

**Submission**

**No 38**

## **DRIVER AND ROAD USER DISTRACTION**

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Mr Greg Aplin MP  
Chair  
Staysafe Committee  
Parliament of New South Wales  
Macquarie Street  
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Mr Aplin MP,

**City of Sydney Submission - Inquiry into Driver and Road User Distraction**

Please find attached the City of Sydney's submission to the Staysafe Inquiry into Driver and Road User Distraction.

The submission outlines the issues relating to road user distraction within the urban and city environments of Sydney. In particular the City is concerned about pedestrian safety where there are high concentrations of pedestrians and vehicles.

The City has made submissions to previous Staysafe inquiries and welcomes this Inquiry into Driver and Road User Distraction. We are pleased to have been given the opportunity to make this submission.

Should you wish to speak with a Council officer about the City's submission please contact [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,

**Monica Barone**  
Chief Executive Officer



**Submission by the City of Sydney**

**Staysafe Committee**

**Inquiry into Road User Distraction**

**May 2012**

**Submissions by Friday 11 May 2012.**

TRIM REF: 2012/125543  
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## **Introduction**

City of Sydney has made submissions to several Staysafe inquiries in recent years. The City believes that the current Inquiry into Road User Distraction will complement these inquiries and provide valuable information and feedback that will help the City of Sydney reduce crashes, particularly involving pedestrians and bike riders.

With around one million pedestrian movements in central Sydney on a typical weekday, pedestrians and vehicles compete for space. The City's Sustainable Sydney 2030 plan identified key objectives that relate to road safety issues include giving greater priority to pedestrian and cycle movements and amenity in the City of Sydney.

The City has recently released its own integrated transport strategy, "Connecting our City" which is on public exhibition until mid May. This naturally focuses on the geographic entity of the City of Sydney local government area. However the City's key role as the main business centre for Australia and as the congested hub of metropolitan Sydney's public transport network means that the report also addresses many wider transport issues. Connecting Our City has five key actions:

1. Transforming George Street
2. Encouraging Active transport
3. Integrating Land use and Transport
4. Managing Streets, Parking and Vehicles
5. Enhancing Public Transport.

The City's main concern relating to road user distraction is the risk to pedestrians and bike riders from distracted drivers.

## **Background**

Cities and urban areas are environments where pedestrians of all ages and physical abilities can be expected at all times. It is important for cities to provide safety and amenity for pedestrians to travel around in safety and comfort and enjoyment.

Road safety is about crash prevention and therefore we should always consider what factors can be controlled either through legislation or behaviour change. This is already considered in the case of School Zones where the onus of responsibility is placed on drivers passing schools.

Many international capital and major cities are embracing the concept that towns are for people and that motor vehicles should only be driven there if necessary and with responsibility for low-risk movement biased towards the drivers. Greater freedom of movement should be expected by people walking.

### **Driver distraction**

Passenger behaviour, personal worries, commitments and responsibilities will all distract a driver from time to time. Consuming food and drinks could be seen as being encouraged through drive-in takeaway fast food opportunities and cup holders within the vehicle. Add to this there are external distractions ranging from looking at other people and events outside of the car, including looking intently at crashes involving others ("rubber-necking"), signs of all types and other attractions.

Drivers may also be distracted because they are impaired by fatigue, drugs (illegal and legal) or alcohol. Being late for an appointment and driving too fast and being lost and looking for parking all distract a driver.

Modern vehicles have an obvious plethora of new devices that involve, and may distract, drivers whilst driving. Some may be seen as desirable and others dangerous. Ultimately the driver must be responsible for their actions.

To drive with low risk one has to concentrate at all times and visually scan the area around them. Many crashes of all types occur because at least one driver fails to concentrate and see and react to another road user.

### **Pedestrian distraction**

Pedestrian movement is different to the movement of motor vehicles. A person walking at a normal pace does not need to look far ahead or make great use of peripheral vision. It is not unreasonable for a pedestrian to expect to look at shops or other interesting things whilst walking. However when someone walking comes to a point where they must cross a road they are expected to concentrate on crossing safely.

### **Safe System**

The Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) and Centre for Road Safety (CRS) have adopted the *Safe System* approach to road safety. *Safe System* seeks to not penalise road users with death or serious injury when they make mistakes.

Pedestrians in a city should not be killed or injured when crossing a road because a vehicle cannot stop in time. A distracted driver has greater ability to react to a situation if they are moving at a low speed.

The ultimate solution to the competition for road space is to follow the example of many cities around the world and restrict motor vehicle movement where people walk or ride bicycles. This is not only important in terms of road safety but for long term solutions to environmental issues including climate change. It is the City's intention to create a pedestrian friendly environment which encourages walking and cycling.

The key solutions to road trauma within the City of Sydney and particularly central Sydney are clearly seen as reducing unnecessary vehicle accessibility, reducing vehicle speeds and improving pedestrian and bicycle movement within the city.

Reduced speed limits in urban areas can support the message that there are unprotected road users around and that a driver must react accordingly.

Many European states have adopted 30 km/h as the standard for residential and CBD areas. This is considered best practice. Whilst speed limits may not always be complied with, unless they are self-enforcing through physical means, actual vehicle speeds are likely to be lower.

## **Submission addressing the Terms of Reference**

The City of Sydney has reviewed the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry. Only the Terms of Reference that are relevant to the City of Sydney have been addressed in the discussion below.

### **a) The nature and extent of distraction as a contributor to crash casualties on NSW roads;**

Crash data is supplied by the Centre for Road Safety which is part of Transport for NSW.

