

**Submission**

**No 20**

## **INQUIRY INTO DRIVER AND ROAD USER DISTRACTION**

**Name:**



**Date Received:**

27/04/2012

*Partially Confidential*

The Staysafe Committee  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

## Submission

I am a driver of a passenger vehicle and travel most days along Sydney's most congested roads. Driver and pedestrian distraction is a major problem that is leading to many deaths and serious injuries every year in Sydney alone.

### 1. Power Poles

Drivers that are distracted and accidentally leave the road have no ability to correct their mistakes and are hitting power poles. Pedestrians walking along the footpath and are distracted are walking out onto the road around power poles due to the poles not being far enough away from the road.

Sydney is going thru a major upgrade of the electricity infrastructure and 50 year old power poles are being replaced. The cost of moving these poles away from the edge of the road is negligible compared to the cost to the community over the life span of the pole. New university research has put a figure of six million dollars that each fatality costs the community.

These power poles are not being replaced to network guidelines that require any replaced poles to be moved well away from the edge of major roads. This is not currently happening and these new poles will be extremely close to the edge of the road for the next 50 years putting pedestrians and vehicle occupants at risk.

Heavy vehicle drivers travelling in the kerbside lane are being distracted away from the road ahead having to concentrate on the side of the road for upcoming objects that they may hit and have to continuously avoid.

#### **Could Staysafe consider the following:**

- Utilities should be asked to follow their own standards and wherever possible move new or replaced poles to the property boundary well away from the edge of the road, even if it takes a few man hours more.

- If not poles should be more than the minimum 600mm away from the kerb so that pedestrians can easily walk between pole and road and vehicles do not impact with the pole if the vehicles stays wholly within the kerbside lane.

### 2. Signs

Pedestrians are having to walk around an ever increasing number of signs that are placed along footpaths and extremely close (300mm) from the edge of the road. School children walk out onto the road around poles whilst listening to music or walking in groups.

Each sign has it's own individual pole and is placed at different distances from the edge of the road. This means that pedestrians have to negotiate these signs and if they are placed near the edge of the road will walk out into traffic to get around the pole.

Drivers have to continuously scan the side of the road for the many signs that are placed behind trees and other signs. If a vehicle or motorbike runs off the road there are many poles to impact with.

Heavy vehicle drivers travelling in the kerbside lane are being distracted away from the road ahead and have to concentrate on the side of the road for upcoming objects that they may hit and have to continuously avoid.

Australian standards and RMS guidelines state that along major arterial roads used for the express movement of vehicles(Clearways, T2 lanes), signs must be placed more than 600mm from the edge of the kerb. Sydney Buses guidelines state that a clear zone along the edge of the roads that have bus routes should be more than 800mm.

### **Could Staysafe consider the following:**

- All new and replaced signs are placed at a set distance from the kerb so that pedestrians have plenty of room to walk between the pole and the edge of the road without needing to step out onto the road. This should be set at a minimum of 600mm or 800mm. All poles along each section of road would all be the same distance from the kerb.
- All new and replaced signs should be clear of bus and truck mirrors so that these vehicles do not need to veer into the adjacent lane to avoid hitting the signs. This should be a minimum of 600mm from the vertical edge of the sign to the vertical edge of the kerb.
- Wherever possible multiple signs should be amalgamated onto one pole. Parking signs should be placed under large signs that are for vehicles traveling at speed.
- Wherever possible could street name signs be placed on top of traffic lights or power poles so people know where to look for the sign.
- Wherever possible could signs be placed on power poles to reduce the number of poles

### **3. Trees**

Around bus stops and along major roads trees have been planted extremely close to the edge of the road. Pedestrians especially school children walk between trees and buses as they are pulling into bus stops, school children are carrying multiple large bags and are walking over uneven ground.

Trees that grow to a diameter of 3.1 metres are being planted 500mm from the kerb along major roads. Councils are not removing trees that have passed their lifespan for the location along the side of the road and are impacting with vehicles making vehicles have to veer into adjacent lanes.

