# RAC Federal Budget Submission 2026-27

## Priorities for a safer, sustainable and connected WA

RAC
For the better

RAC is a voice for over 1.3 million Western Australians. Since our foundation in 1905, RAC has existed to be a driving force for a better WA by championing change that will create a safer, sustainable and connected Western Australia.

## Purpose

The driving force for a better WA.

## Vision

2030: A safer, sustainable and connected future for Western Australians.

## Mission

Delivering great member services and experiences, while inspiring positive community change that makes life better in WA.

# RAC Federal Budget Submission 2026-27

The 2026-27 Federal Budget is an opportunity to fund critically important programs and projects to save thousands of lives and prevent serious injuries, reduce harmful vehicle emissions and better connect people. These initiatives will also create thousands of jobs and help safeguard WA's, and Australia's, productivity and liveability.

**RAC's four priorities for the 2026-27 Federal Budget are:**

1. Further investment in low-cost safety treatments on country roads through the Regional Road Safety Program – to complete the state road network and comprehensively address the local government sealed road network.

2. Funding signage to enable local governments to implement safer speed limits at scale across their networks.

3. Expediting the delivery of cycling infrastructure and enhancing streets and places for active travel.

4. Scaling up electric vehicle charging infrastructure and extending financial support to accelerate the transition to sustainable vehicles.

# Our key priorities

## 1. Low-cost safety treatments on country roads

**The challenge:**

- Over five years, more than 500 people have been killed and over 2,500 seriously injured on WA's regional roads[1].
- Regional WA has a fatality rate of 18.6 road deaths per 100,000 population[2], which is significantly higher than the WA and national averages of 6.3 and 4.8 road deaths per 100,000 people in 2024, respectively[3]. While other states have higher fatality rates in regional areas than in metro areas, WA's regional fatality rate is particularly high.
- Much of the regional road network is unforgiving of mistakes, with high-speed two-way traffic, roadside hazards such as trees and a lack of safety features.
- 44 per cent of deaths and serious injuries in regional WA occur on local government managed roads (accounting for more than 270 deaths and serious injuries each year)[4], meaning that both state and local roads need to be improved to deliver road safety targets.
- Infrastructure Australia has prioritised poor quality parts of Australia's regional road network[5] and more specifically single vehicle, run-off road crashes in WA[6], as issues of national significance.

**The opportunity:**

The Regional Road Safety Program (RRSP) is a landmark WA Government initiative delivering effective, low-cost safety treatments such as sealing shoulders, installing audible edge lines, medians and/or centre lines. The RRSP, announced by the WA Government in August 2019[7], was originally costed at $900 million and modelled to reduce regional road trauma by 60 per cent. To date, around 10,000km of State-controlled regional roads have been upgraded since the program was established in 2020[8].

RAC has welcomed the funding, but it is critical the program is rolled out in full (around 14,400km[9]), so that the safety benefits are realised across the whole WA regional network.

Early evidence indicates that the RRSP is having a positive impact[10]. Crash reduction analysis (to December 2022), which was undertaken across 163 Regional Road Safety Program projects, indicated a 50 per cent reduction in fatalities and a 35 per cent reduction in serious injuries when compared to the five years prior.

Local governments manage around 26,000km of sealed regional roads[11], which would benefit from similar low-cost treatments as the state network, but less than 1,000km of local government roads have been upgraded under the existing RRSP. Therefore a tailored program, akin to the RRSP, offers a clear opportunity to reduce risk across these local networks.

In late 2022, RAC commissioned the National Transport Research Organisation to develop a business case to seek funding to improve the safety of sealed, high speed local government roads in WA. The WA Local Government Association and Main Roads WA were project partners, supporting the project

through: a funding contribution; active participation in the project working group; and a joint commitment to use the deliverables to improve road safety outcomes. The review identified approximately 8,000km of local government roads in need of urgent upgrades using criteria including: high-speed limit (90km/h or more) sealed roads; routes providing a regionally significant function[12]; roads with a 'high' crash rate[13]; and high-speed peri-urban roads identified by Main Roads WA.

