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Call for 'shovel-ready' infrastructure projects – response from the NZ Automobile Association

Introduction

The NZ Automobile Association (AA) strongly supports the formation of the Infrastructure Industry Reference Group, and the Government's commitment to using infrastructure investment to support economic recovery in the wake of Covid-19.

We welcome the steps the Reference Group is taking to engage with the sector to identify 'shovel-ready' infrastructure projects, and appreciate the opportunity to share our views on the projects that could form part of the Government's list.

The AA proposes the launch of two complementary national programmes:

- A five-pronged road safety programme
- A super-charged road maintenance upgrade

These areas are of critical concern to the AA and its membership. With additional funding, we believe there is an excellent opportunity to quickly and effectively deliver benefits to transport users, and deliver on the Government's transport policy objectives.

Meanwhile, to help shed light on public preferences and expectations around infrastructure delivery (and bearing in mind the Reference Group's interest in seeing projects put forward right across the country), we have also included a breakdown of the priority transport infrastructure projects for the AA's 17 District Councils.

Road safety programmes

Road safety is, and always has been, the cornerstone of the AA's advocacy work. While we have strongly supported the Government's reinvigorated approach to road safety, we have repeatedly raised concerns about the availability of funding, and the extent to which funding constraints could impact on programme delivery.

The prospect of additional investment provides an opportunity to address these concerns and, in doing so, to significantly advance the Government's road safety objectives.

We therefore propose the creation of five interlocking road safety programmes, to be deployed right across the country. These are:

- Electronic speed signs outside all New Zealand schools
- Adding 200km of wire rope barriers each year for five years
- Upgrading two-star highways to at least three-star rating
- Engineering work to support safer speeds
- Installing at least 20 new red light cameras in main centres (outside Auckland)

i) Safety around schools

The Government has recently announced a reduction in the speed limit around New Zealand schools – to 30km/h in urban zones (or 40 km/h in some circumstances) and 60km/h in rural areas.

The AA has endorsed this initiative. However, as with all speed limit changes, success requires more investment than simply changing the speed limit roundels.

Variable electronic speed signs

A condition of AA support for the initiative is that variable, rather than permanent, speed limits be applied. Targeting lower speeds at school start and finish times makes more sense to motorists. To maximise the safety benefits (through the highest possible levels of compliance), we propose a programme to deploy electronic, variable speed signs outside all schools in the country.

The lower speed limits already apply outside some schools, and while in some cases, electronic signs are already used, the cost of these signs can be prohibitive for individual schools and for local government. A bulk purchase and roll out, co-ordinated centrally, would bring costs down, and go a long way to addressing this constraint.

Engineering for safer schools

It is also well recognised that a more effective safety intervention in the longer term is engineering based: removing cars or buses from high-speed roads at drop-off and pick-up times, and removing the need for children to cross roads. The evidence behind this approach is contained in existing guidelines issued by NZTA (Safer Journeys for Schools, NZTA, 2017).

We therefore propose a programme to construct new drop-off points for buses and cars – located off the main road – at relevant rural schools. Rural schools are where the risks associated with speed are greatest.

Targets and support

Both of these initiatives align closely with the Government's recent Tackling Unsafe Speeds package of policies. In the release of that package (November 2019), the stated target was for 40% of schools to apply the new speed limits within three years. Currently, only 20% of schools have limits lower than 50km/h in place. For the programme we are proposing, the target should be to increase the rate of uptake to 50% or more in the first three years.

The Ministry of Transport's "Attitudes to Road Safety" survey (run between 2011 and 2016) showed very high levels of public support for lower speeds around schools – 90% supported speeds of 40km/h or less outside urban schools. AA surveys show similar levels of support, with 94% of Members supporting lower variable speed limits (of either 30km/h or 40km/h) around urban schools. But this support is conditional upon the use of variable electronic speed signs – which are supported by 97% of AA Members.

ii) Wire rope barriers

The AA has long advocated the benefits of proven road safety treatments like median and roadside wire rope barriers in reducing deaths and serious injuries. These interventions are strongly supported by AA Members.