### **Could Staysafe consider the following:**

- Asking councils to remove trees that have been planted within bus stops and are extremely close to the kerb allowing pedestrians especially school children that are distracted to stay safe around buses.
- Councils consider not planting trees within the clear zone along major roads.
- Councils consider asking residents if the council could plant trees in their front yards so that the trees can grow healthily away from the edge of the road away from the clear zone.
- Removing trees along major roads that have become too large and have become both a vehicle hazard and pedestrian hazard and look at planting new trees well away from the edge of the road.

### **4. Pedestrian Crossings**

Could Staysafe consider asking RMS to simply program pedestrian crossings at traffic lights that have one-way streets or slip lanes so that they are automated (auto introduction) . The Warringah Freeway intersection of Falcon St works in this manner. The Sydney CBD should have traffic lights that work in the same way allowing pedestrians to easily walk thru the CBD without the need to continuously press the crossing buttons. A ten news story a few days ago on the growing number of pedestrian accidents at traffic lights probably due to pedestrians being distracted:

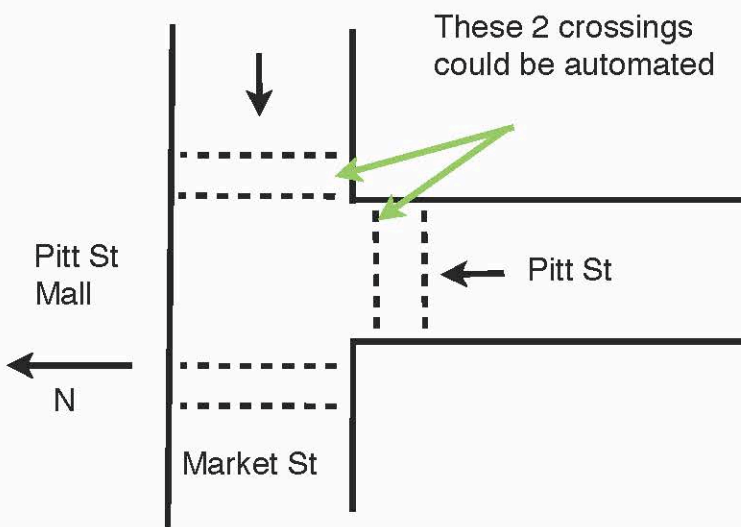
Currently in the CBD, If you arrive at a pedestrian crossing and press the button just a millisecond after the vehicle lights turn orange you have to wait for the complete phase of the lights (even though it is perfectly safe to cross the one way street or slip lane). This may take over a minute and pedestrians will get fed up and try to cross just as the vehicle lights turn green, risking being hit by a bus or truck due to their large blind spots.

Two crossings at each of the intersections in the ten news clip could be automated to encourage pedestrians to trust crossings at traffic lights. The two intersections are on Pitt St Sydney at Market St and Bathurst St, both intersections have one-way streets that could be automated.

The automation would not make it seem like a pedestrian has pressed the button, making the vehicle lights continuously change to red but if a pedestrian did press the button it would then start the current internal countdown timer to change the vehicle lights red. An example would be that Market St has the priority so that in the middle of the night the Pitt St pedestrian crossing would stay green for 5, 10 even 15 minutes, but as soon as a car stops at Pitt St or a pedestrian presses the button to walk across Market St the red walk light on Pitt St would flash for less than 10 seconds, and the vehicle lights on Pitt St would then go green and would stay green for the minimum time it takes a pedestrian to cross Market St, maybe 15 seconds.

