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Automobile Association

2023 Election Calls

Our 2023 Election Calls are based on issues AA Members care deeply about, and also changes that the AA thinks will deliver real improvement to New Zealand's transport system.

- **Revive essential road maintenance**
- **Make the road network resilient**
- **Stop drunk and drugged drivers**
- **Boost investment in electric vehicle chargers**
- **Target cellphone use behind the wheel**
- **Lift the safety of regional highways**
- **Fund roads fairly**
- **Show how transport emissions tax is meaningfully reducing transport emissions**

We must keep aspiring to a transport network that is safe, efficient, resilient, and affordable, and that provides us with choices in the way we travel.

Regardless of which political party/parties form the next Government, we see these calls as achievable actions they can take in the next term to make transport better.

Improvements are not always a matter of money. There are ways to work smarter and co-benefits – investing in one area will often have positive impacts in others.

Many of these issues are not new, but the AA's challenge to the next Government is to take more effective actions to properly address them.

The New Zealand economy and the wellbeing of all of us is impacted by the quality of our transport system.

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Revive **essential** road maintenance

The problem: Our roads have not been getting the maintenance they need to stay safe and fit for purpose for a long time.

Road quality consistently registers in AA Member surveys as their highest concern.

Public dissatisfaction about the quality of surfaces and the frequency of repairs has continued to grow.

Although there has been a welcome increase in road maintenance investment in recent times, maintenance work has been well below target for decades. Meanwhile, the number of vehicle kilometres travelled has increased almost 16% in the last decade, and unfortunately the cost of maintenance work has gone up by around 30%.

The quality of a road's surface has a real impact on safety. Even the best drivers risk losing control if the surface doesn't provide good grip. Putting off maintenance can mean more potholes and greater long-term repair costs down the track.

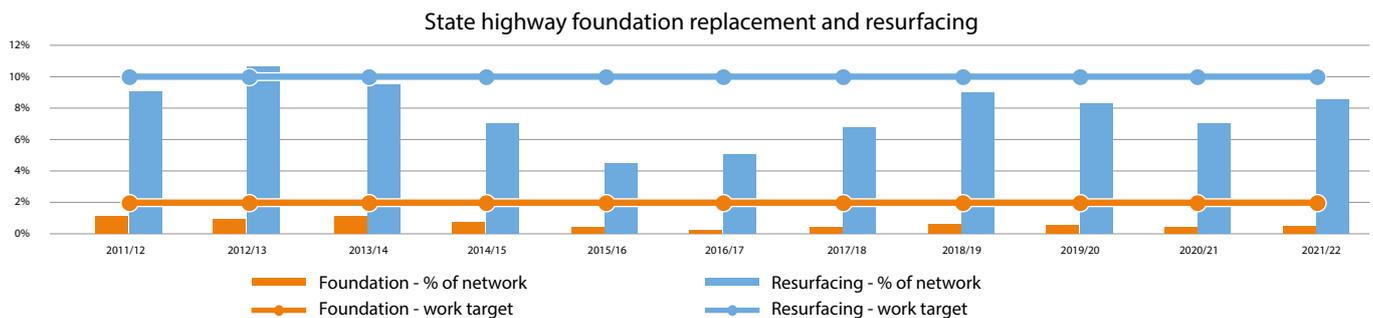
Funding uncertainty has led to less capacity in the transport sector. Without a sustained commitment to properly maintaining roads, sufficient industry capacity to deliver the work will remain a problem.



The call: Increase road maintenance by at least \$1.2 billion over the next three years – focussed on foundation and resurfacing work. This is needed to catch up on work that should have been done in previous years.

It could enable, for example, an extra 1,600 lane km of foundation work and 7,500 lane km of resurfacing.

The AA believes road maintenance should get the first call on Fuel Excise Duty (FED) & Road User Charge (RUC) revenue to ensure road users get well-maintained roads in exchange for our fuel taxes.



Make the road network **resilient**

The problem: Our highways, roads, bridges and tunnels must be able to better withstand extreme weather.

The scale of damage wreaked by the Auckland floods and Cyclone Gabrielle brought home to everyone how vulnerable our road network is to weather events – particularly as their frequency and severity increases with climate change.

