PERFORMANCE AUDIT 30 NOVEMBER 2023

Regional road safety

NEW SOUTH WALES AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT

audit office
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

THE ROLE OF THE AUDITOR-GENERAL

The roles and responsibilities of the Auditor-General, and hence the Audit Office, are set out in the *Government Sector Audit Act 1983* and the *Local Government Act 1993*.

We conduct financial or 'attest' audits of state public sector and local government entities' financial statements. We also audit the Consolidated State Financial Statements, a consolidation of all state public sector agencies' financial statements.

Financial audits are designed to give reasonable assurance that financial statements are true and fair, enhancing their value to end users. Also, the existence of such audits provides a constant stimulus to entities to ensure sound financial management.

Following a financial audit the Audit Office issues a variety of reports to entities and reports periodically to Parliament. In combination, these reports give opinions on the truth and fairness of financial statements, and comment on entity internal controls and governance, and compliance with certain laws, regulations and government directives. They may comment on financial prudence, probity and waste, and recommend operational improvements.

We also conduct performance audits. These assess whether the activities of government entities are being carried out effectively, economically, efficiently and in compliance with relevant laws. Audits may cover all or parts of an entity's operations, or consider particular issues across a number of entities. Our performance audits may also extend to activities of non-government entities that receive money or resources, whether directly or indirectly, from or on behalf of government entities for a particular purpose.

As well as financial and performance audits, the Auditor-General carries out special reviews, compliance engagements and audits requested under section 27B(3) of the *Government Sector Audit Act 1983*, and section 421E of the *Local Government Act 1993*.

© Copyright reserved by the Audit Office of New South Wales. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced without prior consent of the Audit Office of New South Wales. The Audit Office does not accept responsibility for loss or damage suffered by any person acting on or refraining from action as a result of any of this material.

GPO Box 12
Sydney NSW 2001

The Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
Sydney NSW 2000

The Legislative Council
Parliament House
Sydney NSW 2000

In accordance with section 38EC of the *Government Sector Audit Act 1983,* I present a report titled **'Regional road safety'.**

Margaret Crawford PSM
Auditor-General for New South Wales
30 November 2023

auditoffice
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

audit.nsw.gov.au

Disclosure of confidential information

Under section 36A(2) of the *Government Sector Audit Act 1983*, the Auditor-General may authorise the disclosure of confidential information if, in the Auditor-General's opinion, the disclosure is in the public interest and necessary for the exercise of the Auditor-General's functions. Confidential information under the *Government Sector Audit Act 1983* means Cabinet information, or information that could be subject to a claim of privilege by the State or a public official in a court of law. This performance audit report contained confidential information which, in the opinion of the Auditor-General, is in the public interest to disclose and that disclosure is necessary for the exercise of the Auditor-General's functions.

On 26 October 2023, pursuant to section 36A(2)(b) of the *Government Sector Audit Act 1983,* the Auditor-General notified the NSW Premier of the intention to include this information in the published report, having formed the opinion that its disclosure is in the public interest and is necessary for the exercise of the Auditor-General's functions.

On 23 November 2023, pursuant to section 36A(2)(c) of the *Government Sector Audit Act 1983*, the NSW Premier certified that, in his opinion, the proposed disclosure of the confidential information contained in this report was not in the public interest. The Premier's certificate follows. Section 36A(4) states that a certificate of the Premier that it is not in the public interest to disclose confidential information is conclusive evidence of that fact.

The issuance of the certificate by the NSW Premier prevents the publication of this information. The relevant sections of the report containing confidential information have been redacted.

The Hon Chris Minns MP
Premier of New South Wales

Ref: A5903317

Ms Margaret Crawford PSM
Auditor-General
Audit Office of New South Wales
GPO Box 12
SYDNEY NSW 2001

CERTIFICATE OF THE PREMIER

I, Chris Minns MP, Premier, pursuant to section 36(A)(2)(c) of the *Government Sector Audit Act 1983* (NSW) (**GSA Act**), hereby certify that the proposed disclosure of confidential information as notified to me by the Auditor-General on 26 October 2023 is, in my opinion, not in the public interest.

Pursuant to section 36A(4) of the GSA Act, this certificate is conclusive evidence that it is not in the public interest to disclose the confidential information. Accordingly, the Auditor-General is not authorised to disclose that information.

Sincerely,

Chris Minns MP
Premier of New South Wales

23/11/23

52 Martin Place Sydney NSW 2000
GPO Box 5341 Sydney NSW 2001

02 7225 6000
nsw.gov.au/premier

RECONCILIATION COMMITMENT STATEMENT

The Audit Office of New South Wales pay our respect and recognise Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of the land in NSW.

We recognise that Aboriginal people, as custodians, have a spiritual, social and cultural connection with their lands and waters, and have made and continue to make a rich, unique and lasting contribution to the State. We are committed to continue learning about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' history and culture.

We honour and thank the traditional owners of the land on which our office is located, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and the traditional owners of the lands on which our staff live and work. We pay our respects to their Elders past and present, and to the next generation of leaders.

auditoffice
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

Banner image: 'Yarning Circle' by Caitlin Liddle, Audit Office Indigenous Internship Program participant used with permission.

contents

Regional road safety

Section one – Regional road safety

Executive summary 1

Introduction 9

Road Safety initiatives in regional NSW 24

TfNSW's use of data to manage road safety 38

Managing the Road Safety Program 42

Section two – Appendices

Appendix one – Response from Transport for NSW 52

Appendix two – The Safe Systems framework and NSW road safety strategies and plans 55

Appendix three – About the audit 62

Appendix four – Performance auditing 65

Section one

Regional road safety

Executive summary

One-third of the New South Wales population resides in regional areas, but two-thirds of the state's road crash fatalities take place on regional roads.

Between 2017 and 2021, the average number of fatalities for every 100,000 of the population living in regional New South Wales was 8.33 — approximately four times higher than the equivalent measure for Greater Sydney. Similarly, the average number of serious injuries in regional New South Wales over the same period was 75.24 per 100,000 of the population, compared with 50.53 in Greater Sydney. Further, more than 70% of people who lose their lives in accidents on regional roads are residents of regional areas.

Residents of regional areas face particular transport challenges. They often need to travel longer distances for work, health care, or recreation purposes, yet their public transport options are more limited than metropolitan residents. Vehicle safety is also an issue. According to the NSW Road Safety Progress Report 2021, of the light vehicles registered in New South Wales that were manufactured in or after 2000, 48.4% of light vehicles in regional areas had a five-star Australasian New Car Assessment Program (ANCAP) rating, compared to 54.8% in metropolitan areas. Road conditions in regional areas can also be more challenging for drivers.

Regional New South Wales covers 98.5% of the total area of the state. The road network in New South Wales is vast — spanning approximately 200,000 kilometres.

The road network includes major highways, state roads and local roads. Speed limits range from 10 km/hr in high pedestrian shared zones, up to 110 km/hr on high volume and critical road corridors. Eighty per cent of the network has a 100 km/h speed limit, which is mostly applied as a default speed limit, regardless of the presence of safety features and treatments.

Speed is the primary causal factor in more crashes in New South Wales than any other factor, and car crashes in regional areas are more likely to be fatal because of the higher average speeds involved.

The responsibility for managing road safety outcomes across the entire New South Wales road network lies with Transport for NSW (TfNSW), pursuant to Schedule 1 of the *Transport Administration Act 1988*.

While its safety responsibilities are state-wide, TfNSW does not own or directly manage all of the road network in regional New South Wales, which spans approximately 200,000 kilometres. Approximately 80% of the roads are classified as Local Roads and are administered and managed by local councils. Local councils also maintain Regional Roads that run through their local government areas. TfNSW is responsible for managing State Roads (approximately 20% of roads), which are major arterial roads. It also provides funding for councils to manage over 18,000 km (approximately 10%) of state-significant Regional Roads.

According to TfNSW, between 2016 and 2020, there were 9,776 people killed or seriously injured on roads in regional New South Wales. Adding to the tragic loss of life, according to TfNSW, the estimated cost to the community between 2016 and 2020 resulting from regional road trauma and fatalities was around $13.7 billion.

TfNSW also noted that the 'risk of road trauma is pervasive, and a combination of effective road safety measures is required to systematically reduce this risk'.

TfNSW released its first long-term road-safety strategy in December 2012, which introduced the goal of 'Vision Zero' — a long-term goal of zero deaths or serious injuries on NSW roads. The terminology was changed to 'Towards Zero' in the 2021 Road Safety Plan and has been retained in the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026. Towards Zero has the stated goal of 'no death or serious injury occurring on the road transport network' by 2050.

The objective of this audit is to assess the effectiveness of TfNSW's delivery of 'Towards Zero' in regional areas.

In making this assessment, the audit examined whether TfNSW:

- is effectively reducing the number of fatalities and serious injuries on regional roads
- has an effective framework, including governance arrangements, for designing and refreshing the NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012–2021 and the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026
- effectively makes use of whole-of-government and other relevant sources of data to support decision-making, and to evaluate progress and outcomes
- effectively manages accountabilities, including roles and responsibilities, with respect to road safety outcomes and the use of data.

This audit focused on the policies and strategies used by TfNSW for managing road safety outcomes in regional areas. We did not evaluate individual road safety projects, programs and initiatives as part of this audit.

Whilst Regional Roads and Local Roads (as defined by the Road Network Classifications) are owned and maintained by local councils, we included these roads in this audit as TfNSW may advise and assist councils to promote and improve road safety, as well as manage grant programs that focus on improving road safety outcomes on these roads. Hereafter, unless otherwise stated, references to 'regional roads' refer to all classifications of roads in the state which are in regional New South Wales, irrespective of their ownership.

Local councils in regional areas are key stakeholders for the purposes of this audit, and we interviewed eight as part of the audit process (noting that this was not intended to be a representative sample). Road asset management by local councils is also out of scope for this audit as it is the focus of a subsequent performance audit by the Audit Office of New South Wales.

The Audit Office of New South Wales has undertaken several performance audits relating to road safety since 2009 and these have been referenced while undertaking this audit. They include:

- Condition of State Roads (August 2006)
- Improving Road Safety: Heavy Vehicles (May 2009)
- Improving Road Safety: School Zones (March 2010)
- Improving Road Safety: Speed Cameras (July 2011)
- Regional Assistance Programs (May 2018)
- Mobile speed cameras (October 2018)
- Rail freight and Greater Sydney (October 2021).

Conclusion

TfNSW has acknowledged that there is a disproportionate amount of road trauma on regional roads in the NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012–2021, the NSW Road Safety Plan 2021, and the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026. However, TfNSW has not articulated or evaluated a strategy for implementing road safety policy in regional New South Wales to assist in guiding targeted activities to address regional road trauma. There is also no transparency about the total amount of funding invested in improving road safety outcomes for regional New South Wales.

People living in regional New South Wales make up one-third of the state's population, but deaths on regional roads make up around two-thirds of the state's total road toll. This statistic is almost the same in 2023 as it was ten years ago when TfNSW released its first long-term road safety strategy.

More than 70% of people who died on roads between 2012 and 2022 in regional New South Wales were residents of regional areas. Speed is the greatest contributing factor to road fatalities and serious injuries across the entire state. However, it is responsible for more fatalities on regional roads (43%) than in Greater Sydney (34%).

TfNSW's road safety strategies and plans acknowledge that most road fatalities occur in regional New South Wales but none of its existing strategies or plans show evidence of tailoring measures to suit particular regional settings or 'hot spots'. There are infrastructure initiatives (such as Saving Lives on Country Roads) and behavioural programs targeting regional areas (such as Driver Reviver). However, these activities are not aligned to a regional-specific strategy or plan that addresses issues specific to regional areas.

TfNSW has state-wide responsibility for managing road safety outcomes. TfNSW advised the audit that a regional plan and regional trauma reduction targets are not needed as the state-wide plan and targets apply equally for all areas of New South Wales, and local road safety factors are best managed by local councils. TfNSW partners with local councils. However, only 52% of councils in regional New South Wales participate in TfNSW's Local Government Road Safety Program, compared to 84% of councils in metropolitan areas. TfNSW has not undertaken any evaluations to determine whether projects completed under the Local Government Road Safety Program have reduced road trauma at the local level.

Notwithstanding the above points, TfNSW works with local councils (who are road authorities for local roads in their respective areas under the *Roads Act 1993*) and other key stakeholders such as the NSW Police Force to achieve the NSW Government's road safety policy objectives.

TfNSW advised that 'the setting of state-wide road safety targets is consistent with other jurisdictions and international best practice. Importantly, delivery of road safety countermeasures is tailored and applied with a focus on road user groups across all geographic locations to maximise trauma reductions'. There may be legitimate reasons for the existing approach, as articulated by TfNSW. However, the proportion of road fatalities in regional New South Wales roads has not reduced since 2012 – despite a long-term reduction in the overall number of deaths on the state's roads between 2012–2021. The audit report has recommended that a regionally focused implementation plan could address this issue. TfNSW has accepted this report's recommendation that such a plan be developed.

Specific road safety initiatives targeted to regional areas have not been implemented or expanded

Text removed pursuant to section 36A of the *Government Sector Audit Act 1983* (NSW), in compliance with the issuance of a Premier's certificate preventing the publication of this information.

TfNSW increased the use of other forms of automated enforcement (such as tripling enforcement hours in mobile speed cameras).

However, the use of automated enforcement has a strong metropolitan focus with most red light and fixed speed cameras being in metropolitan areas. Average speed cameras are the only camera type overwhelmingly located in regional areas but these apply only to heavy vehicles and are positioned on major freight routes.

There is no consolidated, public reporting of what proportion of total road safety funding is directed to regional New South Wales each year. The main source of funding for road safety in New South Wales, the Community Road Safety Fund, has been underspent since 2019.

Fines from camera-detected speeding, red-light and mobile phone use offences are required to be used solely for road safety purposes through the Community Road Safety Fund (CRSF), as set out in the *Transport Administration Amendment (Community Road Safety Fund) Act 2012*.

The CRSF has been underspent every year since 2019–20. The underspend has increased from 12% in 2019–20 to 20% in 2022–23 where the full year underspend was forecasted to be $104 million. Of this underspend, $13.5 million was dedicated for regional road infrastructure projects. TfNSW advised the audit that much of the underspend is the result of delays to infrastructure projects due to COVID-19, bushfires, and floods, as well as skills shortages. However, TfNSW has not provided any evidence that it had a plan to mitigate these risks – meaning the level of underspend could continue to grow**.** TfNSW also advised 'there is no reason to expect budget management and controls will not return to pre-COVID circumstances'.

In total, TfNSW received $700 million in funding for road safety in 2021–22 (including federal contributions and the Community Road Safety Fund). Of this, $411 million (or ~59%) was directed to regional New South Wales. This is the most recent comprehensive financial data that was provided by TfNSW to the audit team. The 2022–23 NSW Budget allocated $880 million for road safety in 2022–23, with a forecasted total allocation for road safety of $1.6 billion in recurrent expenses and $0.8 billion in capital expenditure over the period 2022–23 to 2025–26.

1. Key findings

TfNSW has no specific road trauma reduction targets for regional New South Wales, despite differences in causes and characteristics of crashes in regional areas

NSW Government road safety strategies and plans since 2012 have used state-wide targets for reduction in road trauma. However, TfNSW has no documented plan for implementing these targets in regional areas and no specific target to reduce road trauma in regional New South Wales – despite regional New South Wales accounting for two-thirds of road crash fatalities.

The factors contributing to crashes on regional roads are different from those for metropolitan roads. For example, fatalities in regional areas are most likely to involve drivers of motor cars, whereas the largest number of road fatalities in metropolitan areas is amongst pedestrians. Similarly, whilst speed and illicit drugs are the two most prevalent causal factors in road crashes across the state (including regional New South Wales), fatigue is the next most frequently occurring contributing factor in regional New South Wales.

TfNSW advised the audit team that 'the existing approach to trauma reduction targets in New South Wales aligns with the approach adopted by other jurisdictions, including internationally, which is to design road safety strategic plans around the jurisdictional accountability for management of safety systems at the National, State or local government level'. Chapters 2 and 4 provide details of the responsibilities of these jurisdictional levels.

There may well be legitimate reasons for the existing approach as articulated by TfNSW. However, in practice, it is possible for New South Wales as a whole to meet a single state-wide road trauma reduction target without reducing road trauma in regional areas. This is because of the higher population in metropolitan areas.

The fact is that the proportion of road fatalities in regional New South Wales roads has not reduced since 2012 – despite a long-term reduction in the total number of deaths on the state's roads between 2012–2021. A target to reduce road trauma in regional New South Wales could sharpen TfNSW's focus on targeting its efforts towards areas of greatest risk or provide more detailed insights on progress in reducing road trauma and fatalities in the geographic areas most represented in the state's road toll.

There is no regional-specific strategy or plan to guide TfNSW's road safety activities

The NSW Government's policy on road safety is clear. However, there is no implementation plan specific to regional New South Wales, despite TfNSW acknowledging that regional areas are an ongoing problem due to their specific issues.

The NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 does include some specific actions for improving regional road safety such as the Safer Roads program, vehicle safety technology upgrades and the Local Government Road Safety Program.

There is also a strategic priority referred to as 'creating safer country and urban places' which has the stated objective of reducing fatalities on country roads and injuries in urban environments. However, this applies to both regional and metropolitan areas.

State-wide road safety strategies and plans list priority actions and initiatives and reflect the NSW Government's policy position on road safety. While there are specific initiatives and programs focused on regional New South Wales, they are not integrated within a regional-specific plan, nor are they aligned to focus on reducing fatalities on regional roads.

TfNSW has acknowledged that plans are not produced based on geographic areas because 'all road safety plans and strategies are designed around the jurisdictions and their management accountability and systems at the State or National government level. At a local government level, TfNSW advised the audit that road safety outcomes should be reflected in local council's road safety strategic plans'.

The NSW Government established the Local Government Road Safety Program in 1992 to assist councils with safety on local roads, but only 52% of regional councils participated in the program in 2022–23

The Local Government Road Safety Program (LGRSP) was created in 1992 to assist councils in delivering locally based road safety initiatives within their communities.

This program includes the appointment of road safety officers (RSOs), local Road Safety Action Plans, and ongoing engagement with TfNSW staff. Employing a RSO is a joint process involving both TfNSW and the local council. Once appointed, the RSO is expected to develop and implement educational and behavioural projects and to prepare the council's Road Safety Action Plan. A Road Safety Action Plan defines local road safety activities and projects and outlines how the council plans to address the road safety problems and issues relevant to their LGA.

The audit team has seen no evidence that TfNSW is consolidating local level plans to identify issues and strategies for regional New South Wales as a whole, or that it is leveraging the information provided by councils to inform management decisions about improving regional road safety outcomes.

Only 52% of local councils in regional New South Wales participated in the Local Government Road Safety Program in 2022–23, despite the fact that local councils own and manage approximately 80% of Local Roads.[1] Local councils also own and maintain Regional Roads that run through their local government areas.

Of the councils currently in the LGRSP, as at the end of September 2023, six had vacant RSO roles and no local road safety plans. Another two councils participated in a single project in 2022–23 but did not join the LGRSP.

This low level of involvement in regional LGAs has persisted since 2017–18 despite the funding advantages resulting from participation in the LGRSP and appointing an RSO.

TfNSW is aware of the gap in participation but notes that the program is voluntary and attempts at increasing participation have been intermittent.

[1] References in local government materials sometimes refer to local government managing 90% of roads in regional areas. This number arises from the combination of 80% (approximately 146,000 km) of roads in regional New South Wales which are owned and managed by local councils and a further ten per cent (approximately 18,200 km) which TfNSW funds councils to maintain on its behalf.

Further, TfNSW has not undertaken any evaluations to determine whether projects completed under the Local Government Road Safety Program have reduced road trauma at the local level.

TfNSW has not updated the Local Government Road Safety Program since 2014, despite a commitment to do so in 2021

TfNSW advised the audit that the Local Government Road Safety program was reviewed in 2008 by the Australian Roads Research Board (a provider of consulting services), with a pilot conducted in 2010–11 to test the recommendations arising from this review. In July 2014, TfNSW implemented a revised delivery model in response to the review and pilot.

In July 2021, the NSW Government committed to updating the Local Government Road Safety Program following the NSW Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety (Staysafe Committee) finding that the program had remained unchanged since its inception in 1992.

In the NSW Road Safety Action 2022–2026, TfNSW committed to 'review and expand the Local Government Road Safety Program to ensure every council has access to a Road Safety Officer to better resource their road safety planning'. However, by April 2023, this action had not progressed and had been labelled 'At Risk'. As at the end of September 2023, there was no record of any action taken by TfNSW to mitigate this risk.

TfNSW has outstanding requests from 2021–22 for speed limit reviews from local councils in regional New South Wales

In July 2023, TfNSW released a new NSW Speed Zoning Standard to enable 'greater consistency of speed zoning across NSW, and greater alignment of speed settings with the surrounding environments'.

The NSW Speed Zoning Standard requires TfNSW to conduct a preliminary review and notify the local council within four months of receiving a speed limit review request. However, there is no time limit imposed on TfNSW to finalise the review.

