



# Road safety initiative welcomed

## EUGENE BONTHUYS AND STUFF REPORTERS

A spate of road deaths at the weekend has taken the toll for the year to date to 330, the same as the toll for the whole of last year with 42 days to go.

In response, Associate Transport Minister Julie Anne Genter has called for a crisis meeting to see how the number of deaths can be curbed before the holidays hit, with investment targeting high risk roads on the agenda.

Genter has called representatives from police, the NZ Transport Agency and Ministry of Transport to Wellington on Tuesday to figure out what changes will have the biggest impact in a short amount of time.

Genter said the meeting would be a "stocktake" of the current situation, and how the Government can help improve road safety. She wanted to find solutions in the short term to try to curb the number of road deaths, and make the roads safer before the holiday season arrived.

That meant a new approach, where central government helped local government fund important road safety improvements.

Environment Southland senior transport policy planner Russell Hawkes said he was positive about the impact such an initiative could have.

"I think, from a regional transport committee's point of view, anything that

is going to provide funding to allow some of the safety issues on the road to be addressed is very much welcomed," Hawkes said.

However, he cautioned that there were challenges, especially when looking at local roads.

"It would be nice to think that there would be enough money to cure all the road safety problems, but the reality is that there probably won't be. As in any projects, the funding when they move off

the state highways onto the local roads, that always provides a challenge as well," he said.

Genter said this year's road toll was "tragic". "Every death on our roads is a tragedy and the high number this year is quite simply unacceptable."

The road toll was the highest it had been since 2010.

"My No 1 priority in the transport portfolio is to bring the road toll down. In recent years, expensive roading projects have been the priority and road safety has taken a back seat. This Government will be exploring all options to improve road safety, including reallocating funding to target high-risk roads."

Hawkes, who is also involved with the regional road safety initiative Any Number Is Too Many, said it is important to change more than just the infrastructure.

"It is about changing attitudes rather than just changing the environment. The Any



Number Is Too Many project down here is really about trying to raise public awareness of the risks on the road, and to get the community talking about those risks," he said.

Hawkes said every road user needed to take personal responsibility when it came to the prevention of road deaths.

"People need to be aware of the risks on the road, and that it is in each person's hands to address those. It is not somebody else's responsibility."

For the Government, the long-term plan involved taking more people out of private cars by improving rail and public transport, more rail and ship freight to reduce the number of trucks on the roads, changing speed restrictions, improving identified dangerous intersections, and continuing to raise awareness around speed and driving under the influence.

"Every life lost leaves behind a devastated family and community. We have to do better," Genter said.



**Russell Hawkes**