In 2025, Main Roads WA commissioned NTRO to update the business case to align with Infrastructure Australia's funding submission requirements and so that the treatment unit rates matched current market conditions and delivery mechanisms. As part of this process, the proposed treatments were also updated to maximise the crash reduction benefits by applying shoulder sealing and audible edge and centre lines on all roads, ensuring a more comprehensive, uniform and equitable application of safety treatments.

The updated version of the business case has been submitted to Infrastructure Australia and still identifies low-cost safety treatments for approximately 8,000km of high speed sealed local government roads. This investment would realise an estimated reduction of more than 750 deaths and serious injuries over a 30-year lifespan.

The WA Government announced in the 2025-26 State Budget that $250 million will be allocated over five years to expand the RRSP to local roads across the State[14]. RAC has welcomed the funding for this first stage of local roads investment, however, to reach the total projected reduction in KSI, the WA and Australian Governments must continue to co-fund these safety treatments across all 8,000km of local government roads.

Funding these programs will assist with the delivery of *Driving Change: A Road Safety Strategy for Western Australia 2020–2030* (*Driving Change*) and the *National Road Safety Strategy 2021-30*, which have both identified making regional roads safer a priority to reduce road trauma. In addition, they respond to Infrastructure Australia's priority listing: *Regional Road Network Safety Improvements*, and strongly align with other priority listings, including *Regional and Rural WA Road Network Safety Improvements,* and *Road Access Improvements to Remote WA Communities*.

**RAC calls on the Australian Government to:**

- Ensure that the existing WA Regional Road Safety Program is fully funded and delivered.
- Co-fund with the WA Government the Regional Road Safety Program (Local Roads) program to apply low-cost safety treatments to approximately 8,000km of high speed sealed local government roads to prevent hundreds of deaths and serious injuries.

## 2. Network wide speed limit reviews for local government roads

**The challenge:**

- Travel speed affects reaction time and braking distance: With less time to react to hazards, driving at higher speeds increases both the likelihood of a crash and the impact speed if there is a crash. The human body is fragile and can only tolerate a certain amount of force, meaning that impact speed is arguably the most influential factor determining crash outcomes.

- Speed limits have historically reflected typical travel speeds rather than the human body's ability to tolerate the energy released during a crash. This means that most of them do not align well with the Safe System principles committed to by the WA Government in its state road safety strategy 2021-2030: *Driving Change* nor the Australian Government in its *National Road Safety Strategy 2021-30* (NRSS).

- Speed limit reductions have also traditionally been set on a case-by-case basis and considered at the road rather than network level, which limits opportunities for a more consistent approach.

- The time and resources required to undertake network wide speed limit reviews, coupled with the cost of purchasing and installing signage, are barriers to implementing safer speed limits at-scale, particularly if local governments are required to pay for signage.

- The NRSS identifies that speed management will underpin, and be a critical part of, addressing the priority areas identified within the strategy[15]. However, progress on the actions relating to speed limits has been modest - we need to act now to meet the 2030 targets.

**The opportunity:**

Speed limits should reflect the fragility of the human body and its ability to tolerate force in the event of a crash. Even the safest vehicles, road designs and the presence of proven, and often costly, road safety treatments are sometimes not enough to save lives and prevent the life-changing injuries that occur from crashes at higher speeds. It's also not feasible to wait for the billions in funding that would be required to upgrade local government roads to make them safer for the speeds drivers currently travel at.

Recognising the importance of speed reforms, the NRSS identified that 'Speed limit reviews are a key element of the comprehensive network-wide safety planning approach over the decade, especially to support vulnerable road users'.

Since June 2022, the Shire of Augusta Margaret River and RAC, with support from Main Roads WA, have been working on a Safer Speeds Trial Project (the Trial)[16], to test a new approach to assessing speed limits on local government roads within the Trial area, focusing on harm minimisation and analysing roads in a holistic, area-wide way, and ultimately create a Blueprint for Safer Speeds.

The design of the Trial has involved reviewing network data including traffic, speed, crash history, movement and place, and community nominations alongside a literature review of best practice speed limit setting. A set of principles for speed zoning, prioritising harm minimisation, were agreed to and helped guide the proposed speed limit reductions.