At the time of writing, TfNSW reported that there are seven unresolved speed limit review requests from councils in regional New South Wales. Three of these date from 2021–22 and the remaining four are from 2022–23.

Delays in responding to requests for speed limit reviews were an area of concern for several of the councils interviewed by the audit team, as well as those councils that engaged with the NSW Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety (Staysafe Committee) Inquiry into Speed Limits and Road Safety in Regional NSW (December 2022).

TfNSW has implemented measures to reduce road trauma across the state but has not assessed the effectiveness of these initiatives in reducing road trauma in regional New South Wales

TfNSW has not undertaken a systematic analysis of the combined impact of its road safety strategies and plans on road trauma in regional New South Wales since 2012.

TfNSW provided the audit with 17 separate instances of program evaluations it has completed since 2013. Of these:

- 6 provided an assessment of the impact of specific initiatives on road trauma reductions.
- only two provided an assessment of the impact of a specific initiative on road trauma reductions in regional New South Wales
- 5 were research reports rather than evaluations.

TfNSW has undertaken post-implementation reviews and evaluations for advertising and capability development campaigns. However, these reviews did not draw any conclusions on the impact of these initiatives on road trauma reductions.

TfNSW advised the audit that funding for the Towards Zero program is subject to Infrastructure NSW's processes and frameworks including benefits realisation and post-evaluation. However, whilst it has shared a business case with the audit team, TfNSW has not provided any evidence of benefits realisation assessments.

In its formal response to the audit report, TfNSW stated that 'independent road trauma modelling provided to the Audit Office demonstrates the positive impact of previous and existing road safety strategies and is based on thorough evaluations demonstrating reductions in trauma from road crashes'.

The audit does not dispute that multiple individual evaluations have been conducted but, the independent modelling report in question was not an evaluation of TfNSW's road trauma countermeasures. Instead, the aim was to predict likely road trauma trends to the end of 2021 using data from other jurisdictions, as well as New South Wales. The audit team interviewed the authors of the independent modelling report as part of the audit process.

There is no consolidated, public reporting on total road safety funding allocated to regional New South Wales each year, and the Community Road Safety Fund has been underspent since 2019

The Community Road Safety Fund (CRSF) was legislated in 2013 to ensure that fines from road safety camera offences are reinvested for road safety purposes. TfNSW has stated that all its initiatives under the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 will be funded by the CRSF.

Fines from camera detected speeding, red-light and mobile phone use offences are to be used solely for road safety purposes through the Community Road Safety Fund. However, the Fund has been underspent every year since 2019–20. In the period 2014–2018, the Community Road Safety Fund was almost completely spent in each year.

The underspend has increased in size from 12% in 2019–20 to 20% in 2022–23, where the full year underspend was forecast to be $104 million. At least $13.5 million of this underspend was on regional road infrastructure projects with a further $73 million that was not allocated to a specific geographical area. Much of the underspend is reportedly the result of COVID-19, bushfires and floods delaying infrastructure projects, as well as skills shortages.

TfNSW advised the audit that as a protected fund under legislation, unspent funding remains in the CRSF and can be carried forward and allocated to deliver road safety outcomes in future years.

TfNSW, however, did not provide evidence that it had a plan to mitigate the impacts of these known risks of natural disaster and pandemic. The impact of the underspends is delayed road safety initiatives that may defer the achievement of significant reductions in road trauma in regional New South Wales. TfNSW advises 'there is no reason to expect budget management and controls will not return to pre-COVID circumstances where the annual budget, since the establishment of the Fund in 2013, was managed to expend all the available funds within each financial year'.

TfNSW's formal response to the audit report stated that the 'NSW Government tables to NSW Parliament annual progress reports on road trauma outcomes which also outline expenditure of the Community Road Safety Fund, including the investment in regional NSW'. There is some information provided on funding for regional New South Wales in these annual reports, but it is not a complete picture.

The audit team also notes that the progress reports do not include:

- the level of funding that is allocated to regional New South Wales
- the budget allocated for the CRSF for that year, and any over- or under-spends against the budget
- the unspent funds carried forward from previous years.

2. Recommendations

By November 2024, Transport for NSW should:

1. Develop a regional implementation plan to support the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026, including an integrated and systematic accountability framework to measure, analyse and publicly report annually on:
    a) road safety trends and insights on a sub-regional level
    b) specific countermeasures that are tailored to the road safety needs of regional communities and to particular sub-regional 'hotspots'
    c) the impact of countermeasures against road trauma reduction targets specific to regional New South Wales
    d) funding that is allocated to achieving road safety outcomes at a sub-regional level.
2. Develop and implement a plan to measure and mitigate the known and emerging risks causing underspends in the Community Road Safety Fund.
3. Expedite the review of the Local Government Road Safety Program and make recommendations to government aimed at increasing the uptake of the Program by councils in regional New South Wales.

1. Introduction

1.1 Road fatalities in New South Wales

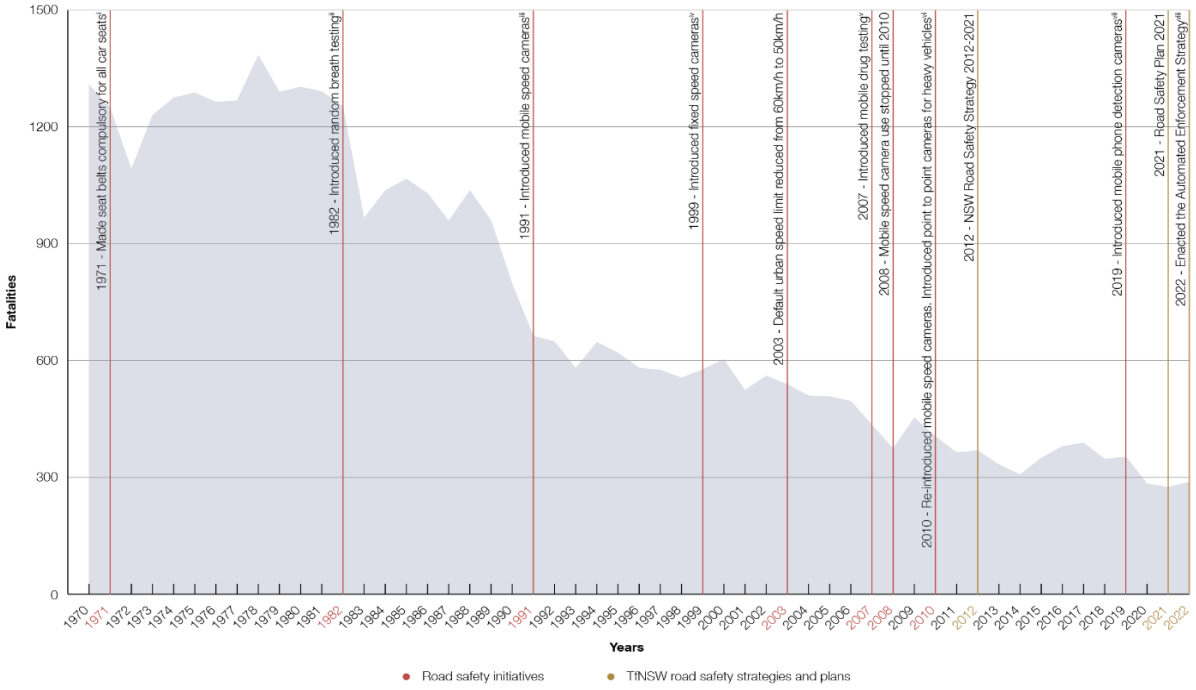
In the last 100 years, the lowest number of road fatalities recorded in New South Wales was in 1923 when there were 231 deaths in a year. At that time, the state population was around 2.2 million and there were only 68,398 vehicles registered.

Since then, the number of vehicles and fatalities have both increased significantly. By 1970 the number of fatalities had increased to 1,310 and it peaked in 1978 with 1,384 fatalities. Since 1970 successive NSW Governments have introduced many initiatives to reduce road trauma. These include:

- making seat belts compulsory for all car seats (1971)
- introducing random breath testing (1982)
- introducing mobile speed cameras (1991–2008)
- introducing fixed speed cameras (1999)
- introducing mobile drug testing (2007)
- re-introducing mobile speed cameras (2010)
- introducing point to point cameras for heavy vehicles (2010)
- introducing mobile phone detection cameras (2019)
- enacting the Automated Enforcement Strategy (2022).

The trend in the number of fatalities since 1970, including the introduction of the initiatives listed above, is shown in Exhibit 1. Section 1.7 details recent trends in road safety trauma in regional New South Wales.

Exhibit 1: Fatalities and road safety initiatives since 1970



Source: Audit Office of New South Wales research based on TfNSW, NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026, p.10.

1.2 Road classification and ownership

There are three tiers of administrative road classification in New South Wales. These are:

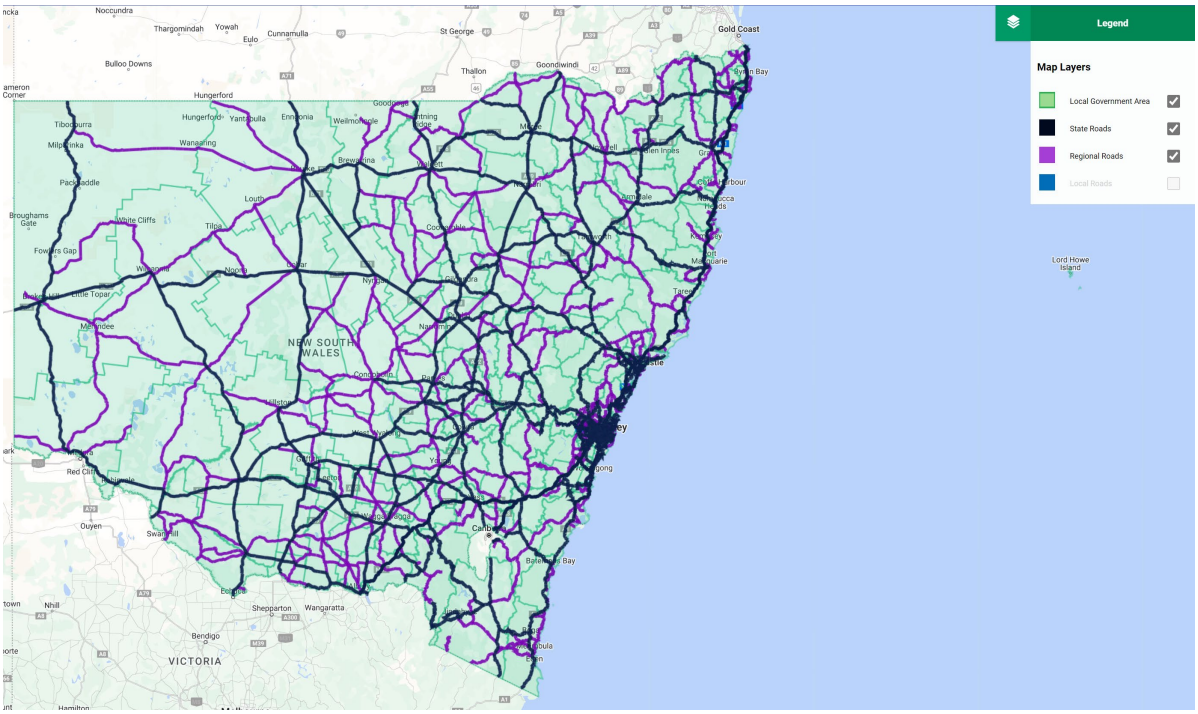
- State roads – the roads with the greatest arterial significance to the state's commerce and industry. The NSW Government funds and, through TfNSW, manages State Roads and is accountable for the outcomes on these roads.
- Regional roads – provide the main connections between smaller towns and act as sub arterial roads in major urban areas. Local councils are responsible for the management and maintenance of regional roads. The NSW Government, through TfNSW, contributes funding assistance for the upkeep of these roads because of their sub arterial function.
- Local roads – roads that provide for local access and circulation. These are the responsibility of local councils, with limited funding assistance from the NSW Government and targeted funding for issues such as blackspots from the Australian Government.

The road network in New South Wales is vast — spanning approximately 200,000 kilometres. Of these roads, approximately 80% are classified as Local Roads managed by local councils. The NSW Government, through TfNSW, is responsible for the management of State Roads and provides funding for local councils to manage state-significant Regional Roads.

Section 163 of the *Roads Act 1993* requires TfNSW to keep a record of all classified roads. TfNSW maintains a Schedule of Classified Roads and Unclassified Regional Roads which includes the details of highways, main, secondary or tourist roads in New South Wales.

Exhibit 2 illustrates the distribution of State and Regional roads across New South Wales, along with the local government areas.

Exhibit 2: State and regional roads, and local government areas in regional New South Wales



Source: TfNSW, NSW Road Network Classifications.

In 2019, the then NSW Government made an election commitment to review the classification of roads, with a view to transferring up to 15,000 km of council-owned roads to the state government. On 21 September 2021, the then Minister for Regional Transport and Roads indicated that the NSW Government had accepted an independent review panel's recommendation for the transfer of 391 km of priority Regional Roads across eight LGAs to state ownership. The NSW 2022–23 Budget provided funding for the transfer of 400 km of roads out of the total 15,000 km originally intended for transfer to state ownership.

The NSW 2023–24 Budget deferred the existing road classification program to fund additional support for roads in regional areas. The additional support included $390 million towards a Regional Emergency Road Repair Fund to assist regional councils in repairing roads damaged by recent weather events and natural disasters and $334 million for a Regional Roads Fund to build new roads in rural and regional areas. Further detail is provided in section 4.2 of this report.

1.3 Key responsibilities for road safety in New South Wales

The statutory responsibility for managing road safety outcomes across the entire New South Wales road network lies with Transport for NSW (TfNSW), pursuant to Schedule 1 of the *Transport Administration Act 1988*. Established in November 2011 as an integrated transport authority, TfNSW's role is to improve the planning and coordination of transport services for the state, including freight.

Under the *Road Transport Act 2013*, TfNSW determines speed limits across the road network. TfNSW develops road safety strategy, policies, and programs with the aim of reducing road trauma on the state's roads. It also manages vehicle registrations and driver licensing.

TfNSW advised the audit that the Safety, Environment and Regulation Division is the point of accountability for road safety within the department. Within this division, the Centre for Road Safety (CRS) is the main source for road safety expertise and governance arrangements.

Amongst other things, the CRS administers the Community Road Safety Fund (CRSF) and reports annually to Parliament on income and expenditure relating to the CRSF. The CRSF was legislated in 2013, pursuant to the *Transport Administration Amendment (Community Road Safety Fund) Act 2012*, to ensure that fines from camera detected speeding, red-light and mobile phone use offences are to be used solely for road safety purposes.

The NSW Police Force and local councils are key stakeholders in delivering improved road safety outcomes to the NSW community.

The NSW Police Force, through the Traffic and Highway Patrol Command, is responsible for the development and dissemination of advice on all matters relating to traffic policy, enforcement, education, and road trauma. This centralised Command oversees the deployment of strategically directed police enforcement operations across New South Wales.

Local councils are responsible for funding, planning, designing, and operating the road networks and footpaths in their local areas, pursuant to the *Roads Act 1993,* Roads Regulation 2018 and NSW Road Management Arrangements.

The Australian Government plays an important role in contributing to road safety outcomes. It regulates safety standards for new vehicles and allocates funding for infrastructure projects across the national highway and Local Road networks through five-year National Partnership Agreements. The Office of Road Safety coordinates national efforts to improve road safety outcomes across Australia.

The NSW Government shares responsibility with the Australian Government for implementing and facilitating work towards road safety targets set out in national road safety plans and strategies.

Further information on responsibilities for road safety is provided in Chapter 4.

1.4 Road safety plans and strategies

The NSW Government, through TfNSW, has put in place a series of plans and strategies to tackle road safety since 2012. The main points of each are summarised here and more information can be found in Appendix two.

NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012–2021

In December 2012, the NSW Government published the NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012–2021 which was the first long-term road safety plan in New South Wales.

The NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012–2021 introduced 'Vision Zero', which had the end goal of no 'death or serious injury occurring on the road transport network' by 2050.

The NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012–2021 introduced state-wide targets to reduce:

- fatalities and serious injuries by at least 30% by 2021 (there was no baseline against which to measure progress)
- the fatality rate to 4.3 per 100,000 population by 2016 which was first set in the NSW 2021 State Plan, the ten-year plan developed in 2011.

NSW Road Safety Plan 2021

In February 2018, the NSW Government published the NSW Road Safety Plan 2021 which identified six priority areas and contained two state-wide targets:

- reduce road fatalities by at least 30% from 2008–2010 levels by 2021 (also a State Priority Target)
- zero fatalities and serious injuries on our roads by 2056 (an aspirational target).

The target for reducing fatalities was refined to include a baseline of the average number of fatalities recorded between 2008–2010. However, the target for reducing serious injuries was removed.

NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026

In April 2022, the NSW Government replaced the NSW Road Safety Plan 2021 with the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026.

The NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 included new state-wide targets:

- 50% reduction in fatalities by 2030 (from a 2018–2020 average)
- 30% reduction in serious injuries by 2030 (from a 2018–2020 average).

In parallel, Future Transport 2056, the NSW Government's integrated vision for transport in New South Wales, includes the vision for zero trauma on the New South Wales transport network and the assurance that people enjoy safe travel and are not harmed when moving around the network. While this strategy was first released in 2018, an updated version of Future Transport 2056 was released in 2022 in the same year as the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026.

National Road Safety Strategy 2021–2030

The National Road Safety Strategy 2021–2030 is a ten-year plan for reducing road trauma on Australia's roads and is implemented by the Office of Road Safety in the Australian Government.

The national target is a reduction in annual fatalities of at least 50% by 2030 and a reduction in annual national serious injuries by at least 30% by 2030 nationally. The national strategy is focused on Towards Zero and uses the Safe System approach. This includes investigations for all fatal crashes and at least ten per cent of serious injury crashes.

The Australian Government is currently negotiating a new five-year National Partnership Agreement (NPA) on land transport projects. The NPA supports the delivery of infrastructure projects and sets out how the Australian Government and states will work together to deliver infrastructure projects for the benefit and wellbeing of Australians.

The NPA covers projects administered under the *National Land Transport Act 2014 (Cth)*. Each state and territory has a separately agreed schedule to the NPA which indicates the levels of funding the Australian Government intends to provide for land transport infrastructure investments.

The NPA is negotiated between governments every five years, with the current NPA set to expire on 30 June 2024.

1.5 Definitions of regional New South Wales

Regional New South Wales covers 98.5% of the total area of the state. Approximately 3.1 million people live in regional New South Wales, which is roughly one-third of the population of the state. As Exhibit 2, above, illustrates the road network in regional New South Wales is extensive.

This audit adopts two definitions used by TfNSW when referring to regional New South Wales, depending on the data source, the type of data gathered and the purpose of the analysis.

The first definition distinguishes between metropolitan New South Wales and regional New South Wales. Roads in regional areas are defined as roads in 'all local government areas except Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Wollongong and Shellharbour, and those in metropolitan Sydney'.

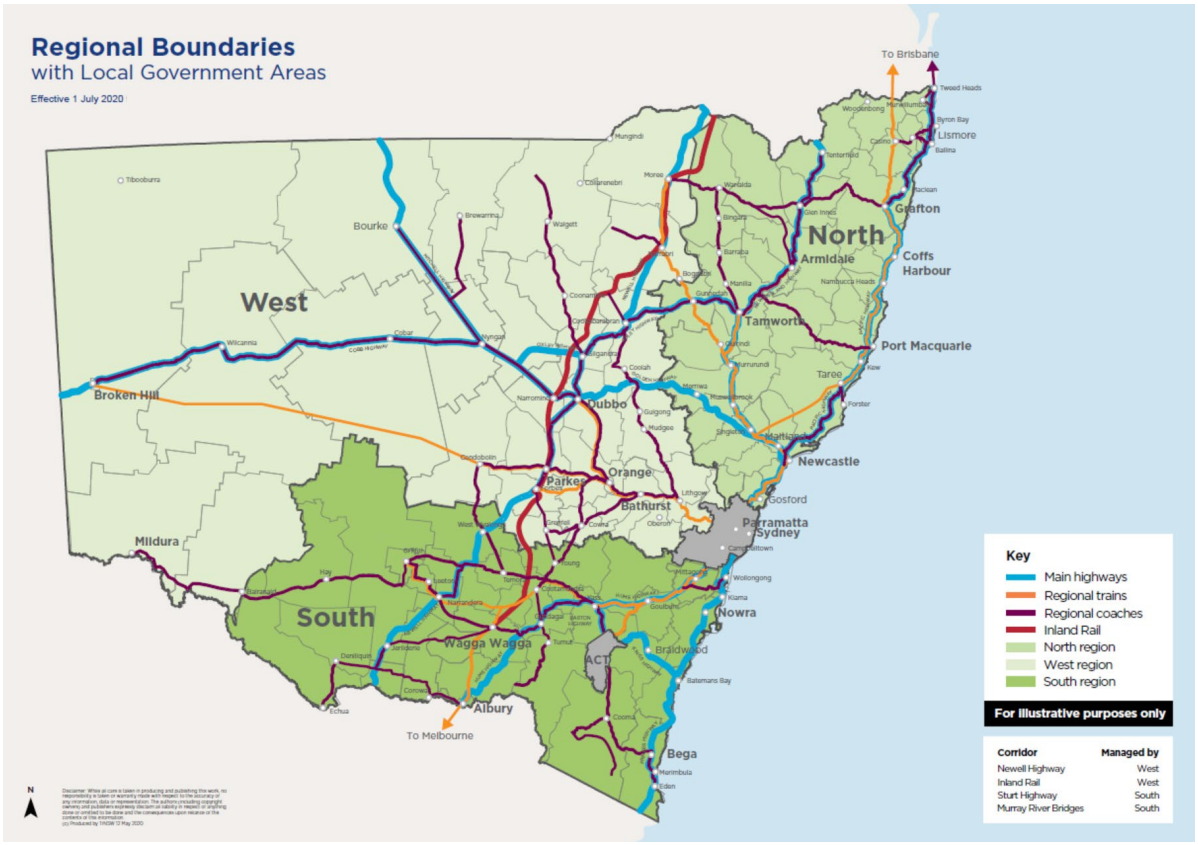
The second definition is based on the TfNSW regions which reflect the geographical structure of its operational divisions. This definition splits New South Wales into Greater Sydney, and three regional areas – North, West and South. Exhibit 3, below, illustrates the boundaries of the TfNSW regions and the local government areas in the North, South and West regions.