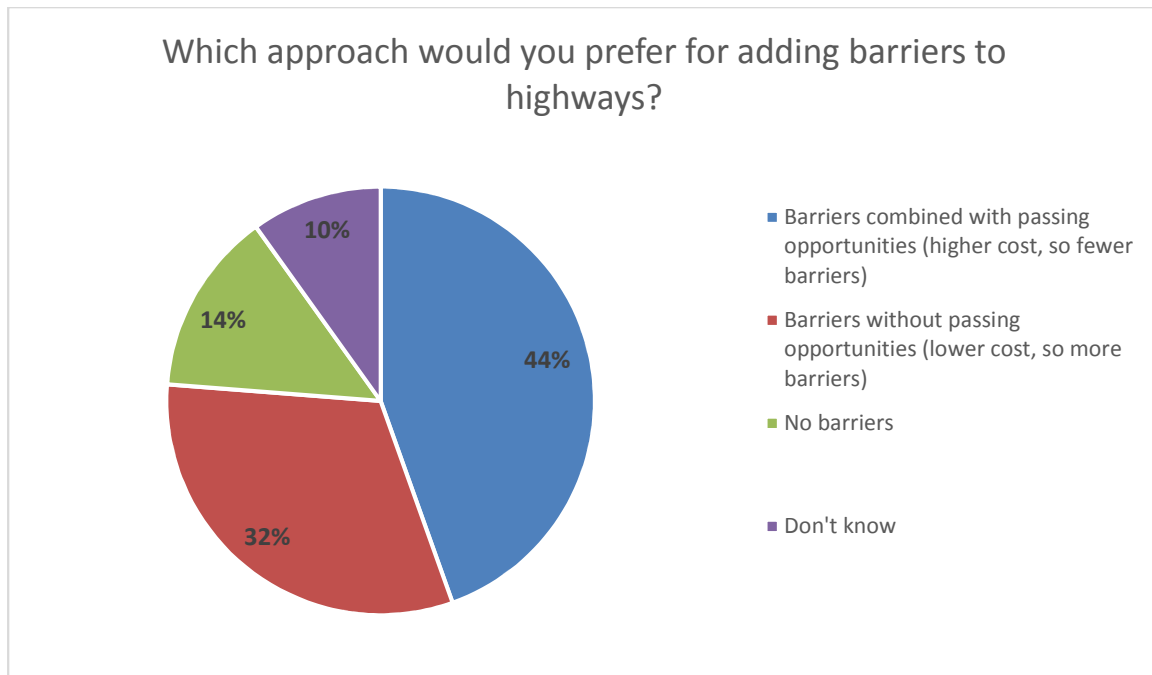


Figure 1 - Results from survey of 1,831 AA Members, March 2020

NZTA research has shown that on rural highways, 72% of deaths and serious injuries are caused when vehicles run off the side of the road, or cross the centreline. Median and side wire rope barriers are proven to reduce the levels of death and serious injuries from these crashes by over 90%.

New Zealand has only 200kms of wire rope barriers nation wide, and plans to deliver more are well behind schedule (the Safer Networks Programme promised an additional 200km by mid 2021, but in the first two years has only managed around 50km). In contrast, Sweden – a country we look to for road safety leadership and that has a similar total length of road network – has over 5000kms of barriers.

The AA proposes a programme to deliver an additional 200km of wire rope barriers each year for the next five years. To get the best possible safety return and to enhance all-important community acceptance, the barriers must be accompanied by physical works to provide passing lanes, wider shoulders, and a greater number of safe turning opportunities.

Using data that NZTA already has through KiwiRAP and the Speed Management Guide, the highest-priority corridors for barriers and road works can be easily identified and quickly actioned.

iii) Upgrading two-star highways

Nearly 40% of New Zealand's state highway network has a two-star safety rating according to KiwiRAP, and a third of all the driving on state highways takes place on those roads. What a two-star rating means in terms of the road environment is that there are major deficiencies in some road features (such as a large number of roadside hazards) and/or many minor deficiencies (such as poorly designed intersections, a lack of safe passing opportunities and narrow lanes).

