

STURT HIGHWAY

Strategic Direction



Sturt Highway Taskforce

June 2025

Sturt Highway Taskforce / June 2025



Contact

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Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge and show respect to the traditional custodians of the lands and waters across the many local government areas within the region. We pay our respects to Aboriginal Elders, past, present and emerging, and honour the enduring connection that First Australians have with these lands, waters and communities.

Foreword



The **Sturt Highway** is one of Australia's key inland transport routes – linking New South Wales, Victoria and South Australia.

It carries thousands of vehicles every day, including a significant proportion of heavy freight, connecting our regions to markets, communities and essential services. Yet, despite its importance, concerns remain about the highway's safety. Ongoing incidents are placing a strain on communities and lives at risk.

This advocacy document outlines a coordinated response from councils along the Sturt Highway – Wagga Wagga, Narrandera, Leeton, Murrumbidgee, Hay, Murray River, Balranald and Wentworth – who have come together to form the Sturt Highway Taskforce. As Chair, I am proud to represent a united front of local governments demanding action.

Behind every statistic is a family, a friend, and a community irreversibly changed. As leaders, we cannot accept this as the status quo. We are calling for a series of targeted, evidence-based actions to make the Sturt Highway safer for all who use it.

This document sets out the key priorities our taskforce is advocating for:

- Investment in safety infrastructure, including overtaking lanes and road widening.
- Improved maintenance and upgrades across critical sections of the route.
- Enhanced road user education, particularly around fatigue, speed and caravan towing safety.

Our strength lies in our collaboration, and our message is simple: the time for action is now. We are committed to working with all levels of government to secure the funding, planning, and delivery mechanisms needed to make the Sturt Highway a safer place for everyone.

This is an important step toward a much-needed transformation, ensuring safer travel for those who use this road every day and honouring those who never made it home.

Ruth McRae OAM

***Chair, Sturt Highway Taskforce
Mayor, Murrumbidgee Council***

Background



The **Sturt Highway** is a vital east-west arterial road, spanning approximately 605 kilometres through south-eastern Australia. It connects the Hume Highway near Tarcutta in New South Wales to the George Chaffey Bridge over the Murray River at Buronga, adjacent to Mildura. From there, the highway continues into Victoria and South Australia, ultimately reaching Adelaide. This extensive route plays a significant role in linking major regional centres across state boundaries, reinforcing its importance as a key transport corridor.

Route and key locations

Beginning near Tarcutta, the Sturt Highway passes through several notable local government areas in New South Wales:

- Wagga Wagga
- Narrandera
- Leeton
- Murrumbidgee
- Hay
- Murray River
- Balranald
- Wentworth

In Victoria, the highway continues through Mildura, a key service centre for the Sunraysia region, before crossing into South Australia.

Sturt Highway Taskforce

In response to a concerning rise in road fatalities along this route, a consortium of councils has formed the Sturt Highway Taskforce.

The participating councils include Wagga Wagga, Narrandera, Leeton, Murrumbidgee, Hay, Murray River, Balranald, and Wentworth.

This collaborative effort aims to advocate for enhanced safety measures and infrastructure improvements along the highway to protect all road users.

Taskforce members by Local Government Area	Population
Wagga Wagga	65,258
Narrandera Shire	5,899
Leeton Shire	11,445
Murrumbidgee	3,917
Hay Shire	2,949
Murray River	12,118
Balranald	2,338
Wentworth	7,053
TOTAL	110,977

Image credit: Bidgee (2008) Sturt and Olympic Highway intersection [photograph], https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Sturt_and_Olympic_Highway_intersection.jpg, accessed 20 May 2025.

Sturt Highway Statistics

June 2018 – July 2023

Total crashes **283**
Total casualties **239**

Source: Cheshire, J. (2024).
Sturt Highway Presentation
– NSW Government.
Wagga Wagga, Australia.

Crash Severity

Fatal crashes: **14 (4.9%)**
Serious injury crashes: **48 (17.0%)**

Contributing Factors

Speeding: **53 crashes (18.7%)**
Fatigue: **39 crashes (13.8%)**

Crash Statistics

Type of crash	No. of crashes	% of total
Car crash	190	67.1%
Light truck crash	79	27.9%
Heavy rigid truck crash	18	6.4%
Articulated truck crash	68	24.0%
Heavy truck crash	84	29.7%
Heavy bus crash	2	0.7%
Bus crash	2	0.7%
Heavy vehicle crash	86	30.4%
Emergency vehicle crash	3	1.1%
Motorcycle crash	11	3.9%
Pedal cycle crash	3	1.1%
Pedestrian crash	1	0.4%

Crash Statistics

Road User Model Group	No. of crashes	% of total
Pedestrian	1	0.4%
Vehicles from adjacent direction – intersections only	34	12.0%
Vehicles from opposing direction	42	14.8%
Vehicles from same direction	50	17.7%
Manoeuvring	14	4.9%
Overtaking	4	1.4%
On path	16	5.7%
Off path, on straight	68	24.0%
Off path, on curve	52	18.4%
Miscellaneous	2	0.7%

Day of the week	No. of crashes	% of total
Sunday	32	11.3%
Monday	35	12.4%
Tuesday	39	13.8%
Wednesday	39	13.8%
Thursday	42	14.8%
Friday	50	17.7%
Saturday	46	16.3%

Collision type	No. of crashes	% of total
Multi vehicle	153	54.1%
Single vehicle	130	45.9%

Road Statistics

Type of location group	No. of crashes	% of total
Intersection locations	100	35.3%
Non-intersection locations	183	64.7%

Intersection locations include crashes up to 10 metres from an intersection.