**Table 1. Speed limit principles**

| Road type | Old speed limit | New speed limit |
|---|---|---|
| Town centres | 40-50km/h | 40km/h (area wide) |
| Residential streets | 50km/h | 40km/h (area wide) |
| Urban major roads | 60-70km/h | 50-60km/h |
| Peri-urban residential roads | 70km/h or 110km/h (open default) | 60km/h (area wide) |
| Sealed rural undivided roads | 70-110km/h (open default) | 70-80km/h |

The Trial commenced in May 2025, with new speed limit signs progressively installed over a four-month period on approximately 550 roads. Comprehensive evaluations will take place 12 months after the Trial commences and then after three years.

The Blueprint will provide a process for an approach to speed limit setting across a wide and varying road network and be able to be replicated for other local government areas. Further, early learnings from the Trial have highlighted that network wide assessment and implementation of new speeds and speed limit signage must be sufficiently resourced.

**RAC calls on the Australian Government to:**

- Establish a new $25 million per year speed limit signage fund that enables local governments to implement safer speed limits aligned to the NRSS where approved by their state or territory speed limit setting authority.

# 3. Upscale investment for a high-quality active transport network

**The challenge:**

- Active travel plays a fundamental role in achieving net zero by 2050, but current rates of walking and riding remain low, even for short trips. Around 4.2 million car trips are made each day in Perth and 2.8 million of these are under 5km[17]. According to RAC data, 47 per cent of car trips in Perth made between June 2023 and June 2024 were under 5km in distance and 10 per cent were under 1km[18].

- RAC member sentiments point to high levels of dissatisfaction with active transport infrastructure where fear of sharing the roads with motorists is the main barrier to cycling more often. While 85 per cent of members feel comfortable riding along a busy street on a shared path and 75 per cent on a protected on-road bike lane, just 11 per cent would feel comfortable mixing with traffic[19].

- Infrastructure Australia notes that the absence of high-quality active transport infrastructure forces people to rely on cars, which raises serious concerns relating to equity, inclusion, urban livability and health[20].

- In 2024, the Australian Government committed $100 million over four years to a new National Active Transport Fund to upgrade and deliver new bicycle and walking paths. Once allocated to each state and territory, this level of funding would not even fund 10km of off-road cycling routes across WA. The $25 million a year National Active Transport Fund represents just 0.3 per cent of Commonwealth road-related expenditure in 2022-23[21].

- Underinvestment is a major barrier to realising the benefits of active travel. The WA Government's annual investment in active travel infrastructure is only around 1.3 per cent of the 2023-24 combined capital expenditure of Main Roads WA, Public Transport Authority, and Department of Transport and Major Infrastructure[22].

- Cycling infrastructure is often funded as part of a road project, meaning that it does not always align with where it is most needed. While much of the network along rail corridors and freeways has been completed, Infrastructure Australia has recognised the need to close gaps as a priority, as well as the needed infrastructure along major arterials[23].

**The opportunity:**

Transitioning short vehicle trips to active travel modes presents a big opportunity. Most people can cycle 5km in 20 minutes. Making it easier for people to travel by active modes reduces emissions, lowers household transport costs, manages congestion, reduces pressure on the health system[24], and saves on road building and maintenance costs[25]. It increases physical activity, provides opportunities for social connectedness by humanising our streets and places[26], and can improve mental health[27].

Investing in active travel creates a stronger, more inclusive and sustainable economy by providing travel options for people of all ages and abilities, that are affordable and virtually emission free. International examples show that the economic, health, and climate benefits generated by such networks outweigh the initial investment often within just two years[28]. In 2022, the Australian

cycling and e-scooter economy contributed over $18.6 billion in economic, health and social and environmental benefits nationally[29]. And, modelling from New South Wales estimates each extra kilometre walked adds $5.24 of value and cycling (off road) adds $2.97, accounting for the economic benefits derived from better physical and mental health over a lifetime, cleaner air, and fewer road injuries[30].

