

**Submission  
No 24**

## **REDUCING TRAUMA ON LOCAL ROADS IN NSW**

**Organisation:** Wollongong City Council

**Date Received:** 20 February 2020

## Submission to the Inquiry into Reducing Trauma on Local Roads in New South Wales

Wollongong City Council (Council) appreciates this opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into Reducing Trauma on Local Roads in New South Wales. This submission provides Council's comments on the Terms of Reference released on 2 December 2019 by The Staysafe Committee Chair The Hon. Lou Amato MLC.

- **The role of local roads in road safety and trauma**

Background:

Road Safety and trauma caused by vehicle crashes is a topic that Wollongong City Council considers a high priority as the cost to our communities and assets following a crash is significant. Trauma caused by road related crashes are of major concern to Council and is considered our highest priority area when we are designing and reviewing our infrastructure and education projects.

Local roads are the largest proportion of the road network in NSW - as noted by the Staysafe Committee 90% of the road network is considered local and is managed and maintained by Local Government. Improving the road safety of this significant asset is a large task however will greatly improve our communities, their overall safety and reduce the likelihood and severity of road trauma and the trauma to our community following these crashes.

Context of local roads:

Local roads in our Local Government Area (LGA) are typically residential with lower speeds than main roads, however statistics show they contribute a higher number of serious crashes (on average) than main roads. Roads are often constrained by topography, with poor sight distance at driveways, crests and past parked vehicles and the road environment typically has more vulnerable road users such as children.

Antisocial driver behaviour, speeding and 'rat-running' tends to be more prevalent on local roads, due to comparatively less enforcement measures (e.g. speed cameras, red light cameras, mobile speed cameras) and the fact that there are a great many more local roads than main roads, meaning it is more difficult for Police to effectively cover all local roads in their patrols. It is noted that *"The threat of enforcement is identified by most drivers as the largest modifier of their driving behaviour"* (Local Government Road Safety Program Guidelines, May 2019). Whilst there are some good programs that are targeting speeding and mobile phone use (e.g. "Stop it or Cop it"), they will always be of limited effect on local roads as drivers know that the actual level of enforcement in these areas is relatively low. Crash statistics in urban areas highlight the conflicts with pedestrians and cyclists, and the vulnerability of these users and the issues associated with current urban speed limits and their enforcement. Unless enforcement is significantly increased (through a number of different methods), trauma on local roads will persist as a major problem in the future.

There also tends to be a mindset of residents who know they have driven their local roads many times before but can become complacent and tend to drive faster as a result. With largely residential land uses adjacent, local roads have a pedestrian/community/amenity function and have a higher likelihood of children in the road environment. Excess speed in these areas can have severe consequences including pedestrian crashes, property damage and trauma associated with vehicles colliding with roadside infrastructure and trees, which don't necessarily have the same setback/buffers for crash attenuation like more major roads.

In rural areas, the majority of local roads (by km) serve as rural arterial or collector roads, connecting towns and villages to the widely spread rural community and the greater State network. These roads often are very high speed, have poor alignment, widths, delineation, sight distance, clear zones and crash attenuation. Due to the road environment being so unforgiving, and emergency response times struggling to reach crash sites, crashes are more often fatal, and may have had a simple solution to avoid.

Apart from speeding which is the main contributor to trauma on local roads, mobile phone use is also a great concern for Council. Given the actual and perceived lower rates of enforcement on these roads, the temptation is higher for motorists to use mobile phones whilst driving in these areas. A similar situation exists with drink and drug driving, with motorists more inclined to use these types of roads to avoid detection by Police RBT units which are often located on major roads. A tragic example of the trauma from drink driving is the recent deaths of 4 children when a drunk driver left the road and mowed down a group of children on the footpath in Oatlands.

- **The effectiveness of existing road safety planning requirements, including in other jurisdictions**

The existing road safety planning requirements can be split into two areas:

- Planning for physical improvements to the road network; and
- Planning the delivery of road safety campaigns

Planning for physical improvements to the road network:

The current arrangements for planning and implementing road safety improvements place a great responsibility on local Councils to ensure the vast number of local roads in its LGA are safe and meet the expectations of the community. This takes a substantial level of resourcing and typically Councils cannot meet the resourcing requirements to effectively deliver the “towards zero” goals as set out in the State’s Road Safety Plan, across the wider local road network.

This has meant that historically, Councils have tended to be more reactive than proactive in addressing road safety concerns, at least in so far as delivering physical road infrastructure is concerned. The available grant funding under the Federal Black Spot Program, for example, is geared around this reactive approach via a benefit-cost analysis, which is good as it ensures money is being spent where it is of most benefit in terms of safety outcomes for the community. However, this doesn’t always make it easy for Councils as they are competing against all other Councils in the state, and unfortunately a number of worthy projects end up unfunded. The annual process for developing and analysing Black Spot sites for submission is often complex and time consuming, meaning that resourcing available for more proactive planning for road safety improvements often falls short, especially in smaller Councils.

Road Safety Audits (RSA’s) are encouraged in both the LGRSP and the Federal Black Spot Program as a way of proactively addressing risk in the road environment. However, they are resource intensive and usually at significant cost when consultants are used, so are often limited to larger Council projects as part of the design process. Whilst it would be ideal to complete RSA’s for existing locations in the local road network, Council simply does not have the funding or staff resources/skill sets to do this. Assistance from TfNSW would be welcomed in terms of either in-kind assistance or funding to complete RSA’s so that Council is in a better position to proactively address road risk before accidents occur (i.e. achieving ‘Towards Zero’ outcomes) and source State/Federal grant funding opportunities for infrastructure identified in such audits. Given the broad lack of Local Government employees qualified to lead RSA’s, this may be a program that the State could lead.