Road classification (admin)	No. of crashes	% of total
State	283	100.0%

Road classification (legal)	No. of crashes	% of total
State highway	283	100.0%

Speed limit	No. of crashes	% of total
40 km/hour	2	0.7%
50 km/hour	1	0.4%
60 km/hour	107	37.8%
80 km/hour	25	8.8%
100 km/hour	73	25.8%
110 km/hour	75	26.5%

Surface condition	No. of crashes	% of total
Wet	52	18.4%
Dry	230	81.3%
Snow or ice	1	0.4%

Freight and Economic Impact



The **Sturt Highway** is a critical freight route stretching across south-west NSW, extending into South Australia.

At least part of the route is used in the movement of \$287m worth of products annually, with 898,640 trailers transporting 17 million tonnes of freight.

It supports 61,423 supply chains, spanning 123 commodities, with 17% of the total volume consisting of essential commodities.

On average, the highway handles 154,064 trailers annually, with the busiest sections carrying 312,764 trailers per year.

The key freight activities along the corridor include;

- 33% of freight is related to movement of general freight between ports, distribution centres and retail.
- 25% involves fuel transportation from ports to depots.
- 15% accounts for wood products.

Source: McFallan, S., Boulaire, F., Price B., Smolanko, N., Bondarenko A., Higgins, A., Bruce, C., CSIRO (2022). *Road and Rail Supply Chain Resilience Review*. Bureau of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.



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Priority Areas for Sturt Highway Advocacy

Priority Areas

Safety component		Issue
1.	Centre line separation, clear zones, audible lines and shoulder widths	Safety concerns about barriers on shoulders.

Solutions sought

- Advocate for a 1 to 1.2 metre wide centre line.
- Maintain 11–12 metre pavement width for additional clearance.

2.	Overtaking lanes	Safety concerns about lack of overtaking lanes as these reduce dangerous driver behaviour and improve freight productivity.
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Solutions sought

- NSW Government for funding to enable Transport for NSW to undertake a desktop audit of overtaking lanes on the Sturt Highway.



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Priority Areas

Safety component	Issue
3. Rest areas	Fatigue is a major contributor to crashes. Regular rest areas are essential for all road users, particularly freight drivers.

Solutions sought

- Funding for rest areas every 40 km.
- Discourage rest area use for highway change of direction (informal U-turn facilities).

4. Bypasses	Bypasses improve town safety and reduce travel time for through traffic.
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Solutions sought

- Support Mildura's bypass advocacy.
- Lobby for a bypass around Wagga Wagga.
- Lobby for Balranald heavy vehicle bypass.



Safety component	Issue
5. Flood resistance	Full flood-proofing isn't feasible, but improvements can achieve 345-day-per-year reliability.

Solutions sought

- Incorporate RAMJO flood resistance work.
- Identify and address other vulnerable areas.
- Lobby for the Sturt Highway to be flood-resistant 345 days per year.

Priority Areas

Safety component		Issue
6.	Intersections	Intersections need realignment for safety and to accommodate larger freight vehicles.

Solutions sought

- Lobby for turning treatments and upgrades from Gillenbah to Wentworth.
- Intersections should be perpendicular for line-of-sight.

7.	Railway crossings	No current level crossings exist on the highway, but future planning must consider rail interactions.
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Solutions sought

- Ensure bypass routes with railway crossings are grade-separated.

8.	Guard rails on road edges	Wire rope barriers reduce rollover and head-on collisions more effectively than traditional guard rails.
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Solutions sought

- Wire rope preferred over guard rails.
- Install at wide centre line locations with head-on collision data.
- Install at road sides where run-off crashes have occurred.

9.	Bridges and culverts	Bridge upgrades during flood mitigation should incorporate widening and structural improvements.
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Solutions sought

- Funding for a comprehensive TfNSW assessment of bridge and culvert width, load capacity, flooding risk and safety.

Priority Areas

Safety component	Issue
10. Signage	Clear and correct signage is crucial for safety.

Solutions sought

- Lobby for a continual signage audit to ensure visibility, readability and accuracy.

11. Approaches to urban areas	Coloured pavement markings (red with blue/white writing) on town approaches are highly effective.
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Solutions sought

- Urban area entry pavement treatments showing speed limits in coloured boxes for all towns along the Sturt Highway.



Safety component	Issue
12. Roads of strategic importance	Feeder roads influence the overall efficiency of the Sturt Highway.

Solutions sought

- Funding for upgrades to roads of strategic importance.

13. Pavement condition	Sections of the Sturt Highway are in poor condition, affecting safety and efficiency.
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Solutions sought

- Significant investment in pavement repairs and ongoing maintenance by the NSW Government.
- Introduce a rolling pavement stabilisation/profiling program

Priority Areas

Safety component		Issue
14.	Driver education program	More driver education needed.

Solutions sought

- Provide defensive driving courses.
- Implement a comprehensive Driver Education Program addressing:
 - Caravan towing
 - Speed awareness
 - Fatigue management
 - Alcohol and drug risks

15.	Guide Posts	Maintenance of guideposts and roadside furniture.
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Solutions sought

- Increased funding for ongoing maintenance of roadside furniture, including guideposts.



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