

SPEED LIMITS AND ROAD SAFETY IN REGIONAL NSW

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Submission to

Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety (Staysafe)



Speed limits and road safety in regional NSW



MidCoast Council
Yalawanyi Ganya, 2 Biripi Way Taree NSW 2430

Author
Richard Wheatley
Team Leader Transport
[REDACTED]

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Introduction

Parliament of New South Wales Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety (Staysafe) has requested submissions on “Speed limits and road safety in regional NSW” with reference to:

- a) The impact of speed limits and travel times on driver behaviour and safety
- b) The impact of improved vehicle technology and road infrastructure
- c) The use of variable speed limits\
- d) Any other related matters



This is MidCoast Council's submission to this review and the focus is on speed limits as listed in the reference items.

Speed limits are important for the country roads and rural townships as it provide safety to the local community with the appropriate speed motorists should be using these roads that they may not know or use on a regular basis. Speed limits are not only setting the safe speed vehicles should be travelling but additionally the tone and amenity of the local area. It is important the speed limits relate to the land use and the safety of the road, plus provide confidence to the local residents and businesses these roads are safe for them.



a) “The impact of speed limits and travel times on driver behaviour and safety”

The uncertainty of speed limits on rural roads is frustrating to drivers due to the number of changes in zones and they not being able to relate the speed limit of the road with the adjacent land use. This uncertainty means drivers either ignore the speed limit or drive at the speed they are comfortable with along the road. This uncertainty is further compounded by many drivers not knowing the Default Speed Limits, especially on rural roads.

Temporary speed limits at work sites on roads can be confusing especially when they are long and there appears to be no work being undertaken. The usual response from drivers is to ignore the reduced speed at work sites and travel at the usual speed limit on the road.

The less appropriate the speed limit appears to the driver the more likely they will disregard the speed limit. The way forward is to raise the awareness of speed limits to drivers with education campaigns and the speed limits are suitable for the road that drivers respect.

Default Speed Limits

The Default Speed Limits for non-signposted roads are 50km/h for urban roads and 100km/h for rural roads. Drivers can be confused with these default limits as they expect (or want) signs to inform them of the road's speed limit. It is clear many drivers are not aware of these default speed limits. The use of education programs on the default speed limits across the state would raise awareness and increase compliance.

Speed limits

On roads where there's a speed limit sign, you must not drive faster than that speed limit.

On roads where there's no speed limit sign, you must not drive faster than the default speed limit:

- 50km/h in 'built-up areas' – areas with street lights and buildings next to the road less than 100m apart
- 100 km/h for all other roads.

Extract from TfNSW website

The 'built-up areas' (urban) default speed limit of 50km/h came into force on Saturday 1 November 2003. This is a recent change in the urban speed limit resulting in many people not being aware of the change especially those that obtain their license before the introduction of the new default speed limit. It is considered there was not enough promotion of this change at the time or since to ensure the drivers are aware of this reduced urban speed limit.

The lack of understanding of the urban default speed limit results in many drivers travelling over the 50km/h speed limit. Many residents of urban streets request 50km/h speed limit signs to enforce this default speed limit due to people travelling at higher speeds past their houses. These calls for 50km/h speed limit signs are rejected with the objective to encourage drivers to accept urban roads have this speed limit without having to install signs everywhere.

Rural Default Speed Limit

The Default Speed Limit for non-signposted rural roads are 100km/h comes as surprise to many people living along these roads. Many roads with this default speed limit are not suitable for vehicles travelling at high speeds and certainly not the 100km/h. The expectation is drivers should drive to the conditions whether that be the road geometry and surface or the weather conditions. There are differences between sealed and unsealed (gravel) roads regarding default speed limits which relate to the surface conditions and traffic volumes.

Sealed Rural Roads

Majority of sealed rural roads have speed limits set to match their environment (geometry, volumes, crashes, land use, etc) with few having the default speed limit. The other factors relating to sealed roads are:

- Road widths generally meet guidelines (2 lane)
- Many still do not meet other guidelines such as clear zones
- Sealed road surface more consistent for drivers either dry or wet, though surface condition may be varied
- Curve advisory speeds may be provided
- Usually more warning signs than gravel roads

This results in sealed roads being more predictable to the drivers with them having the expectation of speed limit signs to guide them on the allowable speed.



