PRESS RELEASE

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Promoting Safety at Railway Level Crossings

“The railway level crossing accident that took place in Lismore, Victoria, yesterday was a major catastrophe for both the public and the rail industry, and once again there is a strong urge for an effective solution to decrease the number of these severe incidents and promote safety at the crossings,” said Mr Brian Nye, Chief Executive Officer of the Australasian Railway Association.

Level crossing accidents are of low frequency but have extremely high consequences. In response to this problem, with strong support and cooperation from government authorities and the rail industry, the ARA has developed a proposal for a National Railway Level Crossing Behavioural Strategy. The National Behavioural Strategy is aimed at modifying the behaviour of road users (vehicle drivers and pedestrians) via various education and awareness programs. The Australian Transport Council is currently evaluating the proposed strategy and it is hoped that approval will be granted shortly.

“In the past, engineering solutions have typically been the means used to improve railway level crossing safety. Behavioural programs are also employed but in a limited way, with only 1.5% of the funding devoted to improving safety at crossings being spent on them. It is estimated that the cost of installing conventional active protection at all passive level crossings would be between $1.2 billion and $1.8 billion,” said Mr Nye. “Although upgrading a crossing from passive to active reduces the chance of a crash, it does not remove the risk entirely. The behavioural programs offer an opportunity to improve safety at all railway level crossings for a fraction of this cost.”

The need for behavioural programs to supplement engineering solutions is evidenced from findings of an Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) study into 87 fatal crossing crashes between 1988 and 1998. The study indicates that 51% of crashes occur at crossings with boom gates and/ or with other active control. Behavioural programs targeted at educating road users about features of active and passive crossings and rail transport would significantly improve safety at all level crossings.

As one of many means to help promote the National Behavioural Strategy and raise awareness of safe road user behaviour at level crossings, the ARA initiated a “National Rail Safety Week”.
This event entails a series of train cabin rides along corridors that have a suitable number of railway level crossings and have been identified by operators as having a high frequency of near misses and/or other incidents. The event will take place in various locations in every state across Australia on 23-29 July 2006.

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