A frustration for Local Government is often the slow adoption/acceptance by the State for innovative road safety solutions. Often years of trials internationally and within Australia are required before a trial is considered in NSW, then it may take many years before it can be considered as a standard treatment. An example is the raised signalised intersection treatment – WCC have requested to undertake a local trial part funded by RMS/TfNSW however the stance is the treatment is not supported at this time. The fact that there is such a facility in Sydney seems to highlight there are differences in policy position between the various regional offices.

Planning the delivery of road safety campaigns

It is considered that the State Government should ideally have more responsibility for delivering Road Safety campaigns, given that the Road Rules, enforcement and funding are predominantly State-managed. Councils have many roles and responsibilities in the community, and often are under resourced and under financed to deliver Road Safety campaigns at a level that have a significant impact on road users.

Notwithstanding the above, there is a lot of good proactive work happening at a Local Government level through behavioural programs (i.e. focussing on 'Safer people' and 'Safer Vehicles'), delivered via Road Safety Officers and part-funded by Transport for NSW. This work could however be vastly extended and improved with additional funding and resources being made available to Councils.

- **Opportunities for improving road safety planning and management on local roads, including through the Local Government Road Safety Program and Community Strategic Planning**

The Local Government Road Safety Program is mainly based on behavioural change programs and as mentioned above, funding made available to the program could be increased to allow greater penetration of these behavioural programs. This would certainly help to achieve one of the main objectives of the LGRSP: *"Raise the profile of road safety within Local Government Areas (LGAs)"*.

As discussed previously, RSA's are an excellent way to address road trauma by addressing risk such that accidents don't happen in the first place. However, without assistance in terms of funding, resources and training, Councils are not well positioned to deliver RSA's and subsequently tend to concentrate on reactive planning and seeking grant funding to help offset the substantial costs of maintaining & improving the local road network. It is considered that with the appropriate Government focus and intervention, considerable road safety gains could be made through the road safety auditing process. For example, State funding of RSA training for Local Government employees to ensure all Councils have a nominal number of staff at Level 2/3 lead auditor, would be a welcome improvement to road safety planning.

Whilst the LGSRP deals mainly with behavioural programs for road safety, the Black Spot Program provides Councils with funding (on a competitive basis) for road safety infrastructure projects. This program improves black spots with a recorded history of serious injury and/or fatal crashes. The program is having success in reducing road trauma but at a relatively slow pace. The funding allocated to this program is clearly insufficient to make a serious improvement in road safety at locations that contribute to road trauma. A significant increase in the allocation would enable Councils to improve the safety of their road network and hence reduce road trauma on local roads.

Additionally, there is the asset inheritance issue, where a Council receives an asset either through handover or grant funded construction but cannot afford to maintain the high level of service asset (grip on wire barriers, mown rural verges and clear zones) due to no additional funding and no ability to increase rates to fund the asset across its life and replacement. Any grant funding received is for the design/construction of the asset, and ideally the funding should make an allowance for the costs associated with ongoing future maintenance, in order to preserve the original road safety outcomes.

Road safety in the vicinity of schools is a major issue for the Wollongong, with approximately 85 schools in the LGA, and more to be delivered as part of the major Urban Release Area in West Dapto. Council works with schools as part of the delivery of road safety behavioural programs, which are coordinated by Council's Road Safety Officer (RSO) under the LGSRP. However, improving road infrastructure around schools is now considerably more difficult for Councils given that the TfNSW "Safety Around Schools (SAS)" program has recently been discontinued. Infrastructure projects identified to improve school related road safety are now competing with all other LGA-wide transport projects and grant funding for stand-alone facilities (for example crossings) is no longer available. Furthermore, the new eligibility criteria for funding under the TfNSW Walking and Cycling Program compounds the issue, requiring Council to have 'shovel-ready' designs, completed community consultation and that the project is part of a wider place-making treatment. This is having an adverse impact on Council's ability to deliver safer road environments around schools.

- **The role of local communities and their representatives in identifying and delivering road safety initiatives to reduce trauma on local roads**

The Staysafe Committee's enquiry notes that it will specifically reference the role of local communities and their representatives in identifying and delivering road safety initiatives to reduce trauma on local roads. This is considered important as the local community best know their local roads, how they are used and any specific issues or problem areas.

There are significant gains to be made in harnessing the power of local communities in tackling road safety, mainly from a behavioural perspective. This input is particularly useful in developing tailored campaigns to certain at-risk demographics or to provide local context for a road project. However, the difficulty is often engaging the community effectively – samples can be biased and often don't represent the entire cross section of road users in a certain area. Council already incorporates a significant amount of community consultation in its projects and has an engagement team that assist with this, especially on larger town and village centre strategy work. It is important to recognise that the role of the community is generally limited to providing input into the identification of road safety issues and initiatives, and in relation to infrastructure projects cannot in itself determine final outcomes or deliver any infrastructure on the ground.

- **Other relevant matters.**

More training etc. on movement and place and the overarching State policy direction (both at state and local government level) should be provided.