#### **Crash data for the City of Sydney relating to distraction**

The CrashLink database has columns titled, “Distraction a Factor” and “Error a Factor” for each road user involved in a crash. These are fields on the database where information collected by police at the time of the incident can be recorded.

In the City of Sydney between 2005 and 2010 (latest data available) there were 10,145 crashes in total. Only ten road users were recorded as being distracted through the use of a hand-held telephone. Forty-two road users were reported as being distracted by ‘other distraction’.

Of these crashes there were 1,711 crashes involving pedestrians resulting in 1,738 injured and 14 killed. Of the 1,752 pedestrians involved just three were recorded as using a hand-held telephone creating a distraction. None of these were fatally injured. Eleven pedestrians that were injured were recorded as having some other distraction as a factor resulting in a crash.

Crash data for the City does not reflect the anecdotal and observational evidence that indicates many road users use mobile devices whilst travelling or are distracted by other means. It is important that crash data collection is improved to ensure its accuracy.

### **b) Current rates and future trends in take up of electronic devices, both by road users and vehicle manufacturers;**

This is not relevant to the City of Sydney.

### **c) Regulatory means of enforcing harm minimisation caused by such devices;**

Lower speeds will reduce the potential of a crash and reduce the severity of crashes. A driver has more time to respond to hazards and crash situation if travelling at a low speed giving them time to react. An improved ability to respond can offset the delay in responding because of distraction.

The Australian Transport Council (ATC) reported in 2006 that small reductions in average speeds (even one or two per cent) result in substantially greater percentage reduction in deaths and injuries. It was also reported that the chance of surviving a crash decreases dramatically above certain impact speeds. For pedestrians the risk increases when the speed limit is above 20-30 km/h.

Within urban areas councils are better equipped, through better local knowledge, to determine low speed limits. This can be managed by the Traffic Committees. In NSW any speed limit changes also require approval by Roads and Maritime Services.

**d) Technological solutions to managing the harmful consequences of distraction;**

A number of “Safety Camera” locations have already been implemented on City of Sydney roads. The City supports the use of modern technology that requires drivers to pay more attention to driving at lower speeds and concentrating on the road.

**e) Other solutions to reduce information overload for road users;**

The City has a program of signage reduction that will contribute to addressing information overload.

Some European cities and towns have introduced a ‘Naked Streets’ concept, also known as “shared space”, which is a very promising approach to both pedestrian safety and improving the vitality of an area.

Naked street schemes place importance on how drivers make decisions about their behaviour, recognising the importance of how they perceive their surroundings. It is a significant departure from attempts to control behaviour through interventions like speed platforms, or engineering pedestrians out of our streetscape through grade-separation or fencing. Drivers have to reduce speed and concentrate on what they are doing.

The shared space concept was masterminded by the innovative Dutch Traffic Engineer Hans Monderman and is based on a principle that removing all priorities will make all road users work together bring traffic speeds down and improving pedestrian access and safety.

**f) Any other related matters.**

The City, and many other councils, have been involved in the Police Citizens and Youth Clubs (PCYC) *Traffic Offenders’ Intervention Program* for some years. A program for potential supervisors of new drivers, “*Helping learner drivers become safer drivers*” has also been part of the City’s road safety program. From the experience of conducting these programs there are concerns that the majority of fully licensed drivers are unaware of many road rules.

It would be desirable to identify a proactive way to improve driver awareness of road rules and awareness of low risk driving. This may contribute to reducing the incidence of driver inattention and the consequent reducing in crashes. This would be better than providing a service for offenders to help them reduce the penalty for their infringement.

## **Recommendations:**

The City of Sydney suggests that the following recommendations are important if we are to reduce the number of crashes involving pedestrians and, over the longer term, improve drivers' attitudes and behaviour towards pedestrians and cyclists. It will also contribute to reducing crashes caused by inattention and of drivers.

- A consistent regime of 40 km/h speed limits will identify central Sydney and residential areas as low speed environments.
- Remaining state roads with a speed limit of 60 km/h be reduced to the Urban Speed Limit of 50 km/h.
- New technologies in regard to safety cameras should continue to be adopted in central Sydney and other high risk locations.
- Driver education programs, including the *Helping learner drivers become safe drivers* program include more emphasis on drivers' responsibility towards pedestrians and cyclists.
- Investigate legislative changes that put more responsibility on drivers to be aware of vulnerable road users, including pedestrians and cyclists in urban areas.
- Improved data collection that more clearly addresses the entries required under "Distraction a Factor" and "Error a Factor" columns (*CrashLink Reporting System Data Manual*, RTA May 2007).
- Restrictions should be placed on motor traffic movement in areas of the City that will encourage walking, cycling and the use of public transport,
- Low Speed Zones and shared space should be introduced and supported by the message that pedestrian movement should be prioritised in urban and city environments.
- Approval of lower speed limits, on Local Roads, including 10 km/h Shared Zones, should be delegated to local councils, approved by the relevant Traffic Committee.

## **Conclusion**

It is important to recognise that motor vehicle use in the City will continue and there is an ongoing need to improve driver skills and behaviour for the benefit of all road users, especially vulnerable at-risk groups such as pedestrians and cyclists.

Clearly there is always the potential for a driver to be distracted in city and urban areas. It is unlikely that changes can be made to remove external distractions. Shop front and footpath advertising are a component of a vibrant city.

As in previous submissions to Staysafe the City considers that speed reduction and better management of restrictions on vehicle movement are the keys to further reducing road trauma in the City of Sydney.