The single step that New Zealand could take that would deliver the greatest gain in road safety would be to upgrade these roads from two-star to three-star quality (where the deficiencies in the features of the road are far fewer). This would effectively halve the trauma from crashes.

As a starting point, we would recommend that the programme target all highways with a two-star classification that currently have a daily traffic count of 6000 or more vehicles.

iv) *Engineering to support safer speeds*

Speed management has, for good reason, been strongly prioritised in the road safety programme in recent years, but the focus has been almost exclusively on just one tool in the toolkit – reduced speed limits. The key role of engineering in speed management has been largely overlooked.

NZTA’s Mega Maps Tool identifies dozens of stretches of highway around the country where “engineering up” is appropriate to make sure that, on roads where there are speed-related risks but also a need to maintain the current speed limit (such as on high-volume roads designed for throughput), road users can safely drive at the existing speed limit.

Funding constraints have, however, meant that this engineering work has effectively been taken off the table. At the same time, little priority appears to have been given to engineering work to make sure that, where speed limits are reduced, road environments reflect the new speed.

We propose a programme to make these engineering treatments a priority, starting by actioning all the sections of highway that have been categorised by Mega Maps as “engineer up”.

v) *Red light cameras*

Every year, hundreds of New Zealanders are injured in crashes resulting from red light running, and two or three are killed. The AA has long supported the deployment of red light cameras as an affordable, effective way to help bring these numbers down.

Red light cameras have exceptionally high levels of support from AA Members and the wider public – surveys of the AA’s membership nationally show close to 90% are in favour of an increase in the roll-out of red light cameras.

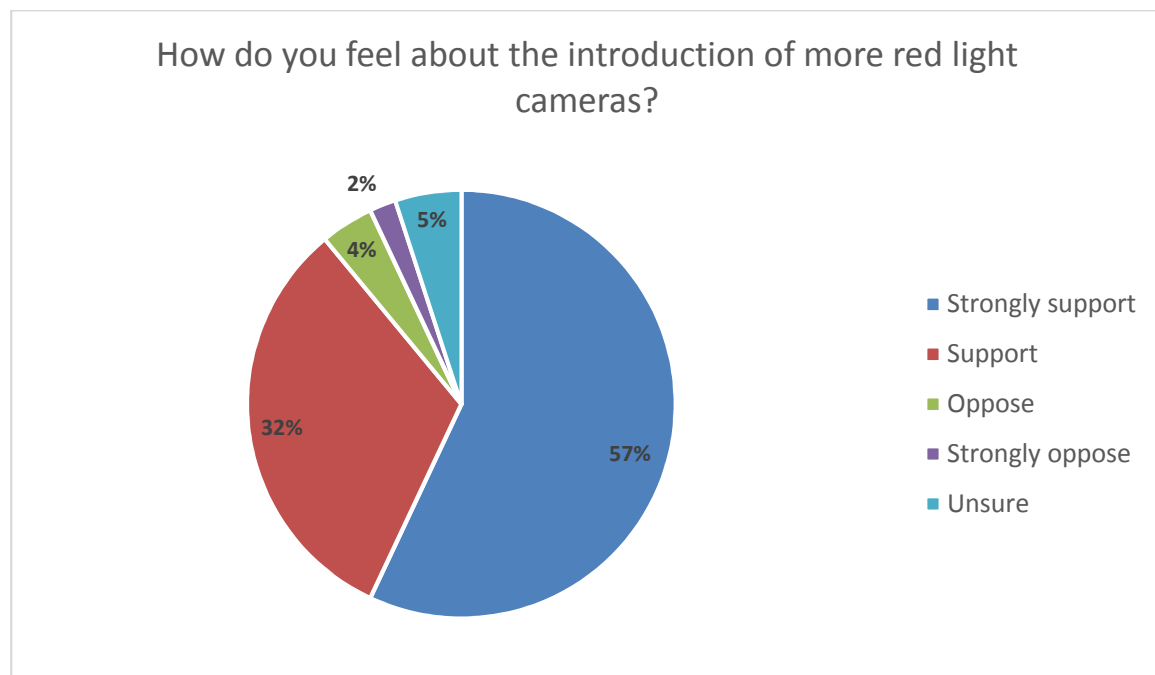


Figure 2 - Results from survey of 5,255 AA Members, December 2015

While Auckland Transport has developed a comprehensive red light camera programme in recent years – with 18 ‘next generation’ cameras deployed since 2017 – there has been no progress elsewhere in the country (outside Auckland, there is only one red light camera in operation – in Wellington).