Unsealed Rural Roads

The policy for unsealed rural roads is not to set a speed limit but use the rural default speed limit of 100km/h. The main reason for use of this default speed limit is the road surface can change rapidly and the road geometry can be poor. The other factors relating to gravel roads are:

- Road widths and geometry considered due to low volumes and in many locations the roads can be down to one lane
- Sharp corners of 90° or worse
- Unsealed road surface changes rapidly and deteriorates quickly especially with rain
- Few warning signs
- No curve advisory speeds are provided

The use of the default rural speed limit on gravel roads is to have drivers take responsibility to driving at a speed suitable to the conditions. The setting of a speed limit can result in some drivers assuming that this is the speed they travel at all times when the pavement condition can change easily.

Residents along gravel roads, especially new ones (“Treechangers”), can be very surprised of the default speed limit of 100km/h. They can demand signs to be installed to reduce the speed limit especially when it is not possible to drive at this speed and there may be drivers travelling faster than other road users deem appropriate. These roads generally have low volumes but these roads can have school buses, farm trucks and large logging semi-trailers travelling on them.



Options

The most important option for reducing speeding on urban and rural roads would be to advertise and campaigns to promote the default speeds, plus the need to drive to the conditions with the objective to change driver behaviour. The long term objective is for drivers to better understand these speed limits and drive to the conditions, so they take responsibility to drive carefully. The focus should be less on speed limit but drive defensively to protect other road users and increase safety along these roads. These campaigns should be multi-level from state wide to local areas using advertising, training packages, community participation and signs.



These promotions should focus on the risks from the neighbouring road use along the roads. These would be children in urban areas and wildlife, stock and large vehicles along rural roads. People need to be informed and reminded the danger of higher than appropriate speed for the roads.

Work Site Speed Limits

A major frustration of drivers is the use of low temporary speed limits along road work areas when no work is being undertaken such as overnight and weekends. In many cases people can see no reason for the reduced speed limit when the road has not changed and the work along the sides are not occurring. If drivers can see no work is being undertaken, then they are unlikely to reduce their speed as there are no workers that need to be protected.

This habit of disregarding the reduced speed limit by drivers may result in them ignoring the work site speed limit when work is be carried out resulting in higher speed vehicles endangering the road workers.

Options

There are two ways to improve safety at work sites with one being advertising the importance of the temporary work site speed limits to drivers. The other is to have a speed limit relevant to the condition of the road along the work site and this may mean raising the speed limit when work is not being undertaken. The more pertinent the reduced speed limit is to the work site then the higher likelihood drivers will obey the speed limit.



Speed Limits v Land Use

There can be confusion on a road's speed limit when the land use or conditions do not match each other. This can be low speed limits along roads with rural land use and higher speed limits along residential areas particularly the entry into rural towns. Drivers may not be able to relate the posted speed limit to the land use resulting in the non-adherence to the speed limit, especially for lower speed zones.

The other factor that results in negativity towards speed limits is the lack of consistency of speed limits (real or perceived). A driver may travel through several country towns each having speed limits reducing at different locations in relation to the land use. This may result from different practitioners setting the speed limits, diverse interpretations of the speed limit guidelines and community or political pressure for a certain speed limit.

