

**INQUIRY INTO PEDESTRIAN SAFETY
(MINISTERIAL REFERENCE)**

Organisation: Walking Volunteers

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Overview

The Problem

- 1. Pedestrian accidents occur because of inadequate, unsafe and unpleasant pedestrian crossings.**

Background Issues

- 1. Pedestrians are forced to use cars and public transport, when walking would be a healthier and often faster mode of sustainable transport.**
- 2. While policies often state pedestrian movements will be balanced with vehicle movements, in most instances vehicles are given first priority.**
- 3. Not only will pedestrian safety be improved with adequate, safe and pleasant pedestrian crossings, but we will have a healthier population and create a more pleasant lifestyle.**
- 4. The answer will not come from further restricting pedestrian movements. This will only encourage further risk taking.**
- 5. What is needed is the political will to create adequate, safe and pleasant pedestrian crossings, which can mean reducing vehicle speeds. Hitting a pedestrian at a reduced speed reduces the severity of the injuries pedestrians receive.**

The Answers

- 1. Increase the proportion of time per light cycle allocated to pedestrians.**
- 2. Increase the time before the pedestrian amber starts flashing.**
- 3. Remove the pedestrian buttons so that pedestrians receive a crossing opportunity on each light cycle.**
- 3. Install timing indicators giving waiting and crossing times for pedestrians and vehicles at lights.**
- 4. Either ensure the RTA properly provides for pedestrian safety, or transfer responsibility to another body to do so.**

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Traffic lights are installed at intersections where there is a high density of both vehicles and pedestrians. Where there is high pedestrian density that the difficulty and delays of crossing makes pedestrians most want to take risks which result in accidents.

Times allocated to pedestrians are particularly inadequate for elderly, mobility impaired and mothers and teachers with children. Some elderly cannot get to the shops, picture theatres, libraries etc as they cannot cross busy roads, even though they are physically able to do so.

For these reasons we think improvements here will show the greatest reduction in accidents.

As the *Walking Volunteers* have extensively studied pedestrian movements in North Sydney, examples are given for this area. The *Volunteers* are now working with over 20 Councils, and similar problems exist throughout Sydney.

Inadequate, unsafe and unpleasant pedestrian crossings.

- 1.1 Crossing times at lights are unbalanced :** sometimes only 6 seconds for pedestrians to step off in each 2 ½ minute cycle for vehicles. ‘Perceived’ waiting times are recognised to be twice ‘actual’, tending to frustrate pedestrians and increase risk taking by crossing against the lights.

Pedestrians who miss the initial 6 seconds become frustrated, and try and cross against the red often at the last moment, risking vehicles about to start their cycle.

This short window of opportunity also coincides with the regular running of red lights by vehicles.

Many large cities allow pedestrians 40% of each light cycle on major roads. E.G: Paris, Seville, St Petersburg, Malaga.

- a. elderly and physically impaired people are nervous and slow to step off, and slow to cross. They become frightened as the green light soon starts flashing. They can be effectively cut off from going to the shops, libraries, clubs etc by their fear of the limiting crossings they are forced to negotiate.
- b. school children are often impatient and treat crossings against the lights as an adventure.
- c. women with prams & strollers, especially those also with a toddler and shopping bags, gophers, wheelchairs, walking frames are similarly slow to react and cross.

- 1.2 The yellow light can start flashing after only 6 seconds :** This further reduces apparent crossing time, and is frightening to the groups mentioned in 1.1.

The crossing time should be increased with a similar increase before the flashing light starts.

- 1.3 Green light only if button pushed :** Frustration is increased if a pedestrian arrives just after the lights change and they have not had time to press the button. This means they miss a crossing cycle, and cross against the red in frustration.

Pedestrians should be given a crossing opportunity each light cycle, which would improve safety and by removing buttons, save costs.