There are six LGAs which are split by the regional boundaries used in this definition for which the regional status changes depending on which definition is used and TfNSW has advised the audit team of how it classifies these LGAs. These are:

- Newcastle and Lake Macquarie which are considered metropolitan by the first definition and as part of the North region by the second definition
- Wollongong and Shellharbour which are considered metropolitan by the first definition and as part of the South region by the second definition
- Wollondilly and Hawkesbury which are considered regional by the first definition and as part of the Greater Sydney region by the second definition.

Throughout this report, we will refer to location either as 'metropolitan and regional New South Wales' (as per the first definition above) or as 'Greater Sydney and North, West or South regions' (as per the second definition) depending on the data source used, as explained in Section 1.6.

Exhibit 3: Boundaries of the TfNSW regions



Source: TfNSW, Regional and Outer Metropolitan division (ROM) regional boundaries, maps and LGA list.

1.6 Interpreting road trauma data

Defining fatalities and serious injuries

A road fatality is defined as a person who dies within 30 days from injuries received in a road traffic crash.

A serious injury is defined as a person identified as:

- having an injury on a public road on the same day or the day after a crash
- who requires a hospital stay that is not an emergency department only admission (unless that admission ended in an interstate transfer, to private hospital or other medical facility)
- does not die within 30 days of the crash.

For the purposes of this audit, we focus on fatalities and serious injuries only.

In New South Wales, the NSW Police Force will attend and investigate 'Major Traffic Crashes' where:

- someone is killed or injured
- a party fails to stop and exchange particulars
- a driver is allegedly under the influence of intoxicating liquor or a drug.

Road trauma data can be either 'matched' or 'unmatched'

Different types of data are available for different types of road incidents. The Centre for Road Safety refers to the data it collects as either matched or unmatched depending on the source.

Matched data is used for fatalities and those serious injuries for which a police report is made. This occurs when a crash is reported to the NSW Police Force who will record details at the scene of the accident, including the LGA. As fatalities and serious injuries require the involvement of health professionals, there will also be a record of the crash in ambulance and/or hospital data. When the health record can be matched to the police record, the data is referred to as matched.

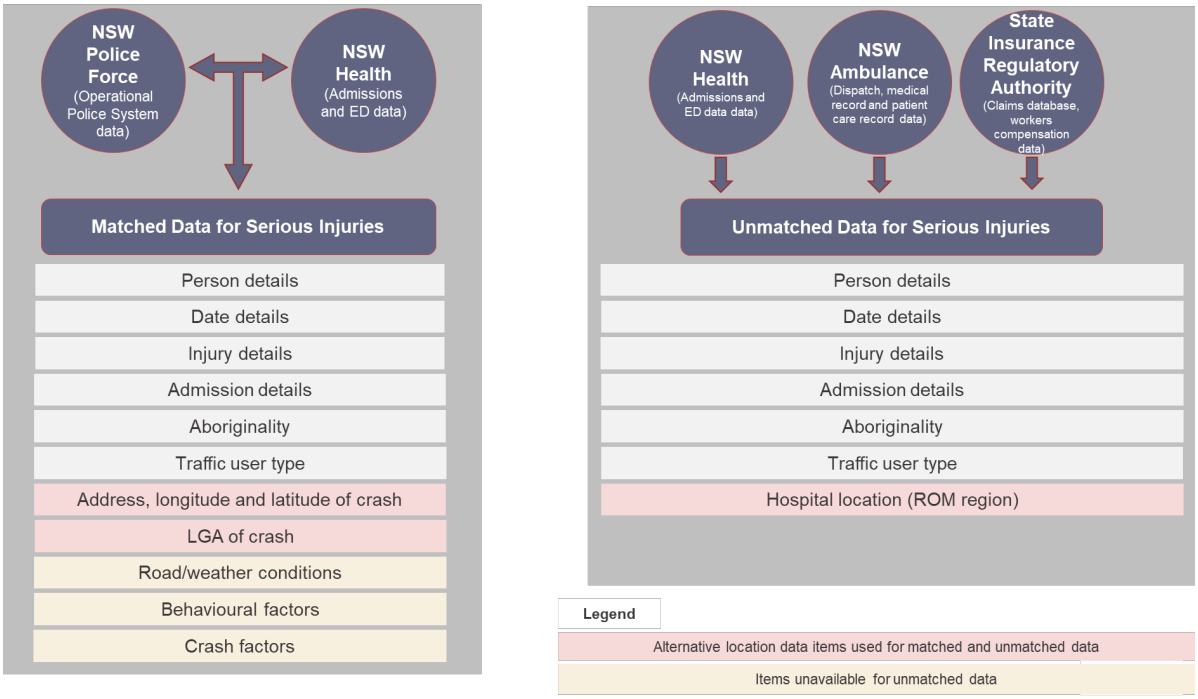
Matched data is gathered for all road fatalities in New South Wales and approximately 48% of serious injuries. When using matched data, TfNSW has access to the crash data as recorded by the NSW Police Force. This allows it to categorise the location of the crash as either metropolitan (Newcastle, Lake Macquarie, Wollongong and Shellharbour, and Greater Sydney) regional New South Wales or by TfNSW Region (see section 1.5 above).

However, there are instances where a health record cannot be matched to a police record. This will occur when a road crash injury is treated by ambulance and/or hospital staff but is not reported to the police. The data on these crashes are referred to as unmatched records.

Unmatched data does not record any location data about the crash. Instead, the data reports the location of the hospital where the patient is admitted and TfNSW records the TfNSW region in which the hospital is located.

Exhibit 4 illustrates the construction of these two data types and compares the information available in each one.

Exhibit 4: Matched and unmatched data



Source: Audit Office of New South Wales analysis based on TfNSW, Definitions and notes to support road crash data (September 2019).

TfNSW uses both matched and unmatched data when reporting on serious injuries. The report will specify where our analysis uses matched or unmatched data and will also specify the location definition being used for each exhibit, where relevant.

1.7 Fatalities and serious injuries on roads in regional New South Wales

The proportion of fatalities and serious injuries in regional New South Wales has mostly remained unchanged since 2012

Between 2012 and 2022, 67.8% of all road fatalities in New South Wales and approximately 40% of serious injuries occurred in regional areas. However, only one-third of the state's population lives in regional New South Wales. These proportions have generally remained at this level for at least a decade.

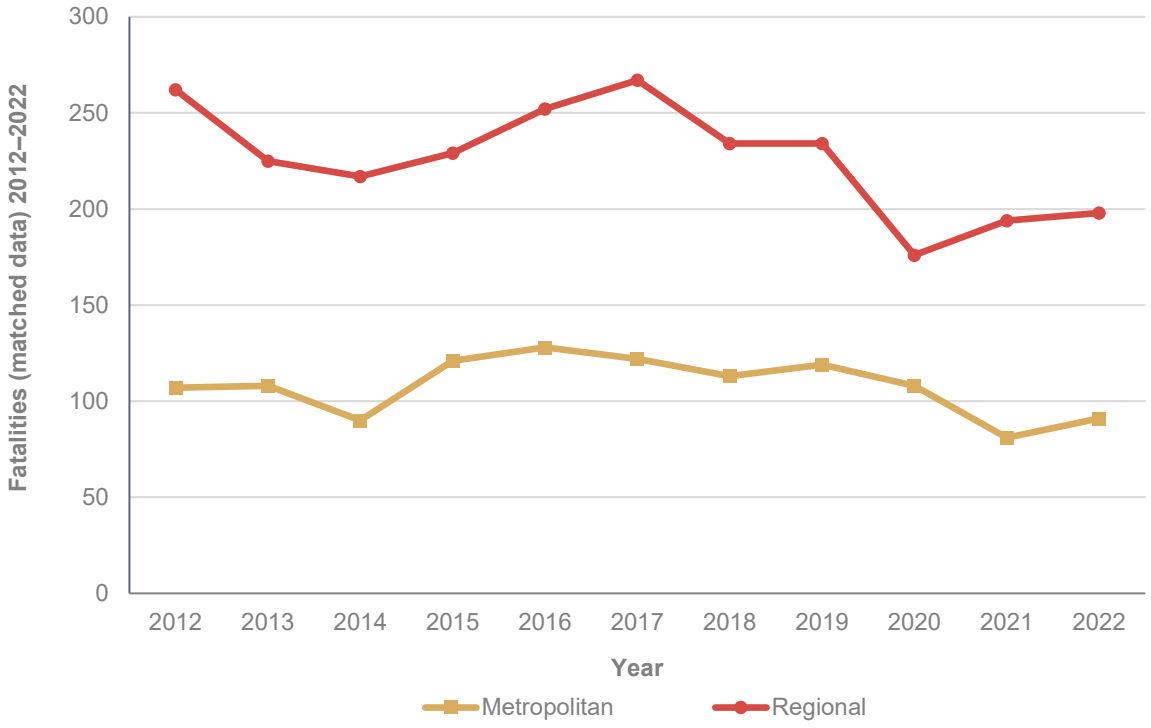
Fatalities on regional roads in 2022 were 68.3% of the state total, which is slightly above the decade average of 67.8%. Serious injuries on regional roads in 2022 were 39.8% of the state total, which is very close to the decade average of 40%.

Fatalities and serious injuries differ between regional and metropolitan areas

TfNSW has state-wide targets for reducing road fatalities and serious injuries. However, there are notable differences in the level of road trauma incidents on regional roads compared to roads in metropolitan areas.

Exhibit 5 illustrates the number of fatalities between 2012 and 2022 on metropolitan and regional New South Wales roads, using matched data.

Exhibit 5: Fatalities on metropolitan and regional roads in New South Wales between 2012 and 2022 (matched data)



Source: Audit Office of New South Wales analysis based on CRS Interactive crash statistics (unaudited figures).

Road fatalities have reduced since 2012, when the first long-term road safety strategy was introduced in New South Wales.

On roads in regional New South Wales, fatalities have fallen by 24.23% (from 262 in 2012 to 198 in 2022), whilst fatalities on metropolitan roads have fallen by 14.95% (from 107 to 91) over the same period.

The total number of fatalities on New South Wales roads in 2023 (as at 23 November) has increased compared to the previous year and the average over the previous three years. These changes are reported in Exhibit 6, below.

Exhibit 6: State-wide NSW road fatalities (year to date as at 23 November 2023) compared to prior comparable periods (matched data)

NSW road fatalities (1 January–23 November)	2023	2022 (same period)	Three-year average of fatalities for the same period (2020–2022)
Number	322	248	249
% increase in 2023 against prior periods	--	29.8%	29.3%

Source: Audit Office of New South Wales analysis based on TfNSW NSW Daily Road Toll to 23 November 2023 (unaudited figures).

When considering regional New South Wales, the rate of fatalities for 2023 (as at 23 November) has also increased compared to the same period in previous years, as shown in Exhibit 7, below. This exhibit also reports the percentage of fatalities on regional roads against the state-wide total which has also increased compared to the three-year average of fatalities for the same period (2020–2022). This exhibit uses matched data.

Exhibit 7: Regional NSW road fatalities (year to date as at 23 November 2023) compared to prior comparable periods (matched data)

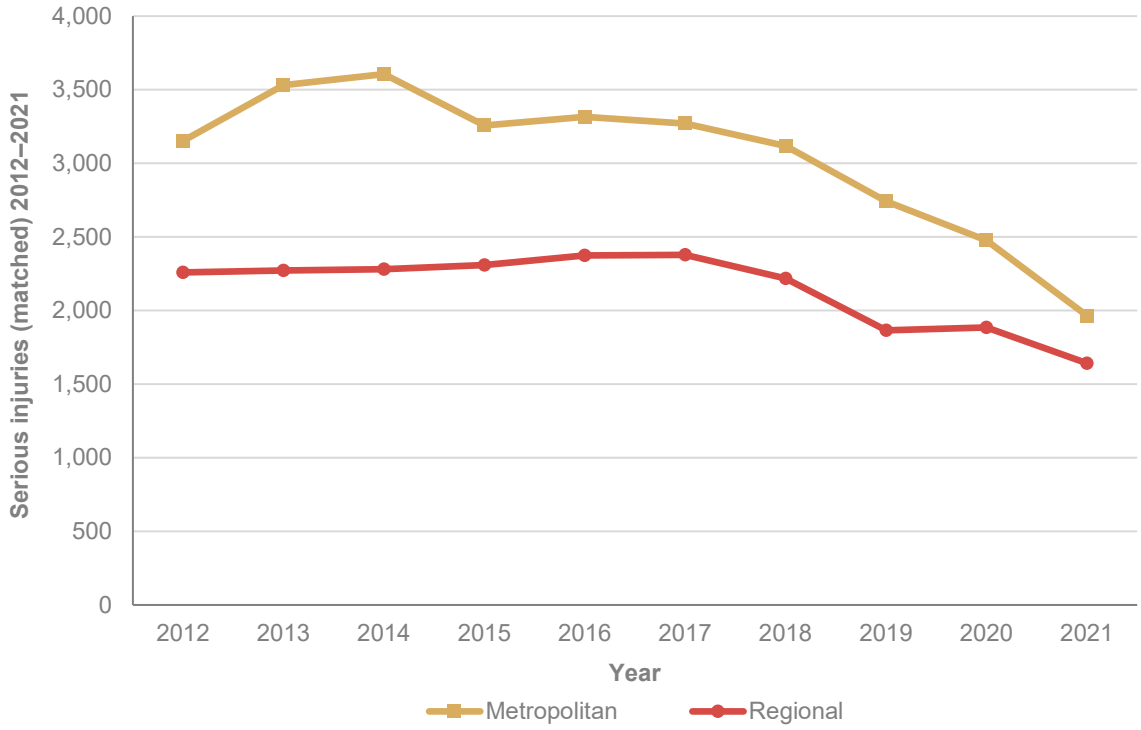
Regional road fatalities (1 January 1–23 November)	2023	2022 (same period)	Three-year average of fatalities for the same period (2020–2022)
Number	223	175	168
% increase in 2023 against prior periods	--	27.4%	32.7%
% of total road fatalities in New South Wales	69.3%	70.6%	67.5%

Source: Audit Office of New South Wales analysis based on TfNSW NSW Daily Road Toll to 23 November 2023 (unaudited figures).

Serious injuries in New South Wales have decreased over the period from 2012 to 2021.

Based on matched data on serious injuries, the decrease in metropolitan areas is 37.66% (from 3,152 in 2012 to 1,965 in 2021) and 27.31% (from 2,259 in 2012 to 1,642 in 2021) in regional New South Wales. This is illustrated in Exhibit 8, below.

Exhibit 8: Serious injuries on Metropolitan and Regional roads in New South Wales between 2012 and 2021 (matched data)



Source: Audit Office of New South Wales analysis based on CRS Interactive crash statistics (unaudited figures).

The risk of road trauma is greater in the north and south areas of regional New South Wales than in the west

When regional New South Wales is disaggregated into the three TfNSW regions – North, South and West – a more nuanced picture becomes apparent.

Whilst approximately two-thirds of all fatalities take place in regional New South Wales as a whole, the number of fatalities is not evenly spread. For example, between 2018 and 2022, the greatest number of fatalities was in the North region (500), followed by the South region (356). In comparison, there were fewer fatalities in the West (218).

A similar pattern can also be seen for serious injuries over the same period (North: 6,046 serious injuries; South: 2,840 serious injuries; West: 1,711 serious injuries).

Population makes a difference when analysing the numbers of fatalities and serious injuries

When road trauma is represented as a proportion of the size of the population, a very different picture is revealed.

TfNSW reported that, between 2017 to 2021, the average number of fatalities for every 100,000 of the population (using matched data and combining the North, South and West TfNSW regions into one) in:

- regional New South Wales was 8.33
- Greater Sydney was 2.00.

TfNSW also reported that, between 2017 to 2021, the average number of serious injuries for every 100,000 of the population (using matched data and combining the North, South and West TfNSW regions into one) in:

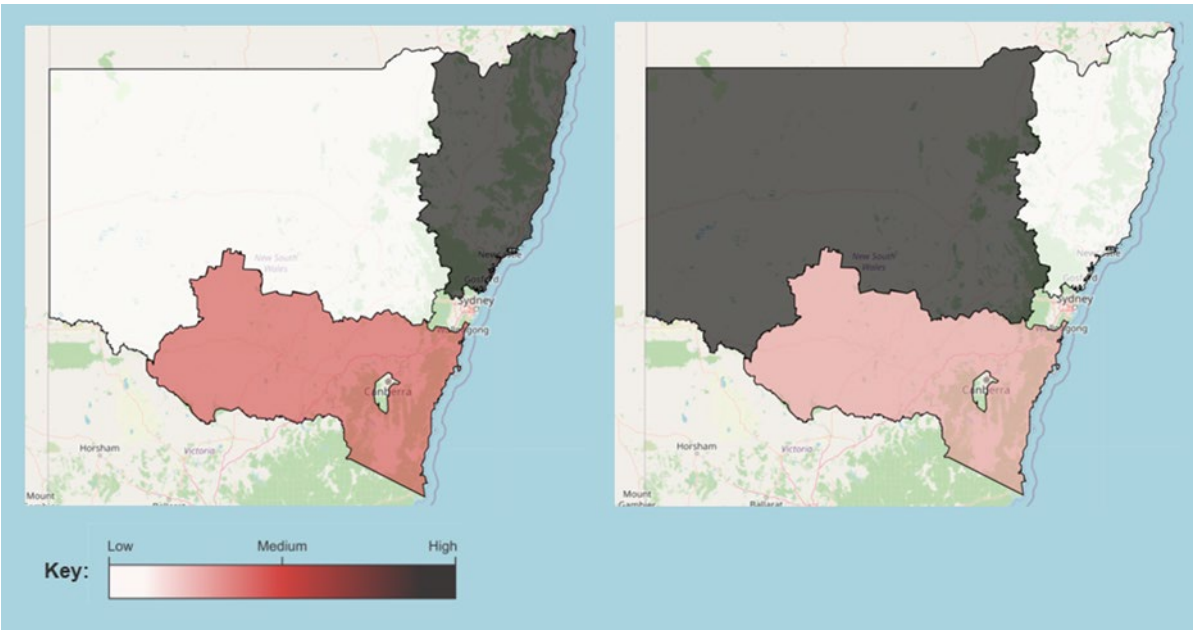
- regional New South Wales was 75.24
- Greater Sydney was 50.53.

Dividing regional NSW into the three TfNSW regions – North, South and West – gives an even more detailed representation of the impact of population on fatality and serious injury numbers.[2]

Between 2018 and 2022, the greatest number of road trauma incidents took place in the West region when considered per 100,000 of the population (11.71 fatalities per 100,000 of the population and 85.78 serious injuries per 100,000 of the population.). Thereafter, the South region ranks second for fatalities (7.18 fatalities per 100,000 of the population) whilst the North region ranks second for serious injuries (55.94 serious injuries per 100,000 of the population).

Exhibit 9 represents the number of fatalities in the North, South and West regions of NSW as a raw number (left) and by 100,000 of the population (right). The darker colours represent greater numbers of fatalities, and the lighter colours indicate areas where there were fewer road fatalities. The data in this exhibit is matched.