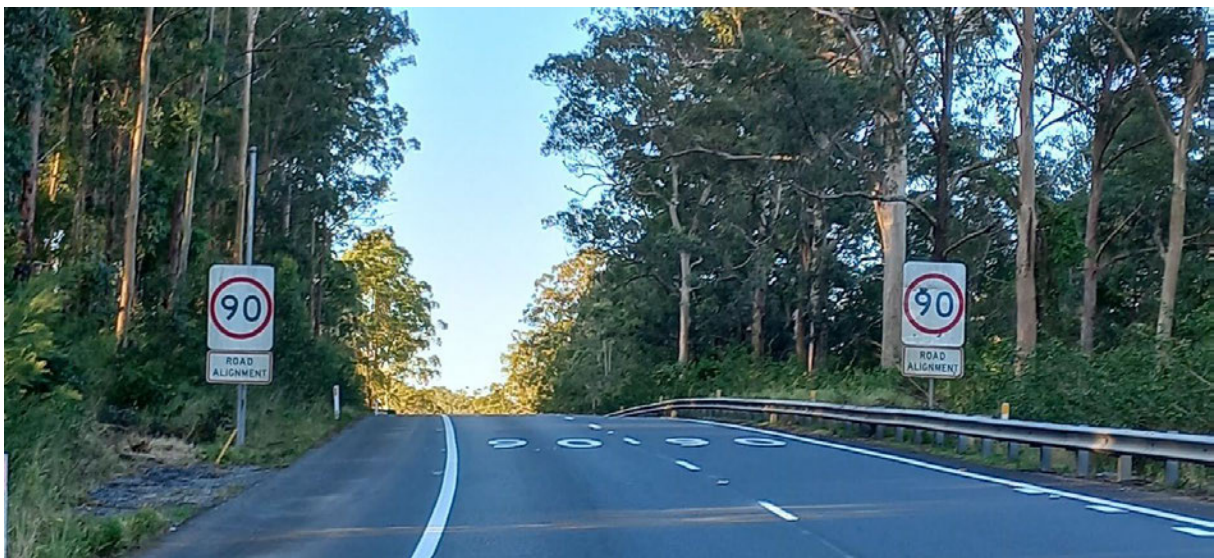
This inconsistency of speed limits reduces the adherence of the speed limits by drivers creating a reduction in safety and a belief they are not important, as they just there to hinder drivers or "fund raising" locations.

Highways are having signs installed informing drivers of the reasons for lower speed limits to ensure they understand why it is occurring, it may only be to reduce the 110km/h limit to 100km/h. These new signs may be stating a section of the highway has "Road Junctions" and "Road Alignment", which is to encourage obedience of the lower speeds. These signs could be used in rural areas where a lower speed is required but the road and land use does not match the lower speeds.

Options

This inconsistency of speed limits can be reduced by having clear interpretations of the guidelines and those determining speed limits be trained to ensure uniformity of the changes in the speed limits.

The use of signs to inform motorists why there is a certain speed limit when it would appear out of place to the land use and the road, as used on the highways.



b) “The impact of improved vehicle technology and road infrastructure”

Improved Technology

The improved technology in vehicles have provided safety for the drivers and passengers exponentially over the years. Cars are safer even at higher speeds with each new improvement plus the enhanced vehicle structure is providing a higher probability of surviving high speed crashes. These inclusions, even standard for most cars, increases safety with features such as airbags, antilock brakes, traction control, lane assistance, electronic stability control just to name a few of safety additions. These improvements should not result in changes to speed limits, assuming increases, as these increases would null and void the benefits of the safety features.

Cars are safer, smoother and quieter with the improved technology resulting in sense of additional ability in driving. The smoother and quieter vehicle can provide a false perception of the speed to the driver and a willingness to travel faster than suitable for the road. The safety features on the car can save the occupants should vehicle control be compromised by high speed such as antilock brakes, traction control and stability control. However, vehicles

travelling at too higher a speed for the road then these safety features will not stop the loss of vehicle control and may result in a crash.

A loss of control at the higher speeds above the benefits of the safety technology will be a more significant crash and this increases the likelihood to involve casualties of the occupants.

There can be a case made for young (newer) drivers, even with older secondhand cars, are having their inexperience compensated by the safety features with the car. Should a young driver lose control of their vehicle it may be at a higher speed resulting in a crash with a greater resultant injuries and possible fatalities. This negative aspect of new features may be overcome through driver training plus the awareness that safety features have limitations the driver must always maintain control using a safe speed.

Road Infrastructure

The improvement in road infrastructure will increase safety, driver comfort, protection of vehicles and improved local amenity. The right infrastructure should provide a safer environment for all the road users, especially when accompanied by an appropriate speed limit.

There is an interesting outcome from the rehabilitation of poor road pavements to a new smooth surface being the speeds of vehicles will increase, even over the speed limit. Drivers are no longer travelling carefully at a slower speed due to a rough, potholed and deformed road surface. The new smooth pavement allows drivers to increase the speed of the vehicles and reduce their attentiveness to the road.

