

## **SUBMISSION**

### **South Australia's Road Safety Strategy to 2031**

***Prepared and authorised by:***

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#### **Who is COTA SA?**

COTA SA is an older people's movement run by, for and with older people. We represent the aspirations, interests and rights of more than 630,000 older South Australians. COTA SA reflects the diversity of modern ageing in terms of living arrangements, relationships, income, health, ambitions and aspirations. COTA SA connects with thousands of older people each year throughout SA and our policy and advocacy is guided by the COTA SA Policy Council made up of older South Australians from a diverse range of backgrounds. COTA SA's social enterprise, The Plug-in is available to facilitate access to older people with lived experience and feedback about health in SA. COTA SA is part of the COTA Federation with independent COTAs in each state and territory and COTA Australia.

## INTRODUCTION

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COTA SA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of South Australia's Road Safety Strategy to 2031.

Older people have a huge stake in road safety. In every consultation undertaken with older people in recent years, transport and staying mobile is always listed as a very high priority including and especially outside metropolitan Adelaide.

Older South Australians are already significant road users as drivers, cyclists, pedestrians, mobility scooter users, grandparents with prams and vehicle passengers. As our society ages, older South Australians have become the fastest growing age cohort of road users both as a proportion of all road users and in sheer numbers.

While the risk of being involved in a road accident is lower amongst older adults in terms of rate per population, the risk of being seriously injured or killed is higher given that medical conditions (many of which are more common as we age) may well cause injuries sustained to have more serious consequences. Thus, whether using roads to walk, ride or as a vehicle passenger, crash outcomes for older road users are likely to be more serious due to greater frailty.<sup>1</sup> As a result of this, against a trend of reduced road fatalities overall, fatalities for older road users have increased and the length of hospitalisation for older people following a road accident is almost twice that of a younger person.<sup>2</sup>

COTA SA has argued over many years against strategies that assume that older road users are an homogenous group. Instead we have advocated for strategies that target both driver performance and other factors including road and vehicle design and safety, improved safety messaging and investment in alternative safe mobility options for people as they age.

## COTA SA FEEDBACK

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This submission puts 6 priority issues to be addressed in the Road Safety Strategy to make sure our roads fit the current and future needs of our community. It has been prepared by COTA SA with input from both the COTA SA Policy Council (made up of older South Australians) and from COTA SA volunteers previously engaged in the Moving Right Along program funded by the State Government until 2019.

### Priority 1 – Increased investment in road safety messaging and education for older people

All citizens must step up to their responsibilities to be safe on the road, older people included.

Older people have tended not to be a focus of campaigns in the past and, as a result, incorrect or exaggerated information about older drivers tends to distract from the very positive opportunity to inform older people and encourage and promote self-regulation. Research suggests that self-regulation (including not driving at night or, in the case of regional drivers, not driving to the city) must be an important part of road safety messaging for older people<sup>3</sup> and that many older drivers self-regulate more than they report.<sup>4</sup> It is also our experience that this information assists family, neighbours and friends to encourage older people who they believe may be unsafe to limit or cease driving.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.roadsafety.gov.au/action-plan/2018-2020/older\\_road\\_users](https://www.roadsafety.gov.au/action-plan/2018-2020/older_road_users)

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

<sup>3</sup> Pp84-85, <https://austroads.com.au/publications/road-safety/ap-r530-16>

<sup>4</sup> <https://digital.library.adelaide.edu.au/dspace/handle/2440/105565>

The Strategy must prioritise investment in road safety messaging and prevention activities targeted to older people as a significant and growing user group.

We urge new initiatives that give older people the information they need to make safe driving decisions and encourage much more complete coverage of road safety information for older people (whether as drivers or otherwise) to learn about their obligations.

As part of this, we urge consideration of messages and delivery methods about road safety that are more inclusive of older people including those not likely to access messages online.

We hear from both older people and their families that many actively review their driving, make modifications to when and where they drive and indeed, for many, decide not to drive any more. The most effective of these conversations canvass alternative mobility options ahead of time.

According to the Centre for Automotive Safety Research (CASR) at the University of Adelaide, older people are generally very good regulators about whether they should continue to drive. Our experience supports CASR's research that, with information, older drivers are typically more aware of their limitations and drive accordingly.

Older people are keen to get information about what to look out for to assess their own fitness to drive. The COTA SA Moving Right Along sessions included discussions about the warning signs that will help people make good safe decisions. They also helped participants initiate conversations with a family member or friend. The State Government defunded Moving Right Along in December 2019 despite it reaching about 2,600 older people in the last year, with a third of the sessions held in country SA. The programs were delivered by 23 older volunteer peer educators. Delivery of road safety education for seniors through SAPOL is much less likely to be effective because older people who are worried about their driving are unlikely to seek help first from Police.