Exhibit 9: Fatalities on roads in regional NSW by TfNSW Region 2018–2022 (actual numbers (left) and per 100,000 of the population (right))



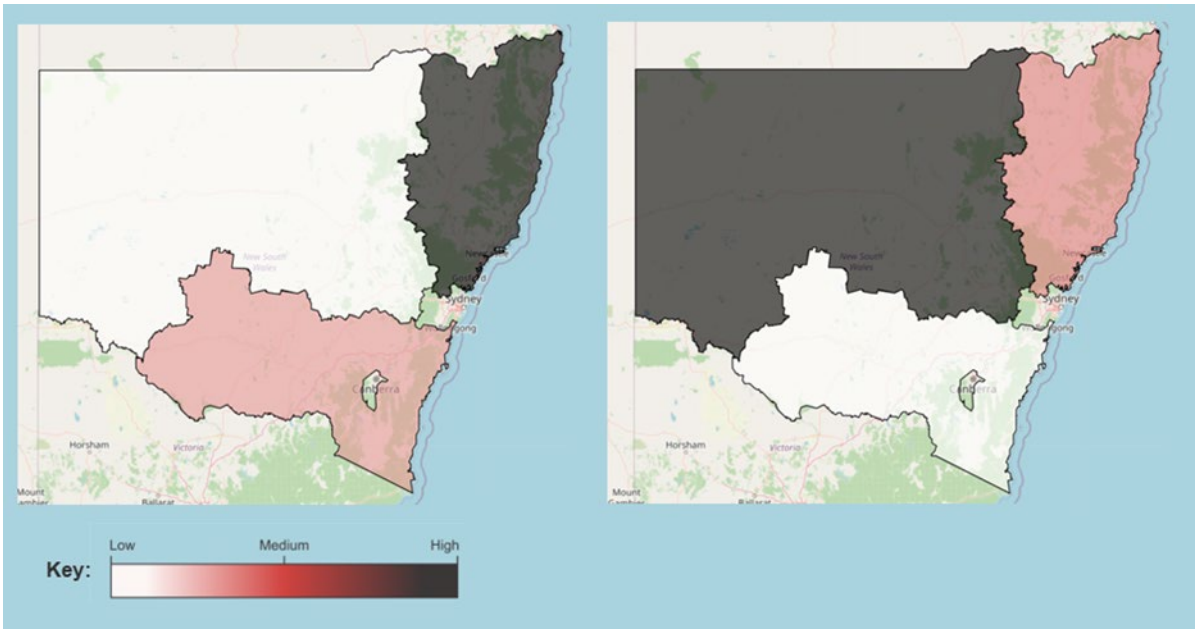
Source: Research commissioned by the Audit Office of New South Wales based on TfNSW Crash Data (unaudited figures).

When considering raw numbers (left), the North and South regions, respectively, represent the greatest numbers of road fatalities in regional NSW. However, when represented as a proportion of the population (right), the West region is the area with the greatest incidence of road fatalities.

Exhibit 10 illustrates a similar pattern for serious injuries. Using matched data, this exhibit illustrates that, when considered in terms of the population, the West region is the area with the greatest incidence of serious injuries.

[2] According to ABS population statistics, the population of the North region averaged approximately 1.8 million people per year between 2018 and 2022. Over the same period, the South region averaged about 988,000 people, whilst the West region averaged 440,000 people.

Exhibit 10: Serious injuries on roads in regional NSW by TfNSW Region 2018–2022 (actual numbers (left) and per 100,000 of the population (right))



Source: Research commissioned by the Audit Office of New South Wales based on TfNSW Crash Data (unaudited figures).

These images serve to highlight the difference between raw numbers and proportional ones when considering road trauma. Representing fatalities and serious injuries as a single annual number masks the true incidence of road trauma in regional NSW and its distribution across regional areas.

Speeding is the most frequently occurring factor in road trauma in regional New South Wales

The most significant contributing factor in road trauma incidents in New South Wales is excess speed. This is followed by illicit drugs, fatigue and alcohol.

Crashes on regional roads are more likely to result in a fatality than those on metropolitan roads. This is because posted speed limits in regional areas tend to be higher, and TfNSW has reported that risky behaviours (such as drink driving, fatigue, excessive or inappropriate speed, and not using seat belt restraints) are more prevalent in serious crashes occurring in regional areas.

Exhibit 11, below, shows the percentage of fatalities and serious injuries that are attributed to each of the most prevalent contributing factors, over the period 2018 to 2022 using the TfNSW region definition. The data in this exhibit is matched.

Exhibit 11: Percentage of fatalities and serious injuries by contributing factors – TfNSW regions – from 2018 to 2022

	Fatalities					Serious injuries				
	Greater Sydney	North	South	West	All regional areas	Greater Sydney	North	South	West	All regional areas
Alcohol	11%	18%	20%	23%	20%	5%	10%	7%	10%	9%
Illicit drugs	22%	29%	16%	26%	24%	2%*	5%*	2%*	4%*	4%*
Fatigue	5%	18%	21%	30%	21%	8%	16%	14%	22%	16%
Speed	34%	48%	40%	38%	43%	15%	34%	30%	35%	33%

* TfNSW has advised that as drug testing is not mandatory in non-fatal crashes, data where illicit drugs are listed as the cause in serious injury-related accident may be understated.

Source: Research commissioned by the Audit Office of New South Wales based on TfNSW Crash Data (unaudited figures).

Speed is the greatest contributing factor in fatalities and serious injuries, across both regional New South Wales and Greater Sydney, but the majority of speed related fatalities occur on regional roads. TfNSW reported that between 2017 and 2021, 71% of fatal crashes in New South Wales involving excess speed were on roads in regional New South Wales.

Illicit drugs and fatigue are the next most prevalent contributing factors in fatalities in regional areas, although the contributing factors differ between the areas within regional NSW. When considering serious injuries, fatigue is the second most frequently occurring contributing factor after excessive speed.

Again, this demonstrates the value of reporting regional factors at a more granular level than the CRS does. Although the contributing factors may be more consistent across areas in regional New South Wales, there are still clear differences in the degree of impact. Reporting at the regional level masks this detail.

Motor vehicle drivers are involved in more fatalities in regional areas than other road users

There are differences in the type of road users involved in fatalities and serious injuries on roads across New South Wales. The most frequently involved road user groups are drivers and passengers in motor vehicles, bicycle and motorcycle riders and pedestrians. Exhibit 12, below, shows the percentage of fatalities and serious injuries involving each of these groups of road users, over the period 2018 to 2022. This exhibit uses the TfNSW regions and matched data.

Exhibit 12: Percentage of fatalities and serious injuries by road user from 2018 to 2022

	Fatalities					Serious injuries				
	Greater Sydney	North	South	West	All regional areas	Greater Sydney	North	South	West	All regional areas
Bicycle rider	4%	3%	3%	2%	3%	7%	4%	5%	3%	4%
Motorcycle rider	18%	23%	13%	13%	18%	21%	22%	20%	20%	21%
Motor vehicle driver	30%	50%	55%	61%	54%	46%	52%	53%	56%	53%
Motor vehicle passenger	13%	12%	19%	20%	16%	10%	14%	15%	18%	15%
Pedestrian	33%	11%	10%	4%	9%	15%	7%	6%	3%	6%

Source: Research commissioned by the Audit Office of New South Wales based on TfNSW Crash Data (unaudited figures).

In regional New South Wales over the period from 2018–2022, the greatest proportion of fatalities were motor vehicle drivers (54%), while in Greater Sydney the most fatalities were pedestrians (33%).

Motorcycle riders make up a similar portion of fatalities and serious injuries in regional areas and Greater Sydney areas (18% for fatalities, and 21% for serious injuries for both Greater Sydney and regional areas).

Again, there are differences between the areas in regional New South Wales.

Proportionally, more motor vehicle passengers are killed or injured in the West (20% and 18% respectively) than in any other regional areas or in Greater Sydney. A similar pattern can be seen for motorcycle riders in the North region, as they are involved in 23% of fatalities and 22% of serious injuries. These patterns in road trauma are likely to reflect patterns of transport usage in different areas.

Access to hospitals, first responders and mobile phone coverage is reduced as distances from metropolitan centres increase

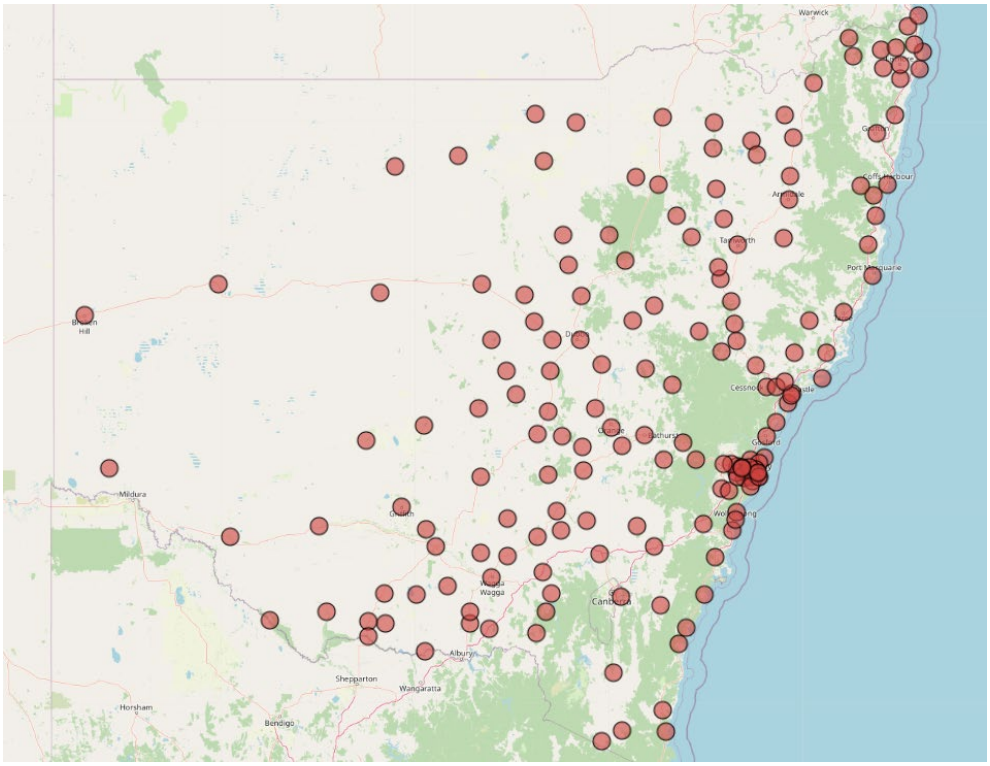
Access to core services such as hospitals, police and rescue and communications are important in determining injury outcomes resulting from crashes, particularly in rural and remote areas. Response times can be impacted by factors including:

- land area
- population size and density, and the dispersion of the population
- topography and road/transport infrastructure
- traffic densities
- response systems and processes.

Short response times suggest the adverse effects on patients and the community are reduced.

Exhibit 13, below, shows the location of hospitals across New South Wales and the smaller number in regional New South Wales, especially in the western parts of the State.

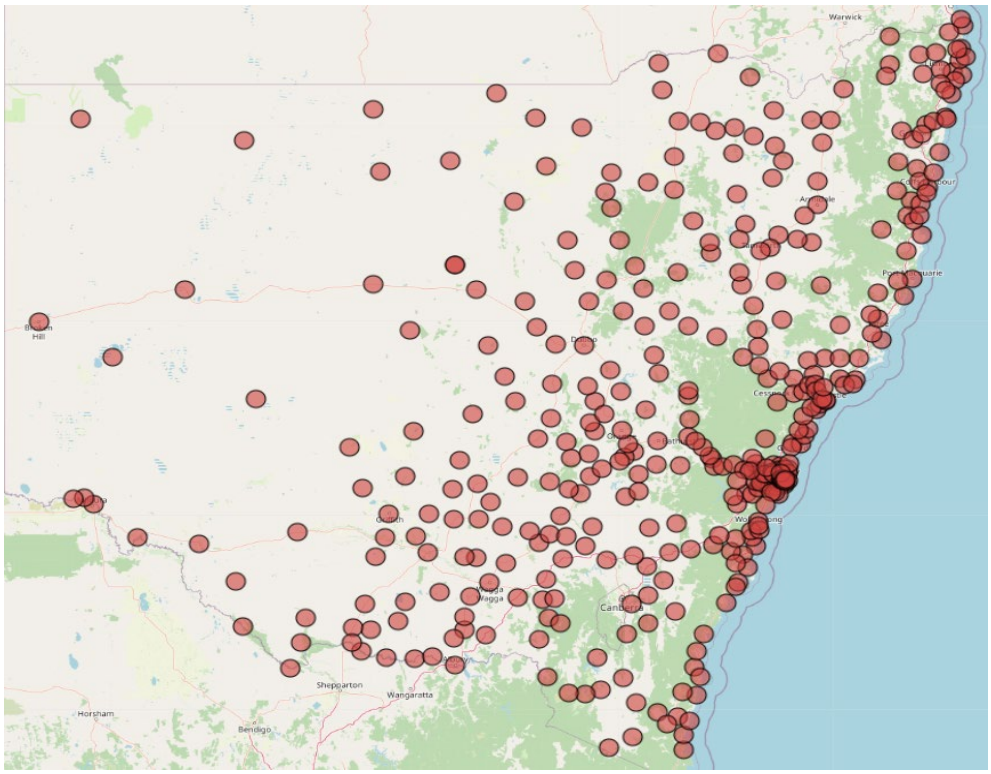
Exhibit 13: Hospital locations in New South Wales



Source: Research commissioned by the Audit Office of New South Wales (unaudited figures).

Exhibit 14, below, shows the locations of police stations across New South Wales and the smaller number in regional New South Wales, especially in the western parts of the State.

Exhibit 14: Police stations in New South Wales



Source: Research commissioned by the Audit Office of New South Wales (unaudited figures).

Access to communications services is also limited. According to the NSW Telco Authority, around 15% of major roads in New South Wales do not have mobile coverage. There are 4,000 reported mobile black spots in New South Wales that impact around 10,000 premises.

The Office of Road Safety in the Australian Government notes that 'post-crash response times are longer in remote areas, and this can be compounded by limited local access to hospital and surgical intervention'.

The majority of road trauma across Australia takes place in regional areas

Road trauma across Australia and in other states echoes the patterns seen in New South Wales.

More than 70% of the Australian population resides in major cities and metropolitan areas whilst over 50% of all road deaths occur on roads that are outside metropolitan areas.

In the National Survey of Community Satisfaction with Policing for 2021–22, people who had driven in the past six months reported that:

- 4.5% had driven without wearing a seat belt
- 6.0% has driven when possibly over the blood alcohol limit
- 59.2% reported travelling ten kilometres per hour or more above the speed limit.

When considering other states around Australia, the differences between regional and metropolitan road trauma levels are similar to those in New South Wales. In Queensland, one-third of road fatalities occur in metropolitan areas although 49% of the state's population live in Brisbane. Similarly, around 20% of Western Australia's population live in regional areas but approximately 40% of fatalities or serious injuries occur on regional roads.

In South Australia, road users in regional areas are twice as likely to be killed or seriously injured than people in Adelaide. Further, 71% of all fatalities and serious injuries in regional South Australia are on roads with a speed limit of 100 or 110 km/h.

2. Road Safety initiatives in regional New South Wales

2.1 Road safety targets

TfNSW achieved its target to reduce road fatalities in New South Wales 'by 30% by 2021', but since 2022 the number of road fatalities has been increasing

TfNSW set a target to reduce road fatalities in New South Wales by 30% by 2021 in the NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012–2021 and the NSW Road Safety Plan 2021. In 2021, this goal was achieved when there was a 33% reduction in road fatalities in New South Wales compared to the benchmark of the average number of fatalities across the period 2008–2010.

However, TfNSW is yet to determine the impact of COVID-19 on road fatalities and serious injuries. Whilst lockdowns and restrictions on travel limited the movement of many people, this could have been offset, to some degree, by the increase in online purchasing and home delivery, necessitating more commercial road transport.

Since 2021, there has been an increase in fatalities both across the state and in regional NSW. In 2022, fatalities on NSW roads increased by 5.5% compared to the previous year and by two per cent in regional NSW.

Exhibit 6, above, shows that in 2023 (year to date) total fatalities on New South Wales roads have increased by 29.3% compared to the three-year average of fatalities (2020–2022) for the same period.

Similarly, Exhibit 7, above, shows that in 2023 (year to date) fatalities on regional New South Wales roads have increased by 32.7% compared to the three-year average of fatalities (2020–2022) for the same period.

TfNSW's reporting on progress against state-wide targets is inconsistent

TfNSW publishes four reports, interactive crash statistics, and data files on the TfNSW open data site that report on state-wide road trauma.

Only one of these public reports, the NSW Road Toll Daily, analyses progress against the fatality reduction target. Neither the interactive crash statistics nor the open data files include references to the fatality reduction target.

TfNSW has published an annual Road Safety Progress Report since 2012 which followed the then Minister's commitment to provide 'a full account of income and expenditure of the Community Road Safety Fund' each year. These reports provide detailed data on demographic, behavioural, location and crash type trends. However, they do not include reporting on the progress to achieving road safety targets.

There is no public reporting on progress against the serious injuries target even using preliminary data. TfNSW provides public reporting on serious injuries including a quarterly bulletin of serious injury crash data, but this does not include reporting on the reduction target. TfNSW cannot fully demonstrate the effectiveness of its investment in specific programs in the absence of reporting on targets.

It is difficult to evaluate progress against serious injury targets due to the split in serious injury data

TfNSW collects both matched and unmatched serious injury data, as explained previously. The matched serious injuries data contains considerably more detail than the unmatched data.

However, approximately 52% of all serious injuries are unmatched data. As a result, meaningful direct comparisons between the two datasets cannot be made for location data, crash factors and behavioural causes.

2.2 Tailoring road safety initiatives for regional New South Wales

TfNSW has no specific trauma reduction targets for road safety in regional New South Wales

Road safety strategies and plans since 2012 have used state-wide targets for reduction in road trauma. None of the documents reviewed by this audit include a target to reduce road trauma in regional New South Wales, where a disproportionate level of road trauma occurs, and which differs greatly from metropolitan New South Wales in many ways.

TfNSW advised the audit that 'the reason for a single target is because caution is required when comparing relatively low numbers of fatalities in different areas with low populations. The primary objective is to reduce actual numbers of deaths…and that…the State targets apply across the entire state including regional NSW'.

TfNSW also stated that 'the existing approach to trauma reduction targets in NSW aligns with the approach adopted by other jurisdictions, including internationally, which is to design road safety strategic plans around the jurisdictional accountability for management of safety systems at the National, State or local government level'. Chapter 4 provides further details of the road safety responsibilities of the different jurisdictional levels.

There are potentially valid reasons for the existing approach as articulated by TfNSW to road trauma reduction targets. However, in practice, it is possible for New South Wales to meet a single state-wide road trauma reduction target without actually reducing road trauma in regional areas. This is because of the higher population in metropolitan areas.

The fact is that the proportion of fatalities on regional roads has not reduced since 2012, despite a long-term reduction in the total number of deaths on the state's roads between 2012–2021. A target to reduce road trauma in regional New South Wales could sharpen TfNSW's focus on targeting funding and its efforts towards areas of greatest risk or provide more detailed insights on progress in reducing road trauma and fatalities in the geographic areas most represented in the state's road toll.

TfNSW has not developed a road safety implementation plan specific to regional New South Wales

TfNSW has acknowledged that there is a disproportionate amount of road trauma on regional roads in the NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012–2021, the NSW Road Safety Plan 2021, and the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026.

TfNSW has also previously stated in response to media enquiries that 'We know we need a sustained focus on improving safety in regional areas to achieve our new road safety targets'.

NSW Government's policy on road safety is clear. However, there is no implementation plan that is focused on identifying and addressing the unique characteristics (crash types, behavioural factors and road users) specific to regional areas. This is despite TfNSW acknowledging that regional areas are an on-going problem due to region-specific issues.

The NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 (and prior plans), list priority actions and initiatives, some of which are targeted at regional areas such as the Safer Roads program**,** vehicle safety technology upgrades and the Local Government Road Safety Program.

TfNSW advised the audit that additional emphasis is placed on regional New South Wales through a specific strategic priority area for 'creating safer country roads'. The strategic priority area referred to is actually 'creating safer country and urban places' and is not wholly dedicated to regional NSW but applies to metropolitan areas as well. The objective of this priority is to reduce fatalities on country roads and injuries in urban environments. This priority area focuses on the contrasting challenges of urban areas to regional roads, the 'mix of different road users in the same environment' and the need to 'design roads and places to be shared and safe for everyone'.

Good strategy effectively targets risk. A single broad strategic approach across the network, as in the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026, is unlikely to be nuanced enough to target specific risks. Moreover, regional-specific factors such as varying population densities, road infrastructure, travel patterns, and levels of enforcement that are factors in defining strategies and targets are not accurately considered in the current NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026.

TfNSW has acknowledged that plans are not produced based on specific geographic areas. This is because 'all road safety plans and strategies are designed around the jurisdictions and their management accountability and systems at the State or National government level. At a local government level, road safety outcomes should be reflected in strategic plans for local councils'.

The audit has highlighted a gap in road safety planning and implementation for regional areas and it is not clear how local government strategic plans can fill this gap.

Schedule 1 of the *Transport Administration Act 1988*, states that TfNSW has a general function for planning and policy for the road network. The planning and policy function includes advice, assistance and recommendations to the Minister in connection with the development of policy for promoting road safety.

Section 7(4) of the *Roads Act 1993* states that the council of a local government area is the roads authority for all public roads within the area, other than any freeway or Crown road, and any public road for which some other public authority is declared by the regulations to be the roads authority.

The NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 plan states that TfNSW 'will support local government to embed road safety in business as usual' but does not reference the role of strategic plans from local councils.

Moreover, an approach that relies on individual strategic plans from local councils does not provide the public with a consolidated perspective on how a cross-regional problem will be resolved.

During this audit, TfNSW has acknowledged that there may be merit in publishing a separate document that outlines the specific NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 measures that will be delivered to improve regional road safety. This could be effective if it contained performance measures, risk metrics and detailed how road safety initiatives addressed specific road safety issues in regional NSW.

TfNSW's targets for the reduction of fatalities and serious injuries do not consider factors such as population density

TfNSW's road safety targets are based on raw numbers and do not consider factors such as population density, mobility, and vehicle ownership. Proportional targets of this sort can provide another option in showing progress across time and allowing for variations in population and economic growth especially measured across regions, as illustrated in Chapter 1.

The National Road Safety Strategy 2021–2030 has adopted per capita rates to accompany its road trauma reduction targets because they are a better option to allow for variations in 'population growth between jurisdictions, regions, age groups and road user groups'.

However, TfNSW advised the audit that its focus is on reducing the actual number of deaths and serious injuries not just the per capita rate. It advised that rates are difficult for the public to understand and may be difficult to accurately measure as rates may vary over time.

It has also stated that reductions on a per population basis may be due to demographic growth and not a reduction in the actual amount of road trauma. TfNSW also contends that comparing rates or targets across regions can be misleading if regional-specific factors such as varying population densities, road infrastructure, travel patterns, and levels of enforcement are not accurately considered in the analysis.

As a result, TfNSW's targets are all raw numbers and do not take into account population size, despite the fact that TfNSW does report on a proportional basis (or 'rate reporting') in one internal and three public reports.

2.3 Road safety strategy at the local level in regional New South Wales

The Local Government Road Safety Program was established in 1992 to assist councils with safety on local roads

Section 7(4) of the *Roads Act 1993* states that the council of a local government area is the roads authority for all public roads within the area, other than any freeway or Crown road, and any public road for which some other public authority is declared by the regulations to be the roads authority.

Under Schedule 1 Part 2 clause 4(1)(c) of the *Transport Administration Act 1988*, TfNSW has a statutory role to provide advice and assistance to local councils for the improvement of road safety. The Local Government Road Safety Program (LGRSP) was created to assist councils in delivering locally based road safety initiatives within their communities. The LGRSP uses the Safe Systems approach to road safety in the development of all local road safety projects.

TfNSW's guidelines for the LGRSP 2022–23 state that 'local councils are well placed to plan, implement and deliver road safety projects relevant to their communities'.

The focus of the LGRSP is:

- at the LGA-level rather than broader regional approaches
- on behavioural and education campaigns, while road safety infrastructure treatments are managed through other state and federal programs (noting though that the LGRSP allows some support for such programs).

The LGRSP provides for the employment of road safety officers (RSOs), local Road Safety Action Plans and ongoing engagement with staff in TfNSW's Centre for Road Safety and Regional and Outer Metropolitan operating division. The Regional and Outer Metropolitan representatives are the key contact for councils and RSOs in all aspects of the LGRSP.

Employing a RSO is a joint process involving both TfNSW and the council. TfNSW informed the audit that the standard RSO role description includes a preference for tertiary qualifications in behavioural sciences, education, health promotion, marketing, communications, sciences, or a related discipline. Alternatively, extensive relevant experience may be considered. Where appointed, the role of the RSO is to:

- plan, develop and implement local road safety projects and action plans
- support state-wide strategies and programs and deliver to local communities
- regularly report on and evaluate projects/activities in action plans.

The RSO is expected to develop and implement educational and behavioural projects. The role can support engineering, enforcement, funding activities, data analysis and research. Funding is also available to support road safety projects to address identified issues within the LGA. A council that does not employ an RSO still apply for road safety project funding, but this is capped at 50% of the project cost.

TfNSW advised the audit that the purpose of council's Road Safety Action Plans is to define local road safety activities and projects and outline how councils plan to address the road safety problems and issues relevant to their LGA. This includes a requirement to undertake statistical analysis to identify road safety issues in the development of their local plans. However, in the absence of a specific implementation plan that draws together information from across regional NSW, TfNSW is unable to support councils' local plans or determine their efficacy.

TfNSW advised that local projects are developed to target problems identified by councils and it supports participating councils by overseeing project delivery, supporting grant and funding applications, and providing data.

TfNSW also advised that it reviews Local Road Safety Action Plans to assess alignment of projects with local road safety problems and issues. TfNSW also reviews council nominated projects to ensure they are appropriate and consistent with the LGRSP Guidelines.

However, the audit team has seen no evidence that TfNSW is consolidating local level plans to identify issues and strategies for regional New South Wales, or that it is leveraging the information provided by local councils to inform management decisions about improving regional road safety outcomes. TfNSW advised that audit that it would not expect such an approach 'to ladder up to the regional or state level, where the key road safety problems and interventions are well-known'.

TfNSW relies on councils to address local road safety issues through the LGRSP but only 52% of regional councils participate in the program

TfNSW has pointed to a 'jurisdictional accountability for management of safety systems at the National, State or local government level' without specifying how this applies to specific issues in regional NSW. Instead, TfNSW advised the audit that at a local government level, road safety outcomes should be reflected in strategic plans for local councils. The LGRSP has been established to support this.

However, of the 92 local councils in regional New South Wales, 48 of them (or 52.2%) participated in the Local Government Road Safety Program in 2022–23. The NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 defines participation as access to a road safety officer, road safety planning and integration in local communities.

Of the 48 participating councils, six currently have vacant RSO roles and no local road safety plans. A further two councils participated in a single project in 2022–23 but did not join the LGRSP.

TfNSW advised the audit that, in comparison, 27 out of 32 (84%) of Sydney metropolitan LGAs participated in the program.

This low level of involvement in regional LGAs has persisted since 2017–18 despite the funding advantages resulting from participation in the LGRSP and appointing an RSO. TfNSW also stated that it is aware of the shortfall in regional council involvement with the LGRSP but notes that the program is voluntary.

TfNSW advised that staff in the Centre for Road Safety and the Regional and Outer Metropolitan Division regularly meet with road safety officers and communicate as required. The Regional and Outer Metropolitan division in TfNSW 'intermittently checks whether a non-participating council wishes to join'. However, without greater participation it is difficult for TfNSW to depend on local council strategic plans to reflect road safety outcomes.

Further, the regional councils interviewed by the audit team expressed concerns with TfNSW's engagement when addressing their issues relating to road safety. Most councils highlighted close working relationships at the local level and on traffic committees but felt that when issues were handled from a distance, the understanding of local issues and responsiveness declined.

TfNSW needs to engage more proactively with local councils to understand and address local and regional specific issues

The audit team met with eight councils in regional areas over the course of the audit. This was not intended to be a representative sample. Five were small shire councils with large road networks, much of it unsealed, but relatively small populations. The remainder were municipal councils with populations of more than 40,000. Whilst the audit team only met with a small number of councils there were some consistent themes arising from these conversations, and these are presented in Exhibit 15, below. The audit team also reviewed submissions made by local councils to the parliamentary inquiries by the NSW Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety (Staysafe Committee) on:

- speed limits and road safety in regional NSW (December 2022)
- reducing trauma on local roads in New South Wales (July 2021).

Exhibit 15: Themes from sample of local council interviews

The audit team interviewed eight councils about their experience with the Local Government Road Safety Program, local issues with road safety and their interactions with TfNSW. This was not a representative sample of all local councils in regional NSW.

Of the eight councils interviewed, the most frequently raised local road safety issues were:

- excessive speed
- the interaction between freight traffic and light vehicles including motor vehicles and motorcycles.

Most councils we interviewed:

- were concerned about delays and/or inflexibility with TfNSW decision-making, including in relation to speed zone reviews
- raised concerns that road safety decision-making and funding remain reactive and dependent on increases in actual road trauma
- believed funding discussions did not take into account factors such as:
  - density (road trauma per capita)
  - predicted increases in traffic flow due to future regional projects
  - interaction between heavy and light vehicles
  - traffic between neighbouring LGAs
  - proximity to post crash responses including access to communications
- noted that State and Federal grants program for roads required different approaches and felt that there could be opportunities for streamlining
- were satisfied with the data provided by TfNSW
- had active traffic committees, but only one council used a Safe Systems Working Group
- engaged with TfNSW at the local level through the TfNSW Regional and Outer Metropolitan division (ROM) division. Only two councils reported regular contact with the Centre for Road Safety.

All of the councils interviewed for this audit reported good relationships with NSW Police Force enforcement and several shared data with the NSW Police Force. However, in some locations, the low numbers of Police can make enforcement a challenge.

One RSO expressed frustration with funding being cut to small programs while another said there were times when they were more proactive 'in the spirit of seeking forgiveness rather than permission'. Nonetheless, the Road Safety Officers were passionate about road safety and fully engaged across the safe systems framework.

Source: Audit Office of New South Wales analysis of council interviews.

TfNSW has outstanding requests for speed limit reviews from regional councils for 2021–22

Councils in regional areas have requested 174 speed limit reviews since 2018. TfNSW reported that 49.7% of these have been accepted and 42.5% have been rejected. Of the remaining 7.8% of requests, 3.6% have been deferred and the rest have been withdrawn or are currently underway.

In July 2023 TfNSW released a new NSW Speed Zoning Standard to enable 'greater consistency of speed zoning across NSW, and greater alignment of speed settings with the surrounding environments'.

The new Standard requires TfNSW to conduct a preliminary review and notify the local council within four months of receiving a speed limit review request or identifying a need. Thereafter, there is no time limit imposed on TfNSW to complete the remainder of the review process.

At the time of writing, TfNSW reported that there are seven unresolved speed limit review requests from councils in regional NSW. Three of these date from 2021–22 and the remaining four are from 2022–23.

Delays in responding to requests for speed reviews were an area that concerned several of the councils interviewed by the audit team, as well as those that engaged with the NSW Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety (Staysafe Committee) Inquiry into speed limits and road safety in regional NSW (December 2022).

TfNSW advised the audit that, on occasion, complexity and the requirement to travel hundreds of kilometres to the road in question may cause delays in completion.

The audit team has not reviewed the merits of any of these requests for speed limit reviews, nor the outcome of decisions made by TfNSW.

However, it is worth noting that reductions in speed limits could impact on the movement of road freight by commercial operators. TfNSW has freight policy within its remit and has acknowledged that NSW will struggle to meet the increasing demand for freight movements unless rail plays a larger role in the movement of freight.

Therefore, TfNSW needs to ensure the independence of decision makers reviewing applications for speed limit reviews to avoid the perception of a conflict of interest. The audit has not evaluated the independence of decision makers and does not intend to question the independence of decision-makers, but to signal the importance of providing such assurance to stakeholders in the process.

TfNSW has not updated the Local Government Road Safety Program since 2014, despite the NSW Government committing to do so in 2021

In the July 2021 'Inquiry into Reducing Trauma on Local Roads in New South Wales', NSW Parliament's Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety (Staysafe Committee) found that, despite being a useful program with success in reducing trauma on local roads, the program:

- has not changed in its format or focus since its inception
- is underfunded and inadequately supported by TfNSW
- may no longer be meeting the current needs of local government.

The Staysafe Committee recommended that the NSW Government conduct a review of the objectives, funding levels, guidelines and duration of the Local Government Road Safety Program. In December 2021, the then NSW Government accepted this recommendation.

TfNSW advised the audit that the Local Government Road Safety Program was reviewed by the Australian Roads Research Board, a consulting firm, in 2008 with a pilot conducted in 2010–11 to test the recommendations arising from this review. In July 2014, TfNSW implemented a revised delivery model in response to the review and pilot.

In April 2022, the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 committed to reviewing and expanding the LGRSP 'to ensure every council has access to a Road Safety Officer to better resource their road safety planning and integration in their local communities'.

Other objectives include:

- increased local council participation in the program
- funding resources are used to effectively incorporate road safety targets in local strategic planning processes
- better enablement of partnerships between councils and their local communities.

However, by April 2023, this action had not progressed, was labelled 'At Risk' and was escalated to the Community Road Safety Fund (CRSF) Governance Committee for a resolution. The reason provided to the CRSF Governance Committee for the lack of progress was that 'a rethink of the scope of works is underway to ensure the most complete delivery of this initiative'. The papers for the May 2023 CRSF Governance Committee included a reference to the escalation but there was no record of any action taken to mitigate the risk.

2.4 Impact measurement

TfNSW has implemented measures to reduce road trauma across the state but has not assessed the effectiveness of these initiatives in reducing road trauma in regional New South Wales

TfNSW has implemented initiatives to reduce road trauma across New South Wales. Investment decisions have been supported by an evidence-base that includes:

- community and stakeholder consultation
- trauma analysis
- research of best practice countermeasures
- modelling of the plan initiatives, including lives saved and economic savings.

Since 2017, TfNSW has engaged the Monash University Accident Research Centre (MUARC) to produce baseline models of road trauma trends that could be used to predict likely trends in New South Wales. This was done by assessing research and data from several countries and Australian jurisdictions where similar initiatives have been employed.

The results were then used to predict the impact of these trends on road trauma, socio-demographic and economic variables and expenditure data in New South Wales. The estimated impacts arising from this research was used to support the investment case for new road safety plans and additional interventions.

To further support the development of the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026, TfNSW also undertook its own modelling of countermeasures necessary to achieve the 2030 trauma reduction targets and the 2050 zero trauma target.

However, TfNSW has not undertaken an integrated assessment of the impact of its own initiatives on road trauma reductions. TfNSW has undertaken some evaluations of specific initiatives, but these have been as stand-alone evaluations which are not integrated across the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 and do not report on the effectiveness of the plan as a whole in reducing road trauma in regional New South Wales.

TfNSW has carried out, or commissioned, at least 17 evaluations of specific road safety initiatives since 2013. However, it is unable to demonstrate the degree to which its initiatives, as a whole, have prevented fatalities and serious injuries. Exhibit 16, below, provides an overview of the key evaluations undertaken by TfNSW.

Of the 17 completed evaluations undertaken:

- 6 (35%) provide an assessment as to the impact of specific initiatives on road trauma reduction
- 2 (12%) provide an assessment of the impact of a specific initiative on road trauma in regional NSW
- 5 (29%) were research reports rather than evaluations.

There is no systematic and integrated analysis of the combined impact or contribution of initiatives and interventions in New South Wales road safety strategies and plans since 2012 on road trauma reduction outcomes in regional New South Wales.

Exhibit 16: Key evaluations undertaken by TfNSW

Evaluation	Date*	Author	Road trauma impact measured	Regional Road trauma impact measured
Annual Speed Camera Program Reviews	2011–2020	Internal	✓	–
Annual Progress Reports	2013–2021	Internal	!	!
Safer Roads Program, Kings Highway case study	March 2013	Internal	!	!
Australian Graduated Licensing Scheme Framework	October 2014	Internal	!	!
Safer Roads Program, Oxley Highway case study	July 2015	Internal	!	!
Evaluation of 40 km/h speed limits and zones	June 2017	Martin Small Consulting	✓	✓
Safer Roads Preliminary Outcome Evaluation from TfNSW's Regional and Outer Metropolitan operating division	2017–2021	Internal	✓	✓
Safer Drivers Course	November 2018	UNSW / MUARC	!	!
Older driver licensing evaluation	November 2018	The George Institute	✓	!
Mandatory Alcohol Interlock Program	August 2019	Internal	!	!
Motorcycle Graduated Licensing Scheme	October 2019	Internal	✓	!
Drink and drug drive reform, monitoring report	July 2020–January 2022	Internal	!	!

Evaluation	Date*	Author	Road trauma impact measured	Regional Road trauma impact measured
Vehicle safety, autonomous emergency braking and forward collision avoidance	August 2020	MUARC	!	!
Drink and drug drive reform, operational review	November 2020	Internal	!	!
Vehicle safety, electronic stability control	August 2021	MUARC	!	!
Fresnel lens vehicle technology	August 2022	Internal	!	!
Evaluation of the NSW Pedestrian Protection Program	August 2023	Internal	✓	−

Key:

✓ Road trauma impact for initiative measured and reported.

! No measurement or reporting of road trauma impact.

− Road trauma impact measured but not reported.

Source: Audit Office of New South Wales analysis of TfNSW evaluations provided by the agency.

TfNSW has undertaken post implementation reviews and evaluations for advertising and capability development campaigns. However, as above, these reviews did not evaluate the impact on road trauma reduction.[3]

The NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 consists of 13 major initiatives, called priority actions. Each priority action has a project summary which details objectives, resourcing, milestones and other details. None of the project summaries include specific road trauma reduction targets or key performance indicators.

Only the Towards Zero Safer Roads Program (which is not listed as a priority action) gives a measure of how much its road safety infrastructure and speed management improvements are expected to contribute to the road trauma reduction target in the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026. These activities are expected to contribute to 60% the total 2026 road trauma reduction target. To date, there is no evidence of whether these road safety infrastructure and speed management improvements are on track to achieve this goal.

The absence of targets makes it difficult to determine the impact on road trauma. This, in turn, makes it difficult to measure the impact of the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 as a whole.

[3] The audit team has not audited the performance of individual road safety measures and it is too early to consider the impact of interventions. Instead, the audit has reviewed available evaluation and post implementation reviews.

TfNSW's Safety Performance Indicators measure risk factors, but less than a third are being measured and reported

TfNSW defined 16 Safety Performance Indicators (SPIs) in the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 as 'key measures of risk in the road system, what we need the road system to look like—across road users, roads, vehicles and travel speeds—to create safe mobility for customers'.

The SPIs and the linked focus areas for each are shown in Exhibit 17, below.

Exhibit 17: Safety Performance Indicators

Focus area	Safety Performance Indicators
Safe roads and streets	Share of travel on state country roads with median barriers *
	Share of km on state country roads with audio tactile line marking *
	Share of length with safer speeds on local and low volume rural roads (80 km/h)*
	Share of urban roads with safe speed limits of 40 km/h or below ^
	Share of intersections on country roads designed at no more than 70 km/h *
	Share of at-grade urban intersections designed at no more than 50 km/h
Safe vehicles	Share of registered 5-star cars (light vehicles) in the vehicle fleet ^
	Share of 5-star cars in new car sales ^
Speed	Average speed on 80–110 km/h country roads *
	Share of vehicles compliant with speed limit on country roads (100–110 km/h) * ^
	Share of vehicles compliant with speed limit on urban roads (40–60 km/h) ^
Non-impaired motorists	Share of sober drivers
	Share of non-drug drivers
	Share of motorists who do not drive while tired
Seat belt and protective gear	Share of seatbelt wear in light vehicles
	Share of riders wearing specific protective gear

Notes:

* SPI specifically refers to regional roads.

^ SPI is currently reported.

Source: Audit Office of New South Wales research based on NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026.

Only six out of 16 (31%) of TfNSW's road safety performance indicators are specific to regional New South Wales although others apply to regional and metropolitan roads alike. Only one performance indicator (measuring compliance with speed limits on regional roads) is currently reported.

TfNSW has not provided timelines on when all safety performance indicators will be measured or when targets will be set noting that these are a work in progress within the timeframe of the current NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026.

The SPIs have been rolled out inconsistently across the 12 priority programs of the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026.[4] Four of the priority programs do not use any SPIs. These four programs are to:

- review and expand Local Government Road Safety Program
- develop an online Towards Zero Collaboration Hub for councils
- deliver the online Learner Education and Testing Platform
- deliver a new online NSW Road Safety Education Centre.

TfNSW advised the audit that targets will be set for the SPIs but, to date, none have been and TfNSW has not provided any information about when this might occur.

[4] A list of these programs can be found in Appendix two.

TfNSW's annual road safety reports do not adequately address road trauma issues in regional New South Wales

TfNSW's submission to the NSW Parliament's Staysafe Committee's inquiry into speed limits and road safety in regional New South Wales (2022–23) included information on several regional-specific issues. This submission is the only substantiative document relating to regional New South Wales that TfNSW has provided to the audit team.

Other documentation reviewed by the audit team, including strategies and action plans, do not effectively address the magnitude of the road trauma challenge by regions and LGAs over time. Nor do they reveal what TfNSW and its partner agencies (NSW Police Force, NSW Health etc) are doing to address regional-specific 'hot spots', progress that is being made, and how they are planning to address residual risks.

TfNSW provides annual road safety progress reports to Parliament. Each progress report is an overview of all initiatives and programs delivered to improve road safety through the Community Road Safety Fund.

The progress reports highlight some major trends impacting on road safety statistics. These trends include:

- changes in population
- ageing population
- increases in the number of vehicles registered
- increases economic activity (and associated impacts of COVID-19)
- increases in the freight task (road vs. road and heavy vehicles vs. light vehicles), which is linked to workplace health and safety
- changes in travel patterns.

However, the audit team has not seen any analysis in these reports of the impacts of these trends on road trauma in regional areas.

The impact of safety initiatives for heavy vehicles in regional areas is not measured

Heavy vehicles (defined by TfNSW as heavy rigid and articulated trucks) represented only 2.2% of registered motor vehicles in New South Wales in 2021, but were involved in 17% of fatalities on NSW roads between 2018 and 2022.