- 1.4 Wide road crossings :** Without lights or zebra crossings wide road crossings force pedestrians to take risks. Often they are wide due to the heavy traffic they bear, increasing the problem. There are two main types:

a. Wide crossing. Bent St off Falcon Street North Sydney was three lanes wide and pedestrian vision was impaired by buses in the bus lane. At the *Walking Volunteers'* suggestion, North Sydney Council reduced the crossing to two lanes by widening the footpath in Bent Street

b. Islands in wide crossings. Falcon Street had an uninterrupted footpath on the northern side, which became broken by three off/on ramps to the Lane Cove Tunnel. Two on ramps had an island between, which meant with the limited crossing times teachers had regular school groups broken into three parts, some on the island and others either side. The *Walking Volunteers* raised this with the RTA in the planning stages without success. They raised it with the Joint Select Committee on the Cross City Tunnel (see The Lane Cove Tunnel Third Report para 4.102 onwards. The Committee asked the *Walking Volunteers* to join a site inspection on 14 June 2006, and that day the then Minister announced a under and overpass would be built commencing early 2007. At para 4.106 the Committee noted the impression that 'the Government only responded to the reasonable demands of the community under the pressure of a public Committee hearing'. It is hoped this Committee will help improve these problems.

- 1.5 Convenient crossings related to public transport stops.** Often little thought is given to convenient crossings to give access to public transport. Where this is not available, pedestrians will take risks and accidents result. Due to the Lane Cove Tunnel works the northern Military Road bus stop (the first after the Harbour Bridge from the Expressway) was moved west and now reasonable crossing was created to the west and south. The *Walking Volunteers* pointed out the dangerous location and lack of crossing at the design stage. It was built, but due to the lack of vision and dangerous traffic we pointed out, it has never been used, greatly reducing public transport amenities in the area. While our recommended underpass is now being built, it is now to a non useable bus stop.

Accidents will occur where Pedestrians risk crossing traffic lanes where no convenient crossings are provided.

1.6 Gaps in major pedestrian paths at busy locations. The Lane Cove Tunnel works required a shared path towards the Harbour Bridge. It was built to the north side of the Naremburn shopping centre, and recommenced at the overpass of the Expressway going south. No provision was made for:

- a. a pedestrian crossing from the end of the shared path over Quiamong Street.
- b. a crossing through the parking area to the overpass. This is a very restricted area with cars backing and moving with restricted vision.
- a. a pedestrian crossing over Rohan St from the school bus stop through the shopping centre to the overpass.

1.7 Gaps in major pedestrian routes. Ernest Street near the Expressway is a six lane street. A major pedestrian route from the north comes through Cammeray Park to Ernest Street, but from there the only pedestrian crossings are 500 meters to the west or 300 metres to the east. Inevitably pedestrians risk accidents by crossing the six lanes.

1.8 Lack of footpaths, footpaths cluttered with poles, parking meters etc, and inadequate lighting. Pedestrians are forced to walk on the road which is dangerous, and often such locations have poor lighting, increasing the risk.

2. The role of the RTA and the cost of improving pedestrian safety.

2.1 The RTA was charged by Action for Transport 2010 to produce a pedestrian strategy by 1999; it has yet to do so. Many, if not most of the major pedestrian safety issues are either caused by RTA's drive to speed vehicular movements, or by it's failure to properly provide for pedestrian movements near its roads.

Questions must be asked as to whether it is the appropriate body to do so?

2.2 Only money spent to actually improve pedestrian safety should be counted. Money spent to rectify reductions in safety caused by vehicle related spending should be charged to the roads budget.

a. The multi-million dollar pedestrian expressway overpass at Falcon Street is a longer and harder pedestrian crossing than the level crossing which existed prior to the Lane Cove Tunnel on/off ramps breaking it in three places. It in no way improves pedestrian safety.

b. The fences along the middle of Military Road are to stop pedestrians trying to avoid the inadequate crossing times at lights. If times were more fairly apportioned the fences would not be necessary. A similar argument applies to the cost of fencing at corners.

When these costs are deleted, little is actually spent on actual pedestrian safety improvements.