Many South Australians (including older people) are making the most of opportunities for in-state tourism, often with caravan or campervan in tow. For many this is a new experience. There is an opportunity (in conjunction with organisations like COTA SA, RAA, caravan and camping associations, caravan retailers etc) to provide training for towing recreational vehicles for this group. While programs are available now at the discretion of individuals, better promotion of opportunities for education, training and general awareness will both support local tourism and improve road safety.

## **Priority 2 - Age Friendly Road and Vehicle Design**

Research shows that it is important to focus road safety well beyond initiatives that target driver performance to include strategies that make better use of environmental and vehicle design.

An emphasis on good design needs to be part of the Strategy so that our roads and walkways are fit for our modern purposes and user profiles, free of tree roots, capable of accommodating walking frames, gophers and pedestrians, accommodate safe road crossing, and provide accessible public transport and other transport options.

Older people cite examples such as street lighting particularly in suburban roads at night, visible street names, road markings and navigation aids that can be seen both in the daylight and at night, increased use of pedestrian light crossings in shopping strips to show seconds to cross as well as the "ticking clock", visible and frequent reminders of speed limits on hills and country roads and continuing investment in the quality of roads in rural areas.

Time and access for pedestrians of all speeds to cross roads is a common request including for the safe crossing of very busy roads. This is especially important in areas where older people are frequent visitors or ongoing residents. Examples brought to our attention as being poor include the precinct around the Royal Adelaide Hospital, the Salisbury business district and the north west precinct of the Cross Road/Portrush Road intersection.

Vehicle design can also have a significant impact on road crash incidence and outcomes. Improved access to information about vehicle safety features will be important for all people but especially for older people. Likewise, and within the timeframe of this Strategy, COTA SA supports accelerated exploration of innovation such as autonomous vehicles because of their potential to be game changers in terms of improved access to safe mobility.

### **Priority 3 – Bicycle Safety**

An increasing number of older people are joining other age groups as regular bike riders, including (increasingly) on electric bikes.

Safety for bikes on roads is a major concern in South Australia and reduces usage well below what it could be. South Australia's topography is mostly flat and thus bicycles are logical transport options.

It will be important that the Strategy prioritises continuing innovation to support safe riding and improve safe mixing with cars on the road including separate pathways for bikes. It will also be important to improve bike parking at tram and train stations much as has occurred with Park n Ride facilities. There is little encouragement currently for short rides in the suburbs to the nearest tram or train stop for the rest of the journey to be completed using public transport.

Electric bikes are a new and under-catered option which will make up an increasing part of bike traffic among older people. Improved Cycle Park and Ride options will be required so people can store their e-bikes safely including when they connect to public transport.

### **Priority 4 – Research and evidence-based strategies**

Older drivers, like drivers of other ages, are generally safe, responsible and conscientious. It is disappointing that there is a proliferation of misinformation and that media headlines continue to feed an anecdote-driven frenzy about older drivers. Anecdotes are dangerous ways to understand the complex factors that make up road safety. It is particularly frustrating when there is beginning to be reliable data and useful analysis (see *Older Road Users: Emerging Trends*, Austroads Research Report AP-R530-16, 2016 for example) which gives a more nuanced picture about road safety and what our priorities should be.

We support continuing investment in research that assists evidence informed road safety strategies and that actively counters false information.

### **Priority 5 – Adequate Transport Options**

The health and wellbeing of South Australians relies upon the ability to move about the community throughout our lives. This includes enabling both access to essential services like health and to friendship and socialisation opportunities. An important aspect of being mobile is having access to safe and accessible transport including in country SA.

Research shows that the loss of a licence is devastating for many older people<sup>5</sup> particularly where there has been little preparation and there are not alternative ways of remaining mobile. Many older people who forgo a driver's licence struggle to find alternatives that work for them due to very poor transport options. In the absence of options, there is a risk that they become stranded at home and disconnected from their community or that they will be slow to self-regulate.

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<sup>5</sup> <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1440-1630.2006.00564.x>

COTA SA supports extending free public transport for older South Australians to a 24/7 basis, to much more active programs to support older people to know about and use public transport (including access to timetables and ticketing), to programs that promote public transport use and to focused work to improve transport options in country SA.

### **Priority 6 – Co-design road safety strategies with older people**

As part of the new Road Safety Strategy, we urge focused work directly with older people. As a fast growing and significant user group, older people have not been featured well in road safety initiatives.

To this end, COTA SA's social enterprise The Plug-in<sup>6</sup> (which started in 2017) is, very literally, a community of older people who are willing to be "plugged in" to research and innovation about services and products targeting older people to improve wellbeing.

For road safety research and innovation, The Plug-in offers access to well-matched end users at scale to be part of co-design including through insights to the design and implementation of contemporary fit for purpose road safety initiatives.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.cotasa.org.au/plug-in/default.aspx>