Red light cameras appear likely to be incorporated in the Tackling Unsafe Speeds initiative, but we see an opportunity to move more boldly. The AA therefore proposes a programme to deploy at least 20 red light cameras in centres outside Auckland, at intersections where the data show a high rate of red light running.

Road maintenance

The AA is calling for a national road maintenance programme that results in 15% of the network’s road surfaces being renewed or rehabilitated each year

New Zealand’s roads are a vital national asset (the state highway network alone is valued at \$43 billion), but they are not being adequately maintained.

Over the last decade, funding for road maintenance has decreased significantly in real terms.

While nominal funding increased by around 30% (after a big uptick in the last two years), the increase was not enough to offset the combined impact of:

- growth in vehicle kilometres travelled of 20% over the same period (and even greater growth for trucks, which cause far greater damage to road surfaces)
- inflation of close to 20% in construction costs; and
- an increase in the total length of the road network of nearly 10%.

The result has been a decline in levels of service, which has not gone unnoticed by the motoring public. When surveyed on their chief concerns with the transport network, AA Members right around the country place the condition of road surfaces at, or very close to, the top of the list.

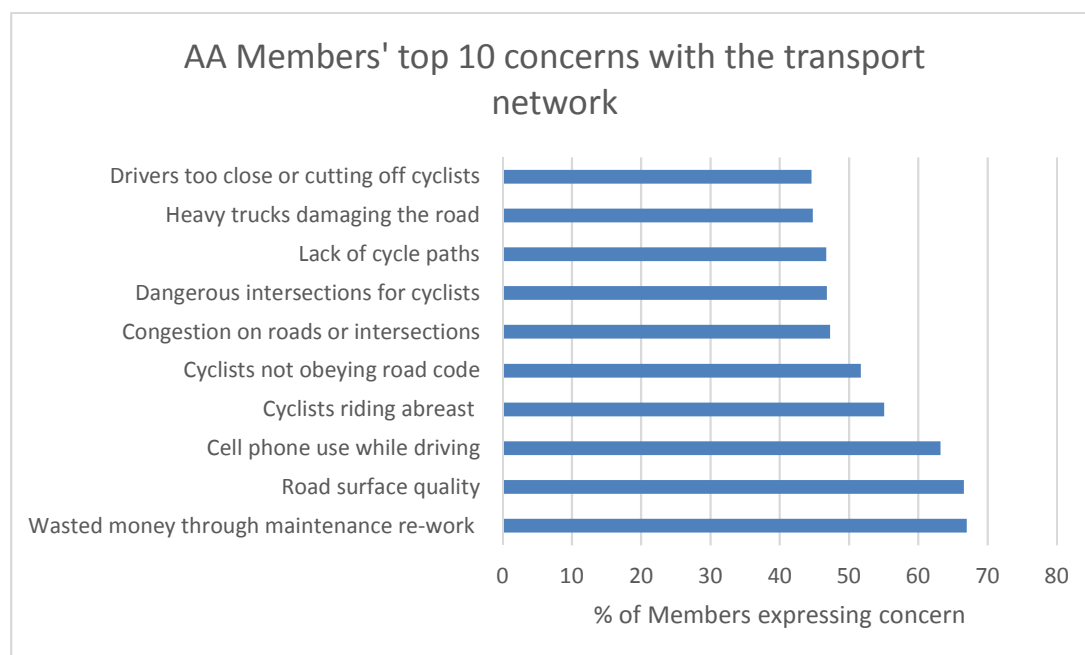


Figure 3 - Results from survey of 4,054 AA Members, February 2020

Above all, road maintenance is a safety issue – poor quality road surfaces reduce the grip a vehicle has with the road and lead to increased crash rates, including for crashes where vehicles cross the centre line or run off the road (which, as outlined above, is where the greatest harm is caused).