Between 2018–2022, the number of heavy vehicle-related fatalities on regional roads reduced from 18 in 2018 to 16 in 2022.

However, in the year to 13 July 2023 there was a 45.4% increase in heavy vehicle-related fatalities on roads in regional NSW compared to the average of the past three years.

TfNSW's initiatives for addressing the risks of heavy vehicle-related fatalities include:

- advocating the mandatory introduction of new technologies in all new heavy vehicles
- promoting the adoption of minimum requirements for blind spots, underruns, lane departure and collision warnings
- educating all road users on safe interactions around heavy vehicles and their unique driving factors.

TfNSW has not measured the impact of these initiatives on heavy vehicle-related road trauma. The annual NSW Road Safety Progress Reports provide details on recent initiatives but it does not report on their impact.

The impact of safety initiatives on most at-risk road users in regional areas is not measured

TfNSW Annual Progress Reports detail initiatives with at-risk road users, including Aboriginal people, pedestrians, school children, and heavy vehicles.

However, the focus is on reporting on specific initiatives and not on measuring impacts on particular vulnerable populations, nor any regional areas. Further, the only assessment that measured the impact of specific initiatives on road trauma was on pedestrian safety, and that assessment did not provide any information on the impact on pedestrian safety in regional NSW.

Exhibit 18, below, provides details on issues pertinent to three groups of at-risk road users.

Exhibit 18: Issues for at-risk road users (using matched data)

Aboriginal people in NSW:[5]

TfNSW has provided the audit team with an analysis that reveals that the percentage of:

- fatalities amongst Aboriginal people has risen from two per cent in 2005 to almost ten per cent in 2022
- serious injuries amongst Aboriginal people has risen from four per cent in 2005 to around seven per cent in 2022.

TfNSW advised the audit that fatalities and serious injuries are typically higher on regional roads compared with metropolitan roads (using the matched data), which also reflects the distribution of the Aboriginal population in New South Wales at this time.

TfNSW added road safety for Aboriginal communities into the Safe Systems framework in 2012. At that time, TfNSW reported that Aboriginal people were involved in road deaths at three times the rate of non-Aboriginal people. This was attributed to a variety of reasons including:

- the tendency to live in remote or rural areas where risk factors are higher than in built up areas
- the need to travel long distances to support extended families
- using older, less safe vehicles.

Initiatives to tackle this issue have included:

- increased opportunities for driver licensing
- culturally appropriate education materials
- partnerships with local communities, other agencies, and councils to reduce unauthorised driving
- improved use of data and reporting on the road safety challenges facing Aboriginal communities.

TfNSW has not reported on the impact of its initiatives to tackle this issue, either at a state-wide level or in regional NSW, in its Annual Progress Reports or in other TfNSW research. It is also not clear whether road safety for Aboriginal people is still a separate pillar of the Safe Systems framework, as it has not been mentioned as a separate area of focus in any TfNSW materials since 2012. TfNSW advises that the Safe Systems framework applies to all residents of NSW.

Pedestrians:

Exhibit 12 above, showed that 33% of fatalities in Greater Sydney involve pedestrians, which is more than any other group of road users. Further, 15% of serious injuries in Greater Sydney also involve pedestrians. In regional NSW, the percentages are nine per cent and six per cent for fatalities and serious injuries respectively.

Between 2017–2022, pedestrian fatalities declined by nine per cent in New South Wales. However, in 2023 (year to date to 20 August), pedestrian fatalities increased by 40.7% compared to 2022.

TfNSW found a 43%–47% reduction in pedestrian-involved crashes involving fatalities or serious injuries from pedestrian protection initiatives since 2015. However, results from regional NSW were not included in this reporting. TfNSW's Annual Progress Report includes details on initiatives to reduce road trauma for pedestrians but does not report outcomes.

[5] TfNSW advised the audit that preliminary data from the most recent 2021 Census noted a significant increase in the number of New South Wales residents identifying as Aboriginal people (up by 29%) compared with the 2016 Census now account for 3.4% in the 2021 Census – this trend would be expected to flow through to an increase in health records for Aboriginality.

School Zones and Crossings:

Between 2018–2022, there was a 50% reduction in the total number of fatalities in school zones in New South Wales. However, over the same period, the level of fatalities in in school zones in regional areas remained unchanged at three.

Initiatives to reduce road trauma in school zones include:

- specific advertising campaigns
- new smartphone apps
- the school crossing supervisor program.

TfNSW has not measured the impact of school zone initiatives on these reductions. Its annual NSW Road Safety Progress Reports provide details on these initiatives but not report on their impact.

Source: Audit Office of New South Wales analysis of NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026, NSW Road Safety Progress Report 2021, TfNSW evaluations and data.

3. TfNSW's use of data to manage road safety

3.1 Data sources to manage road safety

TfNSW uses a range of government data to support decision-making and to report progress against state-wide targets

TfNSW uses data from multiple other government agencies in addition to its own data on licensing and registration from the Driver and Vehicle System (DRIVES) and the Vehicle Specification Database. Government data sources used by TfNSW are shown in Exhibit 19, below:

Exhibit 19: Government data sources used by TfNSW

Agency	Specific data source used
NSW Police	Computerised Operational Police System (COPS) (includes self-reported incidents since 2014)
NSW Health	NSW Admitted Patient Data Collection (APDC) Emergency Department Data Collection (EDDC) NSW Trauma Registry Minimum Data Set (MDS) (NSW Health's Institute of Trauma and Injury Management)
NSW Ambulance Service	Computer-Aided Dispatch (CAD) electronic Medical Record (eMR) Patient Health Care Record (PHCR) data
ACT Health	Admitted Patient Care data (ACT APC) Emergency Department Information System Calvary Hospital data
Government Insurance agencies including iCare and the State Insurance Regulatory Authority (SIRA):	Claims Register and Statistical Database Personal Injury Register Universal Claims Database (UCD) WorkCover Workers Compensation Data Set Lifetime Care data
Australian Bureau of Statistics	Data on Population, Vehicles and local government areas
Other agencies	NSW Births, Deaths and Marriages mortality data Cause of Death Unit Record File (COD URF) (previously ABS-NSW Deaths)

Source: Audit Office of New South Wales analysis of data related documentation from TfNSW.

TfNSW has started using data from sources outside government for proactive decision-making on road improvements and predictive analytics

TfNSW is beginning to use data from sources outside the government to design, prioritise or evaluate its approach to road safety. It has begun to use data from the Australian Road Assessment Program (AusRAP) which rates the safety of roads across NSW. This data reports risk factors for 18,000 km of state managed roads.

AusRAP uses star ratings to measure the inherent safety of road infrastructure including features that prevent and/or reduce the severity of crashes. This involves measurement of 60 risk attributes for every 100m of road including:

- safety features such as dual lane divided carriageways, good line marking and wide lanes
- risk factors such as:
  - single lanes and undivided roads
  - poor line markings
  - trees, poles, and steep embankments close to the edge of the road.

Use of AusRAP is intended to shift decision-making in TfNSW to a more predictive approach based on risk factors to identify potential crash locations. The current approach is to treat roads after crashes have occurred. The data from AusRAP is being used by TfNSW to inform priority sections of roads across NSW to target for upgrades through the NSW Safer Roads Program.

TfNSW is in the early stages of considering using additional data sources for its road safety analytics functions. The NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 lists two initiatives designed to expand its data sources.

One initiative involves a proof of concept/pilot collaborating with TfNSW's data scientists using existing crash data and vehicle telematics data to predict future trauma. Telematics data can be used to determine correlations between driver actions such as swerving and excessive braking and trauma suffered.

The other initiative involves the development of a Road Safety Research Fund to engage with research bodies and academia for more innovative road safety research.

There is evidence, both from within Australia and overseas, that the use of external data can improve the analysis of road trauma.

In its modelling work for TfNSW, the Monash University Accident Research Centre used population growth, socio-demographic and economic data in its road safety models. MUARC found that these factors impact road trauma trends due to increased travel exposure and economic activity.

Another recent MUARC study found that existing methods of determining speed as a cause, mainly through police reports, underestimated the extent of speeding-related crashes. The use of car-based technology such as GPS is promising but needs to be more widely used to fulfil its promise as a source of network-wide data.

The Swedish Transport Administration agency (Trafikverket) has been analysing external factors since 2020 to improve the interpretation of road trauma data. This analysis includes external data such as traffic volumes and flow, traffic mix including new types of vehicles, and the impact of socio-economic features such as unemployment, economic growth and the age profile of road users.

The Dutch Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management has been trialling the use of data from connected vehicles to improve data on the state of the road network and to measure 'near-accident data'. The Ministry is using this data to provide more proactive reporting of risks and to increase the types of data it uses to manage road safety.

This audit has not determined whether these practices have resulted in improved road safety outcomes.

TfNSW also uses data from modelling and research that is commissioned from academic institutions to support strategy development and refinement of reporting. However, the department has no plans at this time to investigate the use of other data sources that may enable more nuanced data insights for management decisions about road safety.

3.2 Validation of data from other NSW Government agencies

TfNSW has effective and documented procedures for validating and securing data

TfNSW uses documented procedures to improve the accuracy of data provided by the NSW Police Force. TfNSW matches the data from the NSW Police Force with data from NSW Health and assesses the accuracy of the data by examining other factors about the crash including:

- location data
- speed limits and school zones
- traffic user type and vehicle details/functions
- Aboriginality of individuals involved in the crash
- use of restraints, helmet, airbags.

TfNSW corrects errors or omissions in the data, if possible, using the other data sources listed above.

The security of this data is governed by a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between TfNSW and the NSW Police Force. Clause 6.2 of the MoU states that the parties comply with the Commonwealth Protective Security Policy Framework only to the extent that it aligns with the NSW Information Classification, Labelling and Handling Guidelines in relation to the use and disclosure of any Confidential Information obtained under this MoU.

No issues relating to the security of the information have been reported to the CRSF Governance Committee, which provides governance and assurance over the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 and the Community Road Safety Fund.

Data for serious injuries cannot always be matched to a Police record as the police may not have attended an incident where no-one died. In this case, the data is subject to the protocols of the Health Linkage project which was established in 2013. The protocol details processes for the use of NSW Health data including:

- data/research governance
- ethics considerations and committees
- access controls
- confidentiality and privacy
- data storage and retention
- risk management.

Data from NSW Health that is received under the Health Linkage project undergoes a validation and matching process before it is added to the crash data held by TfNSW. The process includes validating the data twice once all the extracts have been received from the different agencies providing data to identify and correct any errors. Both validation steps use data administrators from the Centre for Road Safety in TfNSW.

The security of data handled under the NSW Health linkage project is subject to existing TfNSW Information Technology standards and building security rules.

The protocol also states that it ensures all researchers:

- are aware of their responsibilities in relation to data security and usage in their training
- sign an agreement to conduct their research ethically and according to project procedures and conditions of approval.

No risks or issues relating to data validation or security have been raised in the progress reports for:

- the NSW Road Safety Plan 2021 (which date back to April 2020)
- NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 (from April 2022 to May 2023)
- the minutes of the Community Road Safety Fund Governance Committee (since January 2022).

4. Managing the Road Safety Program

4.1 Accountability for road safety

TfNSW is responsible for managing road safety outcomes across NSW, including supporting local government

Schedule 1 of the *Transport Administration Act 1988* states that TfNSW has a general function for planning and policy for the road network. The planning and policy function includes advice, assistance, and recommendations to the Minister in connection with the development of policy for promoting road safety.

Specifically, Part 2 clause 4 of Schedule 1 of the *Transport Administration Act 1988* provides in relation to 'Road safety, road travel efficiency and road traffic management':

1. TfNSW may:
    a) conduct testing, research and investigations in connection with promoting or improving road safety, road travel efficiency and road traffic management, and
    b) develop and implement programs, projects, strategies and campaigns for promoting or improving road safety, road travel efficiency and road traffic management, and
    c) provide advice and assistance to public and local authorities for the promotion or improvement of road safety, road travel efficiency and road traffic management.
2. In this clause, road safety refers to safety in connection with roads, road vehicles and all aspects of road usage.

Section 7(4) of the *Roads Act 1993* states that the council of a local government area is the roads authority for all public roads within the area, other than any freeway or Crown road, and any public road for which some other public authority is declared by the regulations to be the roads authority.

As discussed in detail in Chapter 2, TfNSW established the LGRSP to assist councils with safety on local roads. However, only 52% of local councils in regional New South Wales currently participate in the LGRSP compared to 84% of metropolitan councils. TfNSW advised the audit that it is aware of the relatively low participation rates but notes that the program is voluntary and attempts at increasing participation have been intermittent. The audit team identified that local council participation in regional New South Wales has not increased since 2017 – that is, in the six years to 2023 – and therefore the program is at risk of being ineffective as a support measure.

TfNSW's position on developing targets and specific strategies for regional New South Wales arises from the concept of jurisdictional accountability

TfNSW advised the audit that it 'designs road safety strategic plans around the jurisdictional accountability for management of safety systems at the National, State or local government level'. TfNSW notes the jurisdictional accountability approach aligns with that adopted by other jurisdictions, including internationally.

In Australia's federal system, government responsibilities for road safety vary across jurisdictions. However, there is a complex structure of responsibilities for road safety which is not as clear cut as TfNSW's use of the term 'jurisdictional accountability' might suggest.

Exhibit 20 below, summarises the main responsibilities across the jurisdictional levels with respect to road safety in Australia.

Exhibit 20: Levels of jurisdictional accountability

Level	Accountability
Australian Government	• Regulation of safety standards for new vehicles • Allocation of infrastructure funding across the national highway and local road networks • National coordination and leadership across all levels of government to improve road safety outcomes • Delivery and management of national road safety programs and projects to address the road safety priorities identified in the National Road Safety Strategy • Collaboration with all levels of government and industry.
State Governments	• Fund, plan, design and operate the road network in their jurisdiction • Manage vehicle registration and driver licensing • Regulate and enforce road user behaviour • Provide post-crash care through their healthcare networks • Support programs and research to address road safety issues • Maintain own road safety strategies and plans • Shared responsibility for implementing work towards road safety strategy targets.
Local Governments	• Fund, plan, design and operate the road networks and footpaths in their local areas • Engage with communities on the safe use of roads and other public spaces • Implement community health and safety initiatives to improve road safety.

Source: Audit Office of New South Wales research based on Commonwealth and NSW legislation.

Whilst some responsibilities for road safety are potentially duplicated across three levels of government, there are also potential gaps. Specifically:

- accountabilities for regional areas are not precisely defined
- there is substantial dependence on local government for achieving road safety outcomes, but their participation rates in TfNSW's Local Government Road Safety Program are relatively low in regional New South Wales
- successful implementation of TfNSW's strategies is dependent on a number of government agencies that have their own operational priorities.

TfNSW must work more proactively with other agencies to achieve its goals

TfNSW needs to work in partnership with other agencies (especially the NSW Police Force and NSW Heath) and local councils to achieve the state-wide trauma reduction targets. When these agencies face other operational challenges like the response to the COVID-19 pandemic, this may impact road safety outcomes.

Exhibit 21, below, gives an indication of the extent of the collaboration required, listing agencies and entities spanning national, state and local tiers of government and including the private sector.

Exhibit 21: Entities required to support New South Wales road safety initiatives

Activity	Detail	Entity
Enforcement	Baseload enforcement operations relating to speed limits, distraction, drug and alcohol use and responsible driving	NSW Police Force (operational control) NSW Treasury (additional funding requests)
	Management and deployment of requests for additional enforcement resources	
	Penalty notification and imposition	Revenue NSW
	Heavy vehicle regulation (over 4.5 tonnes gross vehicle mass)	Heavy Vehicle National Regulator
	Enhanced enforcement levels (in addition to baseload enforcement operations)	NSW Police Force
Legislative and regulatory change	Changes to laws including drink and drug driving, post offence education, extension of automated enforcement	NSW Government NSW Parliament
Infrastructure funding and delivery	Safer Roads (current and Towards Zero programs)	Infrastructure NSW (assurance) TfNSW ROM (for regional installations) Local councils (delivery and funding applications)
	Blackspots programs	Australian Government (funding) TfNSW ROM division (for oversight and regional installations) Local councils (funding applications)
	Other road safety and stimulus funding packages	Australian Government (funding) NSW Treasury (oversight)
Communications and engagement	Community engagement	Local Councils and Road Safety Officers
	Education in schools programs	Through the Department of Education and Training and governing bodies for non-government schools
Post crash response	Transportation and first responders	NSW Ambulance Service NSW Ambulance Aeromedical Service Other first responders include fire services, State Emergency Services, local emergency management functions, the Royal Flying Doctor Service
	Trauma treatment	NSW Health
Safer vehicle uptake	Development, regulation, purchase and use of safer vehicles	Vehicle manufacturers Australian Government Fleet owners (including in NSW Government agencies) Consumers

Source: Audit Office of New South Wales analysis of NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026.

TfNSW has a range of memoranda of understanding used to manage these relationships and uses the Community Road Safety Fund to support partners in fulfilling their roles. It also uses the CRSF Governance Committee and Road Safety Advisory Council to support this process.

However, TfNSW does not have a framework and process by which it proactively manages the risks associated with many partners with multiple roles that contribute to road safety outcomes. This includes an assessment of the potential impact on road trauma reduction targets where a partner misses targets, milestone dates or other requirements.

TfNSW advises the audit that 'the systems and processes of external agencies in their management of their areas of responsibility in road safety is the responsibility of each individual agency'.

TfNSW's partnership with the NSW Police Force is critical to enforcing safety initiatives focused on behavioural change

TfNSW provides additional funding to the NSW Police Force for enhanced enforcement operations through the Community Road Safety Fund. This funding is for state-wide and regional operations in addition to baseline hours. Although the NSW Police Force plays a broad role in enforcing road safety laws, under the enhanced enforcement operations program, the sole target is for 200,000 mobile drug tests per year.

This target was not met in 2021, 2022 and the first quarter of 2023. The risk was first raised to the Community Road Safety Fund Governance Committee in August 2022. The monthly target was exceeded in April 2023.

TfNSW advised the audit that other operational priorities such as the response to COVID-19 have reduced the capacity of the NSW Police Force to meet this target.

TfNSW has not measured the impact on road trauma from the delays in achieving this target.

Specific road safety initiatives targeted to regional areas have not been implemented or expanded

Text removed pursuant to section 36A of the *Government Sector Audit Act 1983* (NSW), in compliance with a Premier's certificate preventing the publication of this information.

The Automated Enforcement Strategy offers relatively little enforcement in regional areas

One of the initiatives in the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 was the implementation of the Automated Enforcement Strategy which came into effect in November 2022. Automated enforcement is the use of technology, particularly cameras, to capture and record violations of road rules and its associated data. Automated enforcement supplements road safety enforcement conducted by the NSW Police Force and is used to address speeding, red-light running, illegal mobile phone use, unregistered driving and to assist with fatigue compliance among heavy vehicle drivers.

This program is intended to provide a framework for the management of automated enforcement programs in New South Wales, to assist innovation in this space, and to help reduce road trauma. Further details on this program can be found in Appendix two.

However, in New South Wales, the Automated Enforcement Strategy has a strong metropolitan focus with the majority of red light and fixed speed cameras being located in metropolitan areas, as illustrated in Exhibit 22, below.

Exhibit 22: Percentage of automated enforcement locations in regional New South Wales (2018–2023)

Camera type	NSW total	Regional NSW total	Regional NSW (%)
Red light speed cameras	201	19	9.5%
Fixed speed cameras	109	40	36.7%
Mobile speed cameras *	Locations are not fixed		--
Average speed (point to point) cameras	29	25	86.2%
Mobile phone detection cameras	11	6	54.5%

* Mobile speed cameras do not have fixed locations which makes it impossible to determine how many are located in regional areas as this changes continuously.

Source: Audit Office of New South Wales analysis on TfNSW Regional Camera report and NSW Speed Camera Programs 2021 (February 2023).

As the Exhibit 22 shows, average speed cameras are the only camera type overwhelmingly located in regional areas. These cameras apply to heavy vehicles only and are positioned on major freight routes, which are usually outside built up areas. The distances between cameras can be as short as one km (Sydney Harbour Tunnel)[6] or as long 94 km (Newell Highway) depending on the location. To date, New South Wales is the only jurisdiction in Australia that limits the use point-to-point cameras to heavy vehicles alone.

In comparison, red light cameras and fixed speed cameras, which make up 89% of the cameras employed in New South Wales (310 out of 350 cameras), are mostly located in metropolitan areas.

Another initiative in the Automated Enforcement Strategy is to extend the use of mobile phone detection cameras to identify non-use of seat belts. Non-use of seat belts is twice as prevalent in the deaths of drivers in regional NSW compared to metropolitan areas. TfNSW advised the audit that it is waiting for the passing of the Bill extending the use of cameras to detect non-use of seat belts before rolling out this program.

However, given the relatively low presence of police enforcement in regional New South Wales, the Automated Enforcement Strategy has done little to provide additional enforcement in regional New South Wales.