In recent years, in some parts of the country, roads have been fixed only to fail again when the next flood comes along. It has become obvious that simply putting back what was there before is no longer the answer. And even in places that haven't been hit, it has become equally obvious that many of our most important roads are ill-equipped to cope with either weather events or rising sea levels.

Restoring decent road connections to the regions and communities that were devastated by the most recent events must remain the immediate priority. But also urgent is getting on with improving the resilience of our road network by identifying highest risk highways for weather-related events or for severe disruption; building in resilience; and identifying alternatives / capability if the route is out.

In an AA Member survey that asked about 12 potential election calls for Government action on transport, 'Make the roading network more resilient to extreme weather events' came out top.



PHOTOS ABOVE: Te Ahu a Turanga - Manawatū Tararua Highway currently under construction, which will replace the vulnerable Manawatū Gorge road. Photo and map: Waka Kotahi-NZ Transport Agency.

The call: Improving the resilience of our road network needs to become an urgent ongoing priority. This means having a clear and fully-funded plan for improving the resilience of major roads most at risk or where the consequences of a road being impassable are most significant. It also means carefully considering opportunities to improve resilience when planning road construction, renewals and maintenance work.

Stop **drunk** and **drugged** drivers

The problem: Half of road deaths involve alcohol or drugs and New Zealand's road toll is actually going backwards in this regard. 2022 was the worst year for impaired driving deaths in a long time. Twice as many people were killed as a decade ago.

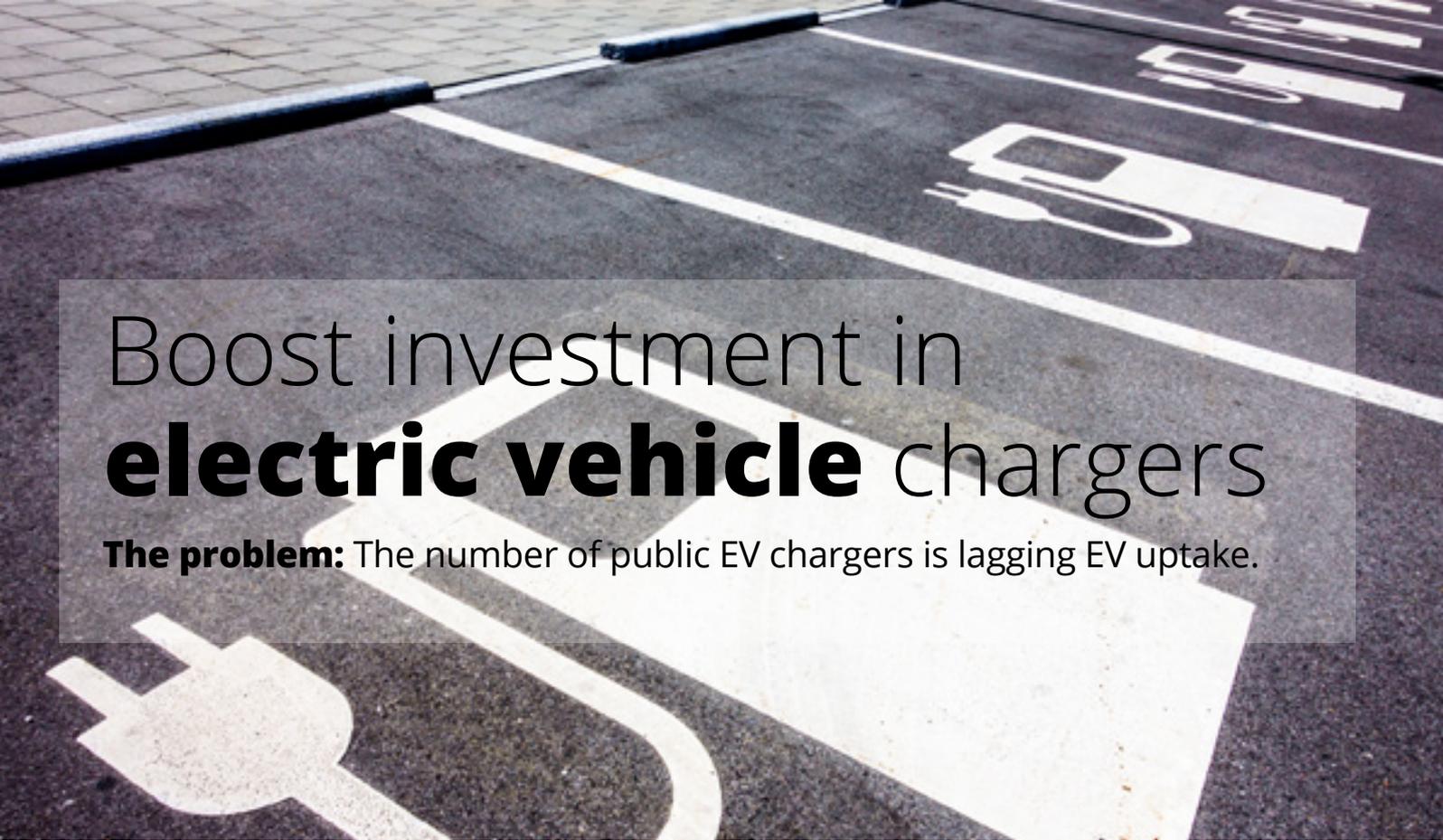
Large-scale testing of drivers for alcohol or drugs is critical in catching and deterring people from getting behind the wheel when they are impaired. The number of alcohol tests being conducted has dropped from 3 million in 2013 to less than 2 million in recent years, and it is still unclear when quick saliva-based roadside drug tests will be introduced.