The fact that the link between the condition of the road and the road toll has not been fully recognised in our national safety programmes is an ongoing source of frustration and concern for the AA.

While funding for maintenance increased in 2018/19, resulting in resurfacing/pavement work being carried out on 8-9% of the network, the amount of this work completed is still below the level NZTA itself targets to ensure road surfaces are safe and fit for purpose. It is also significantly less than what is needed to address the maintenance backlog that has been allowed to develop over the past decade.

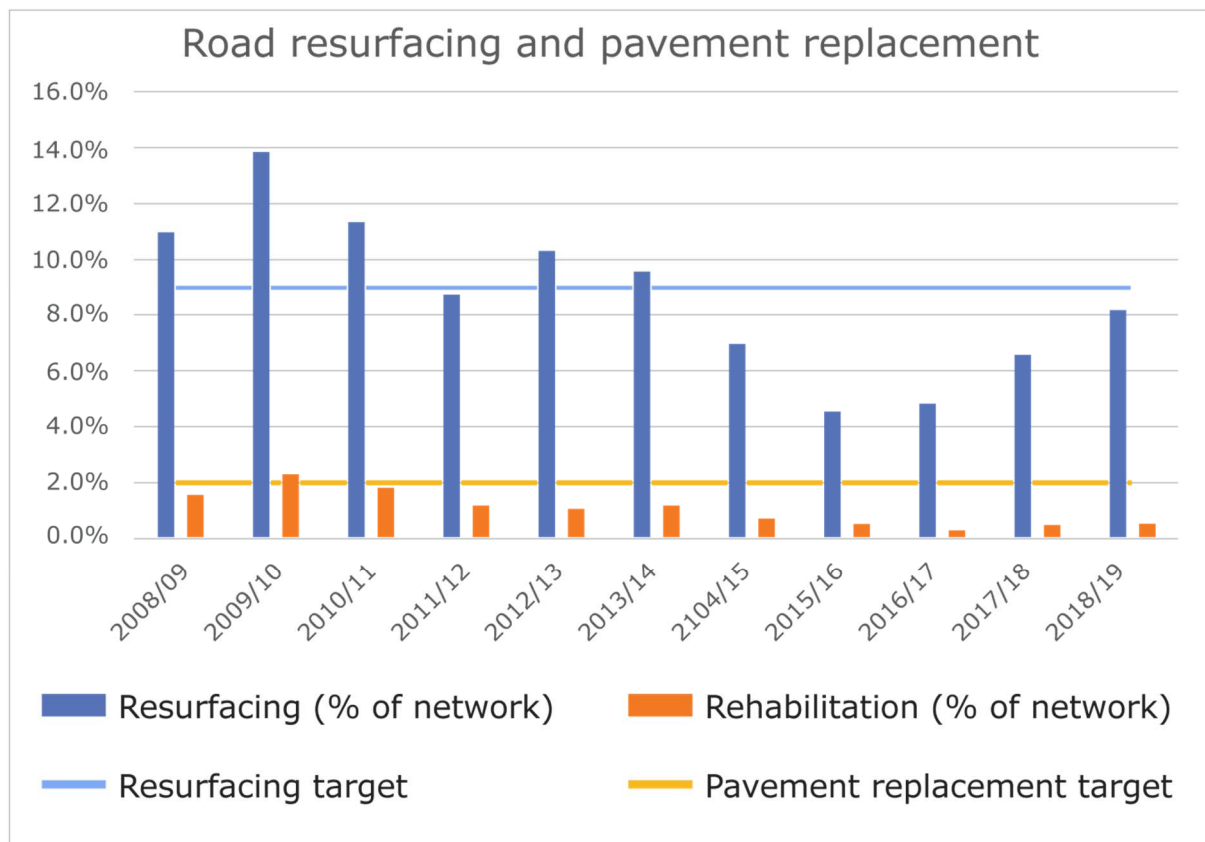


Figure 4 – Road resurfacing and replacement: performance against targets 2008/09-2018/19 (Source: NZTA data)