Numerous cities and countries are scaling up investment to deliver a high-quality active transport network; Ireland committed 20 per cent of the transport capital budget annually (€360 million / $588 million AUD) to walking and cycling for five years from 2020[31]; Scotland allocated 10 per cent of the transport budget to active travel in 2024–25[32], and many other others including Santiago (Chile)[33], Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)[34], Singapore[35], and Abu Dhabi (UAE)[36]. And there are numerous examples of cities seeing the return on investment; Paris invested €250 million ($403 million AUD) from 2021–2026 to make all streets cyclable by 2026[37] and saw cycling trips rise from 3 per cent in 2010 to 11 per cent in 2023, now surpassing car trips for trips from the outskirts to the centre[38]; and the City of London reported a 57 per cent increase in cycling volumes between 2022 and 2024 due to sustained investment[39].

RAC members strongly support investment in off-road and shared path infrastructure to make local streets feel safer for cycling. Recent research shows strong community support for off-road shared paths and better connections between bike routes, local destinations, and public transport, and that infrastructure solutions are among the most impactful solutions for encouraging active transport[40].

**RAC calls on the Australian Government to:**

- Increase the proportion of the transport capital budget allocated to the National Active Transport Fund from under 1 per cent to 10 per cent to build the safe infrastructure required for substantial mode shift.

# 4. Scaling up Electric Vehicle (EV) charging infrastructure and extending financial support

**The challenge:**

- Tragically, modelling estimates more than 11,100 Australian adults die prematurely each year due to exposure to traffic emissions[41].

- In 2021, Australia recorded the highest total oxides of nitrogen (NOx) emissions per capita (108kg) of all Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries; this was almost six and a half times the OECD average[42].

- As well as people's health, our environment is also impacted, a problem that is only worsening. In 2023, road transport made up nearly 18 per cent of national carbon dioxide equivalent ($CO_2$-e) emissions, with cars alone accounting for 9 per cent of national emissions[43]. If we do not act, transport emissions are on track to be the largest source of greenhouse gas emissions in Australia by 2030[44].

- Over the last 30 years, road transport $CO_2$-e emissions per person increased in WA by 12 per cent, whilst the national average declined by 3 per cent[45].

- In 2024, battery electric vehicle (BEV) and plug-in hybrid electric vehicle (PHEV) sales represented 13 per cent of new vehicle sales in Australia, lagging behind the global average of 22 per cent[46].

- Infrastructure Australia has identified the need for more EV fast chargers on national highways as an issue of national significance[47].

- Australia still has a high number of EVs per public charging point compared with other countries, at nearly 45 per public charging point as of 2024 (compared with between 10 and 30 in most IEA member countries), leading to long wait times. Australia has less than 1.1kW of public charging per EV, which is again low compared to other countries[48].

- According to our members, top barriers to purchasing a BEV and PHEV include cost and access to charging infrastructure.

**The opportunity:**

The Australian Government has set ambitious targets to reduce emissions by 43 per cent on 2005 levels by 2030, 62–70 per cent below 2005 levels by 2035 and net zero by 2050. To meet the 2035 target, the Climate Change Authority has recommended over the next 10 years, Australia should prioritise cutting emissions from its light vehicle fleet and heavy road transport because solutions are increasingly available at a competitive price. To meet the lower end of the Government's target, half of the light vehicles sold between now and 2035 need to be electric. The broad adoption of EVs will reduce harmful vehicle emissions, help reduce reliance on fossil fuels, create employment in a developing industry, and reduce the cost of operating a vehicle.

Modelling by Aurecon shows only BEVs and Fuel Cell EVs (FCEVs) have the potential to come close to the magnitude of life cycle $CO_2$-e reductions from cars needed to meet Australia's climate

commitments[49]. However, in the shorter-term PHEVs can also support the transition towards lower-emission road transport, providing a smaller but significant contribution towards the achievement of Australia's emissions reduction targets while the infrastructure and technology for BEVs and FCEVs continue to develop. Operating on WA's mixed grid, the life cycle emissions of BEVs are already lower than a comparable petrol vehicle by 55 per cent, and as the electricity mix continues to decarbonise, this gap will increase such that on a fully renewable grid, the emissions of a BEV would be 86 per cent lower. The life cycle emissions of an FCEV powered by green or grey[50] hydrogen would be 83 per cent or 50 per cent lower on a petrol equivalent, respectively. The life-cycle emissions of PHEVs are lower than a comparable petrol vehicle by 43 per cent.