The resolution of critical risks is not clear despite a documented process for escalation

The NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 uses monthly progress reports to identify risks for individual initiatives. In March 2023, the progress reports introduced a new status for initiatives, ‘At Risk – Escalate to Governance Committee’. The committee referred to is the Community Road Safety Fund Governance Committee.

The purpose of this committee is to provide governance and assurance over the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 and Community Road Safety Fund. This includes overseeing implementation and risk management of the initiatives required to achieve road trauma reduction targets.

Since this change occurred in March 2023, nine initiatives with the ‘At Risk – Escalate to Governance Committee’ status have been raised.

The Community Road Safety Fund Governance Committee included a risk register in its recent papers. However, the list is incomplete and does not include all escalated risks. For example, three initiatives with this rating in April 2023 were not included on the risk register in May 2023. As a result, it is unclear whether progress has been made on mitigating or resolving these risks or not.

[6] The Sydney Harbour Tunnel as a whole is just under 2.3 km from the northern portals to the southern portals (entrances/exits). The average speed cameras within the tunnel are approximately one km apart.

There is also potential for other risks to not be escalated at all.

Risks associated with the ability to triple mobile speed camera enforcement hours to 21,000 per month have not been raised, let alone escalated since the measure was announced in November 2020 by the then government. This measure was intended to increase the deterrent effect of cameras designed to detect speeding across the network to support the perception of 'anywhere, anytime' enforcement.

However, in the 32 months since announcement, the target has been reached only once (January 2022). In 2022 the target was missed by an average of 22% each month and in 2023 is averaging 26.6% below target to date. However, there is no record of a risk being raised in TfNSW's progress reporting or in the Community Road Safety Fund Governance Committee minutes. As this underperformance was not noted as a risk, it is unclear how the initiative proposed to:

- remediate the factors impacting the gaps
- determine how urgently was needed
- measure the impact on road trauma reduction caused by underperformance and delays.

TfNSW advised the audit that 'various factors, most notably flooding and policy changes relating to signage requirements and visibility requirements for the program, have resulted in fewer enforcement hours delivered than the target of 21,000 hours per month. In June and July 2023, more than 19,000 hours have been delivered per month'.

4.2 Governance

TfNSW has defined a framework for the governance of the NSW 2026 Road Safety Action Plan but does not have a consolidated management plan

TfNSW developed its NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 Governance Framework to support implementation and ways of working across different initiatives. This governance structure provides a three-tier structure, outlining responsibilities, decision making bodies and the process of risk escalation. The three tiers are:

1. project delivery teams for the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 actions/initiatives
2. program level steering committees
3. NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 and Community Road Safety Fund Governance Committee.

This governance structure also provides guidelines for how TfNSW is to structure programs under the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026, which are listed in Appendix two. It provides details about roles, responsibilities, and escalations.

All priority programs under the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 are following this guidance and also have an individual program plan that defines objectives, scope, outcomes, milestones, roles, KPIs and SPIs and evaluation requirements.

However, TfNSW has not created a consolidated management plan that brings together the individual plans from the priority programs. Consolidation could assist in understand dependencies between the priorities and how they impact on schedules, milestones, and resourcing.

There is also no program-wide schedule or timeline for the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 that tracks key milestones for priority programs and their inter-relationships. Monthly progress reporting provides details on progress on risks and achievements. However, without a schedule, there are no insights as to the impact a delay can have on achieving milestones in the Plan.

There is no consolidated, public reporting on total road safety funding allocated to regional New South Wales

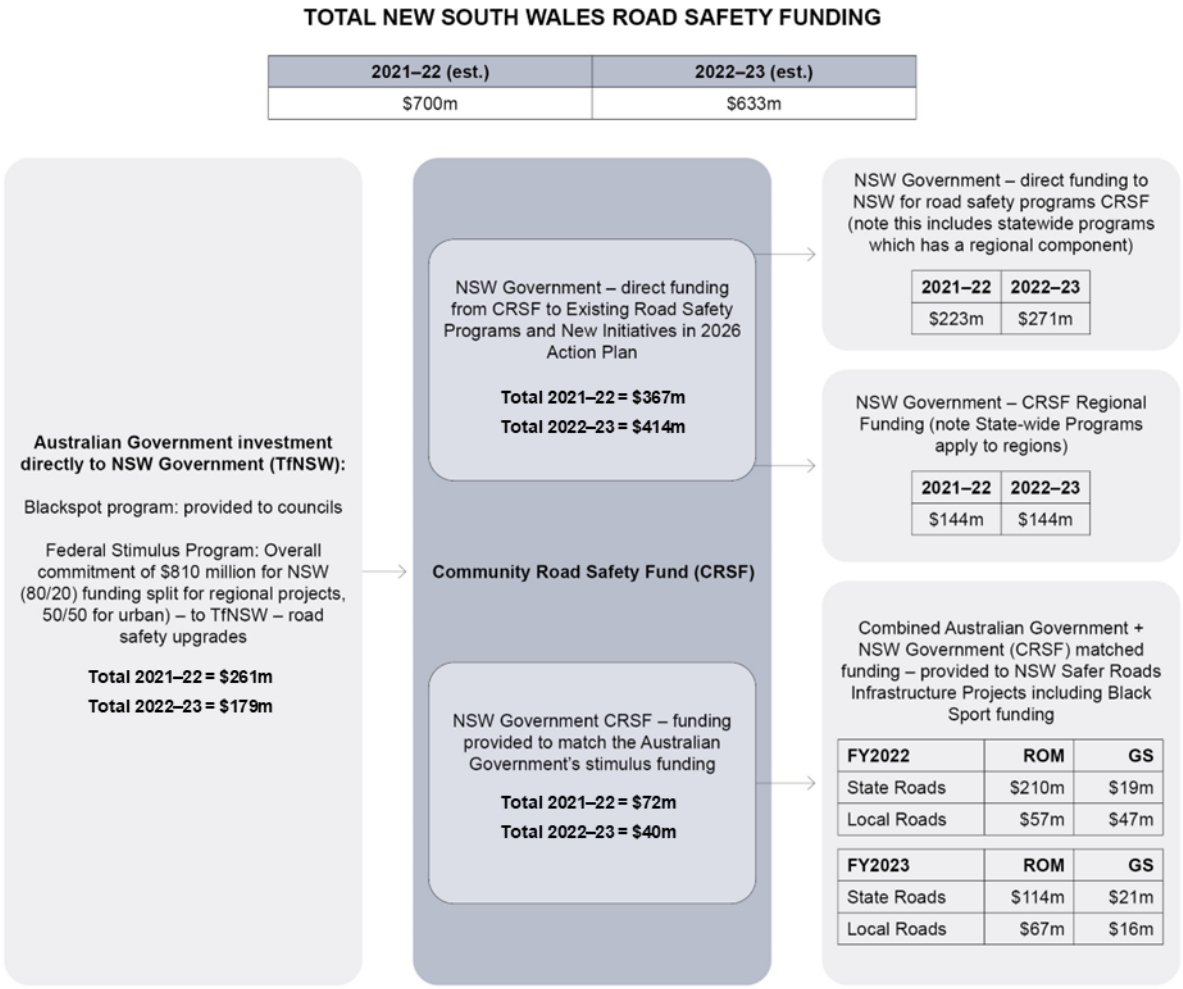
Although Annual Progress Reports on road safety provide an annual account of expenditure from the Community Road Safety Fund, TfNSW does not publicly report on road safety funding allocated to regional New South Wales each year. Information on road safety funding may be found in various sources including NSW Budget papers, the CRSF annual progress reports, and media announcements.

TfNSW advised the audit that the estimated amounts were $700 million in 2021–22 and $633 million in 2022–23, which included contributions made by the Australian Government.

TfNSW also advised that, of the $700 million in funding in 2021–22, $411 million (or 58.7%) was directed to regional New South Wales.

Exhibit 23, below, shows the sources of direct, matched, and external funding for New South Wales road safety programs and how they are directed to the Community Road Safety Fund or to road safety infrastructure projects on state and local roads.

Exhibit 23: NSW Road Safety Funding: sources of funding and recipients[7]



Source: TfNSW presented in a format designed by the Audit Office of New South Wales.

[7] The 2022–23 NSW Budget allocated $24.1 billion to the Transport and Infrastructure cluster. Of this total amount, $880 million was allocated for road safety in 2022–23. The budget forecast a total $1.6 billion in recurrent expenses and $0.8 billion in capital expenditure over the period from 2022–23 to 2025–26 to continue NSW and Australian Government investments in road safety.

Exhibit 23, above, reflects full year actuals of $633 million whereas the $880 million included in the NSW 2022–23 Budget papers reflected the original budget announced in June 2022. Additional budget adjustments were made in-year to align funding against a view of program deliverables which resulted in a revised budget.

In the 2023–24 Budget, the NSW Government allocated $2.6 billion in funding across the next four years to the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2026. The Budget included:

- $390 million to establish the Regional Emergency Road Repair Fund to assist 95 regional councils in repairing roads damaged by recent weather events and natural disasters (with allocations based on the kilometres of Regional and Local Roads managed in their LGA ($/km)
- $334 million to establish the Regional Roads Fund to build new roads in rural and regional areas.

It should be noted that, prior to the 2023–24 NSW Budget announcement, there was already a $500 million Regional and Local Repair Program (RLRRP) funded by the NSW Government. This program was established 'so all local councils across NSW have access to funding to repair damaged Local and Regional Roads under their care and responsibility'. This grant funded program is administered by TfNSW. The RLRRP was made available to all 128 NSW councils and the two eligible entities – the Unincorporated Far West and the Lord Howe Island Board. All were invited to apply for funding 'to undertake vital repairs on their Local and Regional road network' under this program from 11 January to Friday 20 January 2023. Grant funding allocations, announced in March 2023, were provided based on the total of kilometres of the Local and Regional Road network managed in their Local Government area ($/km).

The RLRRP is in addition to a number of other grant funding programs already in place 'to support councils manage a safe and efficient road network', including the $543 million Fixing Country Roads Program, $500 million Fixing Local Roads program, the $50 million Fixing Local Roads – Pothole Repair Round, the Local Government Road Safety Program (LGRSP), and the annual Regional Road Block and REPAIR grants.

TfNSW advised that, with the exception of the LGRSP, these are road asset maintenance programs where the aim to is to restore safety on these roads to baseline levels, and these programs do not contribute towards the achievement of future trauma reduction targets.

The LGRSP is the only program from the list of road asset maintenance programs listed above to be funded by the Community Road Safety Fund.

The Community Road Safety Fund has been underspent since 2019

The Community Road Safety Fund (CRSF) was legislated in 2013, through the *Transport Administration Amendment (Community Road Safety Fund) Act 2012*, to ensure that fines from road safety camera offences are hypothecated to and reinvested for road safety purposes. TfNSW has stated that all initiatives under the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 will be funded by the CRSF. The audit did not verify this statement.

TfNSW has a forecast full year 2022–23 underspend of $104 million, of which at least $13.5 million relates to regional road safety infrastructure projects. A further underspend of $73 million was forecast but its geographic allocation has not been made. TfNSW advised the audit team that the underspend for 2022–23 is due to delays from:

- adverse weather events (such as flooding and bushfires)
- labour shortages including in regional areas
- legislation being presented to Parliament.

In the period 2014–2018, the Community Road Safety Fund was almost totally spent in each year. However, since 2019, the Fund has been consistently underspent, as shown in Exhibit 24 below:

Exhibit 24: Community Road Safety Fund (excluding Australian Government programs)

	2019–20	2020–21	2021–22	2022–May 2023 (forecast)
CRSF budget	$393m	$487m	$439m	$531m
Amount spent	$344.8m (88%)	$411.3m (84%)	$367m (84%)	$427m (80%)
Underspend	$48.2m (12%)	$75.80m (16%)	$72m (16%)	$104m (20%)

Source: Audit Office of New South Wales analysis of budget reports in CRSMS Progress Reports 2019–2023 (unaudited figures).

As at May 2023, the forecast underspend for the financial year 2023 was $104 million or 20% of the original CRSF budget.

The underspends have occurred in:

- infrastructure projects in both metropolitan and regional NSW due to weather and resourcing issues
- behavioural change programs for drink and drug driving due to delays in legislation
- campaigns – delay due to change in agency used and therefore delay in spending
- local behavioural programs – delays due to vacancies for Road Safety Officers
- engagement & education programs – delays in projects, workforce shortage and budget adjustments.

The audit has not seen evidence of how TfNSW is working to mitigate the risks causing underspends. For example, many of the delays are the result of adverse weather conditions impacting on infrastructure projects and resulting in an escalating maintenance backlog and skills shortages, both of which are likely to continue to be known risks for the foreseeable future.

TfNSW advised the audit that ‘the underspend remains in the Community Road Safety Fund and the programs are ultimately delivered’. It also advised that ‘there is no reason to expect budget management and controls will not return to pre-COVID circumstances where the annual budget, since the establishment of the Fund in 2023, was managed to expend all the available funds within each financial year’.

However, aside from the above assurances and providing information on accounting treatments (i.e., carry forwards and within year adjustments), TfNSW has provided no detail to the audit on how programs and resources are being reallocated, or how estimation models are being altered to address known and emerging risks arising from these delays.

The likely results of the underspend are delayed road safety initiatives. These, in turn, may delay achievement of significant reductions in road trauma in regional NSW. TfNSW has not measured the impact of these delays.

TfNSW advised the audit that they have identified resourcing risks on infrastructure programs that may delay the delivery of the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026. TfNSW also reports that it does not have the dedicated personnel to develop and monitor these new programs.

Further, TfNSW advised that existing resources are fully allocated to the delivery of the pre-existing commitments and programs outlined in the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026.

TfNSW has not modelled the impact of these delays on its targets for reducing fatalities and serious injuries on state-wide or regional roads.

Section two

Appendices

Appendix one – Response from Transport for NSW

Transport for NSW

NSW GOVERNMENT

Ms Margaret Crawford
Auditor General
Audit Office of NSW
GPO Box 12
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Re: Performance Audit Report into Regional Road Safety OTS23/04184

Dear Ms Crawford

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Performance Audit Report (the Report) into Regional Road Safety. Transport for NSW (TfNSW) welcomes your Office's recognition of the criticality of our work to reduce road trauma in NSW and accepts the recommendations of the audit, consistent with our commitment to continually enhance our policy settings and strategies to achieve this important outcome. Notwithstanding this, TfNSW also wishes to highlight that a number of the findings are inconsistent with the evidence TfNSW provided to the Audit Office and which is otherwise reflected in the body of the Report.

TfNSW is committed to reducing road trauma in our regional communities through the delivery of the multi-dimensional 2026 Road Safety Action Plan (the Plan). Our wide-ranging initiatives based on the internationally recognised Safe System approach include policy and legislative reforms, safer road infrastructure, safer vehicles, evaluation of data, research and evidence, while building a stronger commitment to safety through enhanced education, engagement and local programs to reduce unsafe behaviour in regional areas.

The NSW Government has set ambitious targets to reduce fatalities from crashes on our roads by 50% by 2030 and serious injuries by 30%. These state-wide targets apply to regional NSW noting that to achieve these targets we need to reduce road trauma across NSW. The setting of state-wide road safety targets is consistent with other jurisdictions and international best practice. Importantly, delivery of road safety countermeasures is tailored and applied with a focus on road user groups across all geographic locations to maximise trauma reductions. The NSW Government tables to NSW Parliament annual progress reports on road trauma outcomes which also outline expenditure of the Community Road Safety Fund, including the investment in regional NSW.

TfNSW acknowledges the merit of the Report's recommendation to publish an additional document specifically to provide insights into the Plan's measures to improve regional road safety. However, TfNSW remains committed to the current statewide trauma reduction target approach to ensure road safety strategies reflect the jurisdictional accountability for management of safety systems at the National, State or Local government level. Not only is this best practice internationally, but NSW's trauma reduction targets align with National Road Safety Strategy targets, and this alignment supports NSW to achieve its targets.

Transport for NSW
231 Elizabeth Street, Sydney NSW 2000 | PO Box K659, Haymarket NSW 1240
T 02 8202 2200 | **W** transport.nsw.gov.au | ABN 18 804 239 602

TfNSW wishes to correct the Report's reference to TfNSW advising the Audit Office that regional trauma reduction targets are not needed as the road safety countermeasures are the same for all areas of NSW. Rather, TfNSW advised during the audit that the existing approach of state-wide targets aligns with the approach adopted by other jurisdictions and is internationally recognised as best practice, the aim is to achieve a 50% reduction in fatalities in both regional and metropolitan areas. TfNSW also advised the delivery of road safety countermeasures are, as outlined above, tailored and applied with a focus on road user groups across all geographic locations to maximise trauma reductions.

Lastly, TfNSW respectfully suggests the Report does not sufficiently consider independent road trauma modelling provided to the Audit Office. The modelling demonstrates the positive impact of previous and existing road safety strategies and is based on thorough evaluations demonstrating reductions in trauma from road crashes. For example, the modelling shows that over the past decade the improvement in vehicle safety features in cars prevented 700 deaths in NSW. Better crash protection in cars as well as the new crash avoidance technologies like automatic emergency breaking and lane assist systems are making a difference as demonstrated in the modelling .

TfNSW acknowledges the Report's finding of an underspend of the Community Road Safety Fund as a result of the impact of unprecedented events including COVID-19 pandemic and recent natural disasters. A plan for mitigating these types of impacts in the future, where possible, will be developed.

TfNSW is committed to reviewing the Local Government Road Safety Program to ensure every council has access to a Road Safety Officer to better resource their road safety planning and integration in their local communities.

I enclose a more detailed response to the Report's recommendations and the actions we will be taking to implement them over the next 12 months.

Yours sincerely

Josh Murray
Secretary
Transport for NSW

24 November 2023

Transport for NSW
231 Elizabeth Street, Sydney NSW 2000 | PO Box K659, Haymarket NSW 1240
T 02 8202 2200 | **W** transport.nsw.gov.au | ABN 18 804 239 602

OFFICIAL

By November 2024, Transport for NSW should:

1. Develop a regional implementation plan to support the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026, including an integrated and systematic accountability framework to measure, analyse and publicly report annually on: a) road safety trends and insights on a sub-regional level b) specific countermeasures that are tailored to the road safety needs of regional communities and to particular sub-regional 'hotspots' c) the impact of countermeasures against road trauma reduction targets specific to regional New South Wales d) funding that is allocated to achieving road safety outcomes at a sub-regional level.
Response: Transport for NSW accepts this recommendation. TfNSW will commence work to determine its definitions of sub-regional and hotspots as referred to by the Audit Office and review its allocation of resources.

2. Develop and implement a plan to measure and mitigate the known and emerging risks causing underspends in the Community Road Safety Fund.
Response: Transport for NSW accepts this recommendation. As noted in the report from the establishment of the Community Road Safety Fund in 2013, all funding was substantially spent each year up until the unprecedented impacts of COVID and the following natural disasters impacted the delivery of programs in particular the infrastructure projects. TfNSW will design and implement a plan to monitor and measure potential underspends from known and emerging risks and to the extent possible mitigate the risk of potential for underspends, noting that being a statutory fund, the funding is still used for road safety projects in future years.

3. Expedite the review of the Local Government Road Safety Program and make recommendations to government aimed at increasing the uptake of the Program by councils in regional New South Wales.
Response: Transport for NSW accepts this recommendation. This is an existing action in the Road Safety Action Plan and will be initiated so the review is completed by November 2024.

Transport for NSW
231 Elizabeth Street, Sydney NSW 2000 | PO Box K659, Haymarket NSW 1240
T 02 8202 2200 | **W** transport.nsw.gov.au | ABN 18 804 239 602

OFFICIAL

Appendix two – The Safe Systems framework and NSW road safety strategies and plans

1. Safe Systems

The Safe Systems framework was developed in Scandinavia and the Netherlands in the late 1990s and has been taken up in many other countries worldwide since then. TfNSW has noted that the Sweden and Norway are two of the best performing countries in the world for road safety.

Traditionally, the responsibility for staying safe on our roads was placed on the individual. Under the Safe System approach businesses and organisations, road and vehicle designers, regulators and road users share this responsibility.

This fundamental shift away from a 'blame the road user' focus, to an approach that compels system providers or designers to provide an intrinsically safe traffic environment, is recognised as the key to achieving ambitious road safety outcomes.

The Safe Systems framework views road safety as a system of interactions between four different elements, as illustrated in Exhibit 25 below.

Exhibit 25: Safe Systems framework

Source: NSW Government: Towards Zero.

These four elements are:

- Safe roads: initiatives and infrastructure treatments to address road design, traffic management, the roadway and its adjoining surroundings.
- Safe speed: initiatives to set speed limits that are appropriate to the type of road and use of speed cameras including those that measure average speed cameras (in place since 2010).
- Safe vehicles: initiatives to investigate improvements to the safety standards for new vehicles, including those used by the freight industry and work with industry and the Australian Government to increase availability to the NSW market.
- Safe people: initiatives to address behaviours that create crash risks and focus on at-risk road users including children, pedestrians, bicyclists, motor cyclists and older drivers.