Meanwhile, although alcohol interlocks are incredibly effective at reducing drink driving and are now a mandatory sentence for high-risk offenders, many individuals are still avoiding being sentenced to one in court. And of those who are sentenced, about one in five are simply ignoring the sentence and not installing an interlock.



PHOTO ABOVE: Students involved in Kaitiaki o Ara/Students Against Dangerous Driving join a Police drink driving checkpoint.

The call: Saliva-based roadside drug testing devices need to be introduced as soon as possible by Police and alcohol testing numbers need to return to their previous high levels. Authorities need to monitor and follow up those who do not install an interlock so that all drivers sentenced to them actually end up with a device in their vehicle.



Boost investment in **electric vehicle** chargers

The problem: The number of public EV chargers is lagging EV uptake.

In Budget 2023, the Government allocated \$120 million to help establish 25 electric vehicle (EV) charging hubs around the country, but the AA does not believe this is sufficient.

Government policies (particularly the Clean Car Discount and Clean Car Standard) have been successful in encouraging the uptake of EVs in New Zealand. But with around 80,000 EVs currently on our roads, charging infrastructure isn't keeping up and could slow people's purchase decisions, jeopardising emission reduction targets.

An extensive research report that the AA Research Foundation contributed to in 2021 found that careful timing of the roll out of EV charging infrastructure is critical to how effective the investment is. Two years

too early was deemed to risk costing the country an additional \$165m, but the authors also calculated that delaying investment by two years could cost an extra \$4.2 billion (25 times as much!) because of lost opportunities for future energy savings.¹

Funding to support private enterprise to deliver more EV charging infrastructure can come from a range of existing sources (eg. Emissions Trading Scheme, Electricity Levy, industry and households). No new taxes or charges are required.

“Under-investment [in EV charging infrastructure] will frustrate EV uptake causing individuals to choose ICE vehicles rather than EVs – ie, the consequence is irreversible costly investment in the wrong capital assets.”¹

The call: Government (working with the private sector) must further increase its support for electric vehicle charging infrastructure.

A particular focus is needed on places where installing EV chargers is not commercially viable because without a complete network drivers will continue to have “range anxiety”.

¹Concept Consulting, Wellington NZ, EV Study Report 3 (p16). For more information: <https://www.aa.co.nz/about/aa-research-foundation/programmes/electric-vehicles/>

Target **cellphone** use behind the **wheel**



The problem: Far too many people are using phones when they are driving and putting themselves and others at completely unnecessary risk. Recent camera trials in New Zealand found around one in 60 drivers using a phone.