On the **state highway** network, therefore, the AA is calling for a national maintenance programme that results in 15% of the network’s road surfaces being renewed or rehabilitated each year. This would be enough to maintain road surfaces at an appropriate standard and to deal with the deficit of the last decade. Northland, Bay of Plenty, and Hawkes Bay – where the most significant increases in vehicle movements (including trucks) have taken place – should be prioritised.

Meanwhile, spending on **local road** maintenance has been limited by the co-funding required from local road controlling authorities. There is a pipeline of maintenance work that cannot start because local share funding is not available. The AA therefore proposes that an additional \$200-250 million be made available each year for local road maintenance. The extra funding could be applied by increasing the proportion of the cost of

local maintenance projects that NZTA covers, allowing more projects to get started. This would also be an effective way to geographically distribute stimulus.

The views of AA Districts

AA District Councils were asked to identify what they consider to be the highest-priority shovel-ready projects in their respective parts of the country, drawing on their knowledge of the views of local road users and the list of projects included in the local RLTP. As mentioned, the rationale for including the views of AA Districts is to provide the Reference Group and its sponsors with a window into the preferences and priorities of the motoring public in different parts of the country.

AA District	Priority projects
Northland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SH1 Kaeo Bridge upgrade • SH1 and SH15 intersection – Otaika Valley Rd • Waipapa Rd and SH10 intersection
Auckland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Accelerate the park and ride programme • Planning and design for staged development of Rapid Transit to the Northwest • Advance Supporting Growth Route Protection Programme
Waikato	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extension of Waikato Expressway from Cambridge to Piarere (in conjunction with SH1/SH29 roundabout) • SH1 Piarere to Taupo, Taupo to Waiouru safety improvements • Hamilton City Southern Links/Peacocke package
Hawkes Bay	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Four-laning of Napier-Hastings Expressway • SH50 Glencoe Gorge realignment • SH2 Paki-Paki to Norswood passing lanes
Manawatu	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SH1/RNZAF Ohakea Air Base intersection • Accelerate planning for Palmerston North Ring Route
Taranaki	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SH3 Waitara to Bell Block Safer Corridor • SH45, SH43, improved facilities for tourist traffic • SH3 New Plymouth to Whanganui Safer Corridor improvements • SH3 North Bexley Curves
Whanganui	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SH4 Parapararas – address flood damage • SH1 passing lanes – Taupo-Turangi, south of Bulls
Wairarapa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SH2 Carterton to Masterton intersection upgrades • SH53 Waihenga Bridge replacement • SH2 improvements (Mt Bruce)
Wellington	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advance planning and design for Second Mt Victoria Tunnel • Fast-track SH58 safety improvements • SH1 safety improvements – section between Manukau and Ohau • SH2 Akatarawa Rd to Te Marua – ‘engineer up’ to 100km/h
Nelson	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SH60 Motueka Investigation • Bridge replacement programme on SH6, SH63, SH65 – replacing one-lane bridges with two lanes; upgrades to existing two-lane bridges • SH6 Nelson-Blenheim safe passing opportunities
Marlborough	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SH1 Weld Pass realignment/reconstruction • Bridge resilience - SH1 Wairau River Bridge upgrade, SH6 Pelorus Bridge replacement • French Pass-Croiselles Rd safety improvements - widening, guardrailling

Canterbury/West Coast	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Woodend Bypass • Second Ashburton Bridge • SH1 median barrier, Rolleston to Ashburton
South Canterbury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SH1 four-laning: Washdyke to Port; Temuka to Timaru • SH8 Upper Orari Bridge two-laning • Passing lanes between Timaru and Oamaru
North Otago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SH1 repairs, North Oamaru • Thames Street/ Coquet Street intersection, Oamaru • Widening of SH83 Pukeuri to Omarama
Otago	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SH8 Beaumont Bridge replacement • SH6 Albertown Bridge – upgrade/replacement to 2 lanes • SH8 Milton to Roxburgh passing lanes
Southland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elles Road Roundabout • Passing lane construction: SH1, SH6, SH93, SH99

Other concerns

The Reference Group's focus is firmly on advancing projects where construction (i.e., contractor activity) can get under way within short timeframes. While we support this approach (and the rationale behind it), our view is that projects where design and planning (i.e., consultant activity) can quickly get under way also need to be prioritised.