This approach is underpinned by the understanding that:

- People are human and sometimes make mistakes – a simple mistake should not cost anyone their life.
- Roads, roadsides, and vehicles need to be designed to minimise crashes or reduce forces if a crash happens.
- Road safety is a shared responsibility – everyone needs to make safe decisions on and around the road to prioritise safety.

In the NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012–2021, TfNSW expanded the Safe Systems framework to include two more elements which are:

- Safer heavy vehicle operation – heavy trucks are often involved in serious road trauma in New South Wales, in part because the mass of a heavy truck involved in a crash increases the severity of the crash. The NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012–2021 reported that heavy vehicles represented just 2.2%of registered motor vehicles at that time but were involved in 17% of fatalities on NSW roads between 2008 and 2010.
  - Initiatives to tackle this issue include improved compliance for speeding and fatigue with average speed cameras targeting only heavy vehicles since 2010.
- Road safety for Aboriginal communities – the NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012–2021 reported that, nationally, Aboriginal people are involved in road deaths at three times the rate of non-Aboriginal people. This is attributed to a variety of reasons including the tendency to live in remote or rural areas where risk factors are generally higher than in built up areas, the need to travel long distances to support extended families and using older, less safe vehicles.
  - Initiatives to tackle this issue include increased driver licensing opportunities, culturally appropriate education materials, partnerships with local communities, other agencies and councils to reduce levels of unauthorised driving, and improved use of data and reporting on the extent of road safety challenges facing Aboriginal communities.

TfNSW advised the audit that these two elements are still included in their Safe Systems framework although these additional elements are not mentioned in any of the material on the Towards Zero website.

2. NSW Road safety strategies and plans

NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012–2021

In December 2012, TfNSW released the NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012–2021 which was the first long-term road safety plan in New South Wales.

The NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012–2021 introduced ‘Vision Zero’, which had the end goal of no ‘death or serious injury occurring on the road transport network’ by 2050. As part of Vision Zero, TfNSW also adopted the Safe Systems framework, detailed above.

The NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012–2021 also included state-wide targets to reduce:

- fatalities and serious injuries by at least 30% by 2021 (although this was without a baseline against which to measure)
- the fatality rate to 4.3 per 100,000 population by 2016 which was first set in the NSW 2021 State Plan, the ten-year plan developed in 2011.

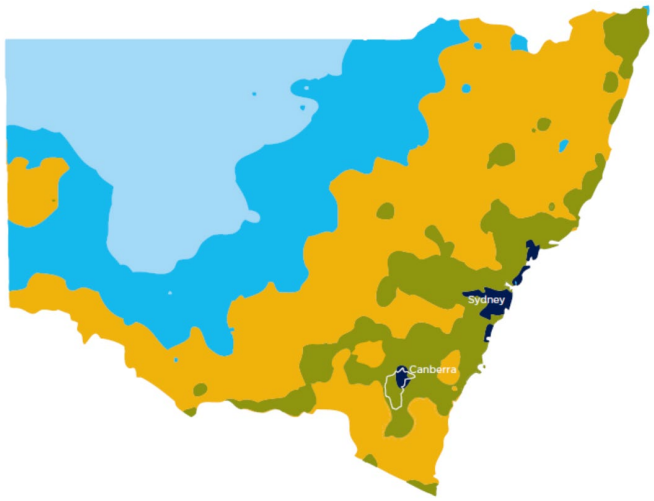
The NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012–2021 also included an action to ensure that road safety was considered throughout the design, construction, maintenance, operation and audit of the road network, and a commitment to report road safety efforts to Parliament each year. The first annual report to Parliament was in 2012.

In the NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012–2021, TfNSW classified the state into five regions reflecting population density, and access to services. These regional classifications were:

- Major cities (Sydney, Newcastle, Wollongong)
- Inner regional (Bathurst, Coffs Harbour, Albury)
- Outer regional (Coonabarabran, Glen Innes, Narrandera)
- Remote (Cobar, Walgett, Menindee)
- Very remote (Wilcannia, Lightning Ridge, Lord Howe Island).

These regions can be seen in Exhibit 26, below:

Exhibit 26: TfNSW regional classifications in 2012



Key

- Major cities – dark blue
- Inner regional – green
- Outer regional – yellow
- Remote – mid blue
- Very remote – light blue

Source: TfNSW NSW Road Safety Strategy (2012–2021).

The NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012–2021 reported marked differences across these five regions in the levels of:

- fatalities
- serious injuries
- run-off road serious casualties
- head-on serious casualties
- young driver and pedestrian serious casualties.

Further, the NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012–2021 also noted that, whilst only one third of the NSW population resides in regional areas, two-thirds of all road fatalities occur there. When considered per 100,000 of the population, regional residents had a fatality rate more than four times that of metropolitan residents.

NSW Road Safety Plan 2021

In February 2018, the NSW Government published the NSW Road Safety Plan 2021 to 'deliver targeted initiatives to help us reduce the daily trauma' on NSW roads.

This plan identified six priority areas, which were:

- Saving lives on country roads – which focused on improving road safety infrastructure, including targeting high-risk roads and behaviours
- Safe urban places – which focused on addressing crashes in busy local areas, including pedestrian trauma
- Using the roads safely – which focused on preventing risky road behaviour, such as drink and drug driving
- Building a safer community culture – which focused on building a safety culture
- New and proven vehicle technology – which focused on leveraging advances in technology to prevent crashes and minimise the impact of human error
- Building a safe future – which focused on ensuring safe was included in the development, design, operation and maintenance of NSW roads.

In this plan, Vision Zero was replaced with Towards Zero which contained the four elements in Exhibit 25, above.

Further, the NSW Road Safety Plan 2021 contained two state-wide targets:

- reduce road fatalities by at least 30% from 2008–2010 levels by 2021 (also a State Priority Target)
- zero fatalities and serious injuries on our roads by 2056 (an aspirational target).

In this policy 'refresh', the target for fatalities is the same as in the 2012–21 Strategy but it was refined to include a baseline of the average number of fatalities recorded between 2008–2010. However, the target for serious injuries was removed.

This plan also noted that two-thirds of all fatalities in New South Wales take place on regional roads and reported that more than 70% of people who die on regional roads are also resident in regional areas. The plan reports that, in 2017, the number of fatalities per 100,000 of the population was 2.3 in metropolitan areas and 10.3 in regional NSW.

In 2018–19, when the NSW Road Safety Plan 2021 was published, $1.9 billion of funding, over five years, was committed to the Safer Roads program. This program was focused on safety infrastructure on roads to reduce the likelihood of a fatality or serious injury arising from a crash. This included:

- road upgrades and hazard removal
- improved road design
- new road signs, surfaces, markings and safety barriers
- median separation treatments such as wide centrelines and median strip barriers
- risk safety reviews on long stretches of major roads.

NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026

In 2021, TfNSW undertook a case-by-case investigation of all fatal crashes from 2018 including modelling the potential impact of future safety measures and system improvements. This investigation informed the development of the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026.

In April 2022, the NSW Government replaced the 2021 Road Safety Plan with the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026.

The NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 included new state-wide targets of a:

- 50% reduction in fatalities (from a 2018–2020 average) by 2030
- 30% reduction in serious injuries by 2030 (from a 2018–2020 average).

The NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 has five priority areas which are:

- creating safer country roads and urban places
- enhancing road safety in local communities
- increasing the safety of light vehicles, heavy vehicles and protective equipment
- making safer choices on our roads
- ensuring the safety of vulnerable and other at-risk road users.

The Governance Structure for the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 lists 12 Priority Actions which are:

1. Expand the MPDC Program to enforce seatbelts.
2. Deliver the NSW Automated Enforcement Strategy.
3. Deliver Towards Zero Safer Roads Program.
4. Deliver a new Drug and Alcohol Advisory Group.
5. Optimise drug and alcohol enforcement and post-crash testing.
6. Deliver enhanced drink and drug drive education programs.
7. Review and expand Local Government Road Safety Program.
8. Develop an online Towards Zero Collaboration Hub for councils.
9. Support the NSW Road Trauma Support Group.
10. Deliver the online Learner Education and Testing Platform.
11. Deliver a new online NSW Road Safety Education Centre.
12. Extend best-practice vehicle fleet and safe road use policies.

Key initiatives under the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 include:

- continuing to upgrade roads and essential infrastructure across New South Wales, through the Safer Roads Program and Saving Lives on Country Roads Initiative
- conducting speed zone reviews of high risk, default speed zones on low-quality, high speed country roads, as well as delivering safer speeds in towns
- supporting the Road Trauma Support Group, to deliver services to families impacted by road trauma
- supporting local councils with resources, training, collaboration and networking opportunities to develop road safety knowledge and skills through a new online Towards Zero Collaboration Hub and safe systems training
- establishing a new digital Road Safety Education Centre to make education resources more readily available and current for delivery of road safety education by agencies, business, local government and community organisations
- working in partnership with the freight and heavy vehicle industry, to deliver a new Heavy Vehicle Safety Strategy
- revitalising the strategy for drug and alcohol testing of drivers.

A key action in the NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 was the implementation of the Automated Enforcement Strategy in November 2022. This program is intended to provide a framework for the management of automated enforcement programs in New South Wales, to assist innovation in this space, and to help reduce road trauma.

This strategy follows on from the NSW Auditor-General's 2011 audit on speed cameras in New South Wales, the Speed Camera Strategy (2012) and the Mobile Phone Detection Camera program (2020) and has outcomes including:

- fewer deaths and injuries on NSW roads
- overall reduction of the risk of trauma related crashes
- greater compliance and behaviour change among the community due to enhanced understanding and support of automated enforcement
- more innovative, flexible and sustainable technology solutions that further complement on road policing.

A key element of the Automated Enforcement Strategy is the use of cameras. Currently the cameras in use in New South Wales are:

- Speed and red-light cameras. There are four types of speed cameras currently used in New South Wales. These are:
  - Fixed speed cameras – detect speeding at specific, high-risk locations
  - Red-light speed cameras – detect speeding and red-light running at specific signalised intersections
  - Mobile speed cameras – detect speeding across the road network by moving around various locations at various times, at a scale and network spread to support the perception of 'anywhere, anytime' enforcement
  - Average speed cameras – detect heavy vehicle speeding between two points on specific high volume and/or high-risk routes.
- Mobile Phone and Seatbelt Detection Cameras, both fixed and transportable cameras are used to detect drivers using a mobile phone when driving. The same cameras will also be used to detect seatbelt non-use in drivers and front passengers.
- Safe-T-Cam. A network of cameras that monitor the movement of heavy vehicles, and focuses on:
  - fatigue-regulated heavy vehicles which are bound by maximum work and minimum rest time
  - vehicles that are unregistered and/or uninsured
  - attempts to avoid detection at camera sites
  - failure to enter inspection stations.

The NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026 also includes ongoing commitment to established and proven safety measures implemented across regional NSW. These include road safety advertising campaigns and information for all road user groups, mandatory road safety education from early childhood through schooling, the Enhanced Enforcement Program with the NSW Police Force, as well as vehicle and equipment safety testing and research.

National Road Safety Strategy 2021–2030

The National Road Safety Strategy 2021–2030 (the national strategy) is a ten-year plan for reducing road trauma on Australia's roads and is implemented by the Commonwealth Office of Road Safety.

The national target is a reduction in annual fatalities of at least 50% by 2030 and a reduction in annual national serious injuries by at least 30% by 2030 nationally. The priorities of the national plan are:

- that governments will focus on designing a Safe System that is future focused
- that governments at all levels will plan and implement network-wide safety improvements
- better transport options and assistance
- to pursue technological improvements and uptake of safer vehicles
- to support safe movement of freight and passengers and reduce harm to all road users
- to enable safety culture in organisations to take responsibility for vehicles and roads as a workplace
- to address the over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in road trauma
- to provide safe access for all road users
- to increase community understanding of risky road use and address through education and enforcement.

The national strategy is focused on Towards Zero and uses the Safe System approach. This includes investigations for all fatal crashes and at least ten per cent of serious injury crashes.

The national and state plans are aligned in the following ways:

- a long-term vision for zero fatalities and serious injuries
- targets to reduce fatalities by 50% and serious injuries by 30% by 2030
- use of the Safe Systems framework
- a focus on specific high-risk factors such as infrastructure, vehicle standards, behaviour, heavy vehicle impacts, regional roads and Aboriginal people.

The Australian Government provides matched funding for road infrastructure improvements and can mandate other improvements such as vehicle standards and new technology. National road safety reporting uses data provided by all states and territories.

Appendix three – About the audit

Audit objective

This audit assessed the effectiveness of Transport for NSW's delivery of Towards Zero in regional areas.

Audit criteria

We addressed the audit objective by assessing the following criteria:

1. TfNSW is effectively reducing the number of fatalities and serious injuries on regional roads.
2. TfNSW has an effective framework, including governance arrangements, for designing and refreshing the Strategy and Action Plan.
3. TfNSW effectively makes use of whole-of-government and other relevant sources of data to support decision making, and to evaluate progress and outcomes.
4. TfNSW effectively manages accountabilities, including roles and responsibilities, with respect to road safety outcomes and the use of data.

Audit scope and focus

This audit focused on how TfNSW is managing and monitoring road safety in regional areas and how it is using data to inform decision-making and program evaluation.

In assessing the criteria, we checked the following aspects:

1. Analysis of data from April 2018 to April 2023 (five years' data) to pre-date COVID and spanning both the NSW Road Safety Strategy 2012–2021 and NSW Road Safety Action Plan 2022–2026.
2. Processes to collect validate, assess, evaluate, analyse and/or monitor road safety on regional state roads.
3. Regional areas defined as defined by the TfNSW Centre for Road Safety and TfNSW Regional and Outer Metropolitan operating division.
4. Fatalities and serious injuries as defined by the TfNSW Centre for Road Safety.

Audit exclusions

The audit will not seek to:

- examine regional road asset maintenance, which will be the subject of another audit
- examine roads within metropolitan areas as defined by the TfNSW Centre for Road Safety
- examine accidents where moderate or minor injuries occurred as defined by the Centre for Road Safety (TfNSW)
- question the merits of Government policy objectives.

However, we may comment on these issues where they affect our findings or to provide context.

If warranted, we may change the audit objective, scope or criteria during the course of the audit. If we feel this is necessary, we shall discuss any planned changes and the reasons for them with the entity before finalising.

Audit approach

Our procedures included:

1. Interviewing:
    - relevant Transport for NSW staff
    - stakeholders, industry reference groups and other representatives from:
        - the NSW Police Force
        - Local Government NSW
        - local councils in regional areas
        - Independent Commission Against Corruption
        - NSW Health
        - Infrastructure NSW
        - NSW Treasury
        - NRMA
        - relevant research and academic bodies
        - NSW Data and Analytics Centre within the Department of Customer Service cluster
        - Bureau of Transport Research Economics (BITRE), in the Australian Government.
2. Examining:
    a) legislation, government policies, directions and regulations relating to TfNSW's role in managing, monitoring and improving regional road safety
    b) TfNSW strategies, plans, policies, reports, and procedures for managing, monitoring and improving regional road safety
    c) any relevant data pertaining to the management and improvement of regional road safety
    d) internal audits or reports produced by other bodies/agencies on relevant topics
    e) documentation from other stakeholders obtained throughout the audit such as research and studies, statistical data and analysis
    f) submissions that were provided to recent NSW parliamentary inquiries.
3. Analysing relevant data pertaining to the:
    a) performance of regional road safety initiatives
    b) different types of vehicle accidents in regional areas
    c) different types of injuries sustained in accidents in regional areas.

The audit approach was complemented by quality assurance processes within the Audit Office to ensure compliance with professional standards.

Audit methodology

Our performance audit methodology is designed to satisfy Australian Auditing Standard ASAE 3500 Performance Engagements and other professional standards. The standards require the audit team to comply with relevant ethical requirements and plan and perform the audit to obtain reasonable assurance and draw a conclusion on the audit objective. Our processes have also been designed to comply with requirements specified in the *Government Sector Audit Act 1983* and the *Local Government Act 1993*.

Acknowledgements

We gratefully acknowledge the cooperation and assistance provided by Transport for NSW. We would particularly like to thank our liaison officers and staff who participated in interviews and provided evidence for the audit.

We also wish to thank staff from local government who participated in interviews and provided material relevant to the audit. We would also like to thank other stakeholders, such as the NSW Police Force, that spoke to us and provided material during the audit.

Audit cost

The estimated cost of this audit including disbursements is $635,000.

Appendix four – Performance auditing

What are performance audits?

Performance audits assess whether the activities of State or local government entities are being carried out effectively, economically, efficiently and in compliance with relevant laws.

The activities examined by a performance audit may include a government program, all or part of an audited entity, or more than one entity. They can also consider particular issues which affect the whole public sector and/or the whole local government sector. They cannot question the merits of government policy objectives.

The Auditor General's mandate to undertake audits is set out in the *Government Sector Audit Act 1983* for state government entities, and in the *Local Government Act 1993* for local government entities. This mandate includes audit of non-government sector entities where these entities have received money or other resources, (whether directly or indirectly) from or on behalf of a government entity for a particular purpose (follow-the-dollar).

Why do we conduct performance audits?

Performance audits provide independent assurance to the NSW Parliament and the public.

Through their recommendations, performance audits seek to improve the value for money the community receives from government services.

Performance audits are selected at the discretion of the Auditor-General who seeks input from parliamentarians, State and local government entities, other interested stakeholders and Audit Office research.

How are performance audits selected?

When selecting and scoping topics, we aim to choose topics that reflect the interests of parliament in holding the government to account. Performance audits are selected at the discretion of the Auditor-General based on our own research, suggestions from the public, and consultation with parliamentarians, agency heads and key government stakeholders. Our three-year performance audit program is published on the website and is reviewed annually to ensure it continues to address significant issues of interest to parliament, aligns with government priorities, and reflects contemporary thinking on public sector management. Our program is sufficiently flexible to allow us to respond readily to any emerging issues.

What happens during the phases of a performance audit?

Performance audits have three key phases: planning, fieldwork and report writing.

During the planning phase, the audit team develops an understanding of the audit topic and responsible entities and defines the objective and scope of the audit.

The planning phase also identifies the audit criteria. These are standards of performance against which the audited entity, program or activities are assessed. Criteria may be based on relevant legislation, internal policies and procedures, industry standards, best practice, government targets, benchmarks or published guidelines.

During the fieldwork phase, audit teams will require access to books, records, or any documentation that are deemed necessary in the conduct of the audit, including confidential information which is either Cabinet information within the meaning of the *Government Information (Public Access) Act 2009*, or information that could be subject to a claim of privilege by the State or a public official in a court of law. Confidential information will not be disclosed, unless authorised by the Auditor-General.

At the completion of fieldwork, the audit team meets with management representatives to discuss all significant matters arising out of the audit. Following this, a draft performance audit report is prepared.

The audit team then meets with management representatives to check that facts presented in the draft report are accurate and to seek input in developing practical recommendations on areas of improvement.

A final report is then provided to the accountable authority of the audited entity(ies) who will be invited to formally respond to the report. If the audit includes a follow-the-dollar component, the final report will also be provided to the governing body of the relevant entity. The report presented to the NSW Parliament includes any response from the accountable authority of the audited entity. The relevant Minister and the Treasurer are also provided with a copy of the final report for State Government entities. For local government entities, the Secretary of the Department of Planning and Environment, the Minister for Local Government and other responsible Ministers will also be provided with a copy of the report. In performance audits that involve multiple entities, there may be responses from more than one audited entity or from a nominated coordinating entity.

Who checks to see if recommendations have been implemented?

After the report is presented to the NSW Parliament, it is usual for the entity's Audit and Risk Committee / Audit Risk and Improvement Committee to monitor progress with the implementation of recommendations.

In addition, it is the practice of NSW Parliament's Public Accounts Committee to conduct reviews or hold inquiries into matters raised in performance audit reports. The reviews and inquiries are usually held 12 months after the report received by the NSW Parliament. These reports are available on the NSW Parliament website.

Who audits the auditors?

Our performance audits are subject to internal and external quality reviews against relevant Australian standards.

The Public Accounts Committee appoints an independent reviewer to report on compliance with auditing practices and standards every four years. The reviewer's report is presented to the NSW Parliament and available on its website.

Periodic peer reviews by other Audit Offices test our activities against relevant standards and better practice.

Each audit is subject to internal review prior to its release.

Who pays for performance audits?

No fee is charged to entities for performance audits. Our performance audit services are funded by the NSW Parliament.

Further information and copies of reports

For further information, including copies of performance audit reports and a list of audits currently in-progress, please see our website www.audit.nsw.gov.au or contact us on 9275 7100.

OUR VISION

Our insights inform and challenge government to improve outcomes for citizens.

OUR PURPOSE

To help Parliament hold government accountable for its use of public resources.

OUR VALUES

Pride in purpose

Curious and open-minded

Valuing people

Contagious integrity

Courage (even when it's uncomfortable)

auditoffice
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

audit.nsw.gov.au

Level 19, Darling Park Tower 2
201 Sussex Street
Sydney NSW 2000 Australia

PHONE +61 2 9275 7100

mail@audit.nsw.gov.au

Office hours: 8.30am-5.00pm
Monday to Friday.

auditoffice
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

audit.nsw.gov.au