perform all those physical functions in getting the vehicle from A to B.

We should persuade drivers that impatience, aggression and lack of consideration on the road serve no constructive purpose and might well prove fatal to the driver himself/or herself.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In wishing this symposium every success in its examination of priorities, and in its assessment of problems, information and remedial measures, let me give you one assurance: my Government is right behind you.

We are committed to improving the nation's roads. Better roads are safer roads and we are spending record amount of money on this, despite very strict Budgetary constraints.

We are also committed to improved vehicle standards. We have introduced a certification system which, with current streamlining and considerable investment, will ensure that our cars are as safe as any others in the world.

We also want to see Australian drivers become better drivers. Every car driver, heavy vehicle driver, motorcyclist, pedestrian and push bike rider needs to be more aware of the dangers and to be better able to use our roads without mishap.

This will only happen if all of us join in a concentrated effort to make our roads safer - safer for all Australians.

At the national level we have shown since coming to Government, that there is a very strong community spirit which can be harnessed for the common good. We should apply this to road safety as much as we are doing to economic matters, industrial revival, restructuring and industrial disputation.

All Australians have a common interest in reducing the road toll. We should be doing all we can to minimise road deaths and injuries.

That is why road safety is so important.

It therefore gives me great pleasure to declare this National Road Safety Symposium officially open.