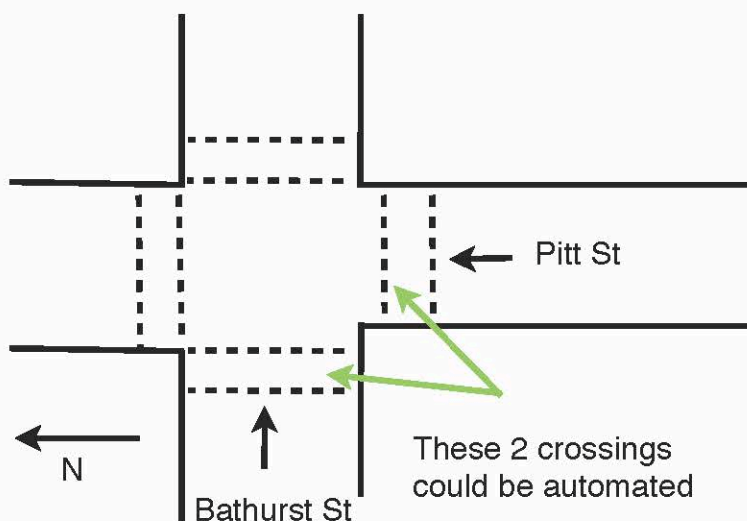
**Pitt and Market St intersection.**

Two of the three crossings could be automated so that pedestrians do not need to press the button, the walk light just turns green and stays green until about 10 seconds before the vehicle light turns green.



**Pitt and Bathurst St intersection**

Two of the four crossings could be automated so that pedestrians do not need to press the button, the walk light just turns green and stays green until about 10 seconds before the vehicle light turns green.



The maximum time a car would ever have to wait would be about 10 seconds but SCATS could be programmed to take the 10 seconds into account for phasing of multiple lights through the city.

I have waited in my car late at night for more than a minute to exit out of a side street in the city and 10 seconds is not a lot to ask for the safety of millions of pedestrians around Sydney.

If the RMS could consider programming traffic lights around Sydney to be safer for pedestrians then they will be less likely to take chances and potentially be killed or seriously injured by a vehicle.

#### **Could staysafe also consider**

- Look at marking all zebra pedestrian crossings with the zig zag line marking approaching the crossing
- Look at placing 2 yellow pedestrian crossing signs in either direction of the crossing
- Look at having correct lighting above zebra pedestrian crossings
- Advertise the meaning of the zig zag line marking to the general public
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#### **5. Confusing signs**

Consider numbering all Freeway and Motorway exit ramps and installing signs above the existing exit signs so that drivers know exactly which exit to use.

I was in Queensland and used the M1 to go to a shop 15 kilometers away, the shop owner said take the M1 south and take exit 92 then turn left. It was very easy to get to my destination because I could count the exits down till I needed to leave the Motorway.

If the RMS could number every exit on Sydney's orbital road system and also the F3, M4 and F6 this would make it much easier for all drivers that use these confusing roads.

Google even has the exit numbers on their maps so drivers can plan trips before getting into the car and know exactly which exit to use.

#### **6. Confusing lane merging**

By making merging simpler on freeways drivers are less likely to have accidents because of the confusing lanes whilst being distracted. The following example is from the SHB to the Pacific Hwy Artarmon on the Warringah freeway simplifies lane merging. Drivers will know if they get in the left lane it will become the exit lane for the next suburb.

On the Warringah Freeway from SHB lane 1 is the only exit lane for Milsons Point and North Sydney

At Falcon St left lane, the merge lane from North Sydney is the only lane that exits to Falcon St

The 2 right lanes become only exit lanes to Falcon St and no longer continue straight.

3 lanes are left going west under Falcon St

Lane 1 then becomes exit lane for Miller St Cammeray

Two lanes in middle of the freeway no longer dangerously merge just before Miller St underpass

After Miller St underpass lane 1 becomes the only exit lane for Brook St

Extra lane is added over Brook St underpass small amount of roadwork needed before bridge

Lane 1 becomes exit lane for Willoughby Rd Naremburn

T2 lane signage is removed on Gore Hill freeway till just before Reserve Rd.

Lane 1 becomes the only exit lane for Pacific Hwy and Epping Rd

2 right lanes go straight into the Lane Cove Tunnel

Just after above exit a new lane is added to the left before Reserve Rd and becomes a T2 lane till Pacific Hwy underpass

## **7. Mobile phone, GPS usage**

Mobile usage whilst driving is becoming a normal thing especially whilst stopped at traffic lights. You know if somebody is texting whilst driving because the vehicle veers left and right. GPS units are being placed in the middle of the vehicles window reducing the drivers view out the front window of the vehicle.

### **Could Staysafe consider the following:**

- Could the police look at using unmarked vans with recording cameras that look into the vehicles adjacent to view drivers texting or holding mobile phones whilst driving.

Thanks