One of the Government's key objectives is to maintain a pipeline of infrastructure work – the pipeline will soon dry up if resources are only directed towards one link in the supply chain (contracting). In our response, therefore, the interpretation of shovel-readiness has included design and planning activity.

Meanwhile, we assume that the Reference Group will be closely involved in the discussion around larger-scale, strategic infrastructure projects, planning for which needs to be ramped up now.

With these projects, we would urge some caution when it comes to the Reference Group's objective to reduce or remove barriers to delivery. Streamlining processes is a worthy goal (especially in the current environment), but it must not come at the cost of adequate levels of public engagement. We have recently seen the extent to which a lack of transparency and consultation alienated transport stakeholders from the Government's planning for rapid transit in Auckland – replicating this outcome further ahead will ultimately lead not only to poor decisions, but to slower delivery.

Conclusion

The AA would very much like to continue engaging with the Reference Group as its work programme evolves. We are very happy to meet at any point to discuss the views outlined above, and the possibility of drawing on the AA's survey capability further ahead to support the Reference Group's work. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide feedback.

Yours sincerely,

Barney Irvine
Principal Advisor – Infrastructure

Appendix: The AA

The AA is an incorporated society with over 1.7 million members, representing a large proportion of New Zealand road users. The AA was founded in 1903 as an automobile users' advocacy group, but today our work reflects the wide range of interests of our large membership, many of whom are cyclists and public transport users as well as private motorists.

Across New Zealand, the motoring public regularly come into contact with the AA through our breakdown officers, 37 AA Centres and other AA businesses. Seventeen volunteer AA District Councils around New Zealand meet each month to discuss local transport issues. Based in Wellington and Auckland, our professional policy and research team regularly surveys our Members on transport issues and Members frequently contact us unsolicited to share their views. Via the AA Research Foundation, we commission original research into current issues in transport and mobility. Collectively, these networks, combined with our professional resource, help to guide our advocacy work and enable the AA to develop a comprehensive view on mobility issues.

Motorists pay over \$4 billion in taxes each year through fuel excise, road user charges, registration fees, ACC levies, and GST. Much of this money is reinvested by the Government in our transport system, funding road building and maintenance, public transport services, road safety work including advertising, and Police enforcement activity. On behalf of AA Members, we advocate for sound and transparent use of this money in ways that improve transport networks, enhance safety and keep costs fair and reasonable.

Our advocacy takes the form of meetings with local and central government politicians and officials, publication of research and policy papers, contributing to media on topical issues, and submissions to select committees and local government hearings.

The AA at a glance

Total Membership

1.7+ million Members

Just over 1 million are personal Member

0.7 million are business-based memberships

% of licenced drivers

Half of licenced drivers are NZAA Members

Gender split

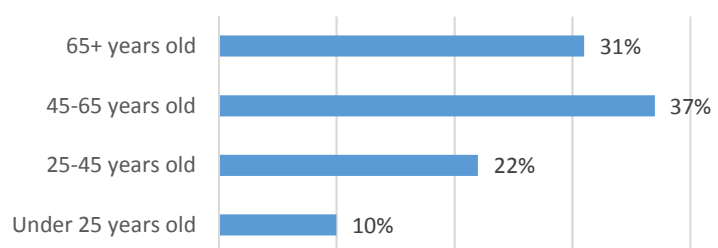
54% Female

46% Male

Age range &

Membership retention

Age of AA Members



Half of NZAA Members have been with us for 10 years or more.