Research has shown drivers are about 4 times more likely to be in a crash if using a cellphone. It is not something that can be done accidentally. People make a deliberate choice to use a phone and the more drivers there are on the roads that do so, the greater the risks that one of them will have something unexpected happen and be too slow to react. There is also a danger that high numbers of drivers getting away with using their phone normalises the behaviour and encourages others to do it.

In 2021, distraction (from cellphone and other in-car distractions) contributed to crashes resulting in:

10 deaths

136 serious injuries

1,033 minor injuries

Confirming distraction was a factor in a crash is difficult and most experts believe the true figures are much higher.

The call: Reducing cellphone use by drivers needs to be made an urgent road safety priority by the authorities. A coordinated plan and package of actions is required to change people's behaviour – combining better detection and enforcement, effective penalties, awareness campaigns and technology solutions.

Lift the **safety** of **regional highways**

The problem: Old highways, on which traffic volume has grown considerably in recent decades, are not as safe as new roads.



The contrast in safety engineering between the old SH1 north of Wellington (on the right) and new Peka Peka to Ōtaki expressway is stark.

New roads have massive safety benefits and will help meet the Government's Road to Zero targets.

AA Research Foundation research on the safety impact of new roads has recently found on average there has been a 37% reduction in deaths and serious injuries in locations where new roads or bypasses have been built.

Many of the highways that are key regional connections are not up to the standard they should be.

In New Zealand's regions, roading is always going to be at the core of the transport system, and we need safe, resilient roads.

The call: We need a pipeline of new builds to replace our least safe roads, and we need to complement this with decarbonising the cars that drive on them. The AA wants to see clear, fully-funded plans for upgrading regional roads. This should include a combination of building new roads and bypasses; upgrading entire road corridors to a quality that fits the use and purpose of the road; and smaller safety retrofits where appropriate.

Over three quarters of AA Members think government should publish a clear and fixed long-term plan for upgrading key inter-regional highways.

Fund roads **fairly**

GST charged on fuel tax (FED/RUC) should go into roads.



The problem: Household budgets are stretched, transport funding is under huge pressure, and many transport costs have been surging. But there is also a clear feeling among AA Members that more investment is needed to improve transport infrastructure.

Currently, the price of every litre of petrol includes about 70 cents of tax for funding transport (Fuel Excise Duty/FED). Diesel vehicle owners pay an equivalent amount through Road User Charges (RUC). GST is then charged on these taxes, in effect a tax on a tax.

The call: As a way of boosting transport funding, the AA wants GST paid on fuel tax and road user charges to be added into the National Land Transport Fund to be spent on maintaining safe, high-quality roads. Doing this is fair and would increase transport funding by 15% at no extra cost to motorists.

In an AA Member survey, 68% of respondents considered the 'cost of living' in the top three issues facing New Zealand and fuel prices are a big part of household costs. Not too far behind, 'infrastructure deficiencies' was the third biggest issue (with 41% placing it in the top 3 issues) – showing that many people also recognise that more investment is needed into transport infrastructure.



Show **how transport emissions tax** is meaningfully **reducing transport emissions**

The problem: Currently, Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS) revenue that transport generates is spent on projects that make annual bids as part of the Government's Budget process. The impact of some of these projects is questionable. The AA believes actions with wide impact across the fleet are needed.

The transport sector has been paying into New Zealand's ETS since 2010 and currently pays about \$1 billion annually in ETS charges. The AA believes this money needs to be targeted to actions that will deliver the greatest impact on reducing future transport emissions but is not convinced that the current process through the annual Government Budget is the best approach.

As part of international agreements, New Zealand has committed to reaching net-zero carbon emissions by 2050.

Emissions from light vehicles (cars, vans and utes) account for 65% of New Zealand's carbon dioxide emissions from transport.¹ Electric options now exist for many light vehicle models, meaning it is a sector where large-scale change is feasible.

The call: The AA wants to see a clear, long-term strategy, with time-bound targets, showing how the money paid by Kiwis in transport-related ETS charges is actually reducing transport emissions in line with the Government's climate change commitments.

¹This figure is for CO2 emissions related to New Zealand's transport sector only. When considering New Zealand's gross emissions, which also includes methane from farming, transport (road, rail, air and sea) is 17% of New Zealand's entire emissions (or 12% if only considering light transport).



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