The National Electric Vehicle Strategy summarises existing initiatives such as: the New Vehicle Efficiency Standard; establishing a national network of EV chargers on major highways; and the Electric Car Discount which exempts battery electric vehicles from the 5 per cent import tariff and fringe benefits tax (FBT) if they are below the luxury car tax threshold for fuel-efficient vehicles. The FBT exemption can save workers approximately $5,000 each year on the average cost of an EV when taking out a novated lease[51]. If vehicles are traded in when novated leases expire, there is the added benefit of EVs filtering into the second-hand market which also assists affordability. The FBT exemption for plug-in hybrid EVs ended on 31 March 2025 making it more important that the FBT exemption for BEVs is not withdrawn prematurely, particularly while EV market penetration remains low. The Australian Government is to be commended for introducing a low-interest EV loans scheme in December 2024 for essential workers and low/middle-income households. However, incentives such as the FBT exemption still play a role in offsetting the higher purchase cost of EVs and addressing what remains one of the most persistent barriers to EV uptake. Continuing the FBT exemption or an alternative more impactful purchase incentive for EVs is critical to achieving Australia's emissions reduction goals and accelerating uptake of low and zero emissions vehicles.

According to Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) EV projections for WA's Wholesale Electricity Market (WEM), the expected scenario[52] for 2030 estimates more than 300,000 passenger EVs (BEVs and PHEVs) within the SWIS area. At a national level, CSIRO's modelling projects that EVs will account for around 58 per cent of new passenger vehicle sales and 11 per cent of the total vehicle fleet in Australia in 2030[53]. To service the increasing number of EVs, Deloitte modelling suggests an eight-fold increase on 2023 levels of public charging capacity will be needed by 2033. This represents around 31,500 new public EV chargers nationally, with approximately 3,000 new public chargers needed in WA[54].

In a 2024 RAC survey, EV owners suggested more charging stations, particularly fast chargers, in more locations, especially in regional/rural areas as the main improvements needed to public EV charging facilities in WA. Other common suggestions included increased reliability of existing chargers and enhanced charge station amenities.

The Driving the Nation Fund (DNF) and Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA) have funded critical initiatives to support the uptake of BEVs. The former is establishing a national EV charging network and the ARENA program has assisted WA local government authorities to purchase BEVs and implement EV charging infrastructure at scale across multiple areas (including in the regions) and has contributed to a positive shift in perception of BEVs and EV charging. Experiencing electrification has increased the willingness of local governments to consider further fleet transition and public use of chargers[55]. However, funding under ARENA's "charging innovation" focus closed for applications in November 2024 and the focus of new funding rounds has shifted to trucks, and trials or demonstrations of new charging solutions that are likely to unlock wider BEV adoption. In addition to the recent commitment of $40 million for kerbside charging and what is currently planned through the DNF, it is important the Australian Government continues to fund both initiatives that incentivise

the broader scale rollout of fleet and/or public EV charging infrastructure to address critical network gaps through the ARENA program or similar.

A key learning from operating the RAC Electric Highway®, and important consideration for the Australian Government's National EV Charging Network, is that for the public to have confidence in using public charging infrastructure, it is critical not only to invest in the chargers themselves but also in amenities that improve comfort and safety while waiting for an EV to charge. This includes lighting and CCTV, as well as access to facilities such as seating, shelters, bins and toilets, and is particularly important in remote locations where stopping to charge a vehicle also doubles as a rest stop for drivers.

**RAC calls on the Australian Government to:**

- Continue the Fringe Benefit Tax exemption for BEVs or an alternative more impactful purchase incentive given the importance of making EVs more affordable to purchase.
- Continue to incentivise the broadscale rollout of fleet and/or public EV charging infrastructure (e.g. through ongoing ARENA funding).
- Incorporate key amenities including lighting, CCTV and shelters into all charging stations on the National EV Charging Network.

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**RAC Advocacy** **E** advocacy@rac.com.au **rac.com.au/advocacy**