This increased speed may not result in crashes, but the residents along the road are not appreciative of the higher speeds of the passing traffic. The complaints to Council change from the poor condition of the road to objections of the higher speeds with the attitude their safety is reduced. The usual solution is increased Police patrols to enforce the speed limit and the installation of reassurance speed limit signs to remind the drivers of the speed limit. The experience has indicated the higher speeds from improved roads is usually only short to medium term issue with the speeds returning to the speed limit but with higher average and 85% speeds.



Options

The raising of awareness of drivers the importance of speed limits even with vehicles that perform better at high speeds. The mistakes by drivers are being countered by the new technology, which provides a (false) sense of confidence at these higher speeds. The importance of drivers being conscious they are fully responsible for the vehicle safe passage along the road network. The development of self-driving cars (autonomous vehicle or hybrid) may result in drivers taking less accountability of the driving task with uncertain consequences.

The increase of speeds following a road upgrade can be dealt with by enforcement and awareness campaigns. These awareness campaigns can be done with a number of ways from media releases, Variable Message Sign trailers informing the road's speed limit and the installation of speed limit signs. The most effective of the ways to have drivers return to the speed limit is an intensive enforcement operation by the Police.



c) “The use of variable speed limits”

The use of variable speed limits would have little use within Council's road network as motorists want certainty of the speed limit when travelling along the roads. The speed limit should provide the appropriate speed on a road with drivers adjusting their speed to the conditions or the road geometry as they drive along it.

The technology required to inform drivers of the variable speed limit would be expensive and the ongoing maintenance costs would be a major deterrent. The community would expect the limited funds of rural councils to be use on the maintenance and upgrading of roads rather than devices informing of changes of speed limit along a road.

The variable speed limits work on major roads with high volumes such as highways for special reasons such as weather or heavy congestion (queuing traffic) within cities that requires a reduction in the speed of vehicles.



d) “Any other related matters”

Road Delineation

The delineation of roads can play a major role in supporting speed limits with the use of pavement markings, warning signs and raised pavement markers. The proper delineation of the road can provide reassurance to the driver of the speed and the safe travel along the road.

Warning signs can inform drivers of curves and sections of the road that are not suitable to the speed limit and drivers can adjust the speed of their vehicle to the road conditions. The use of longitudinal line marking such as centre lines and edge lines will provide confidence to drivers of the geometry of the road especially at night and wet weather. The addition of raised pavement markers to the longitudinal lines further supports the delineation of the road at night and low light conditions.

The utilization of correct delineation will ensure speed limits are set at their most appropriate speed limit and they will assist drivers to travel the roads at the best speed for the road alignment. The more confidence drivers have on the road's layout they more likely drive to within the speed limit and adjust their driving to the warnings they are observing. If this is achieved then the higher speed limit can be set along a length of road with warnings to reduce speed as required.



Fixed Speed Cameras

The use of Fixed Speed Cameras can be very effective in having the speed limit heeded to, rather than ignored. Currently these cameras are used at known speeding locations with crashes, however they should be considered where speed limits are reduced and drivers are ignoring the lower speeds.

There is such a location in our Council area, which is the village of Coopernook on the Pacific Highway. The speed limit along the highway is 100km/h and reduces down to 80km/h through the village (photo below). The speed of vehicles through this village is usually higher than 80km/h as most drivers lower their speed marginally but not down to the posted speed limit. The residents of this village are deeply concerned by this lack of adherence of the speed limit and the likelihood of severe crashes at the higher speeds.

It is acknowledged the Police do undertake regular monitoring of the vehicle speeds and enforce the speed limit within the village. However, they can not be there 24 hours a day and every day. This would be a perfect location for Fixed Speed Cameras within the 80km/h zone on both approaches to the village. This would guarantee motorists would reduce their speeds to the 80km/h speed limit. The additional benefit is the Police Highway Patrol would be free up from enforcing this zone to monitor other known speeding locations.



Mobile Speed Cameras

The monitoring of roads by the Mobile Speed Camera Vehicles has proven to be an effective way of ensuring motorists travel the road network within the speed limit. These Mobile Speed Camera Vehicles and the enforcement is managed and controlled by TfNSW.

There would be a significant benefit if local councils had approval to use their own Mobile Speed Camera Vehicles on the Regional and Local road network. The Council owned vehicles would be focused on the known speeding trouble spots within their road network and this more localised focus would be beneficial to the local residents and businesses. These locations may have lower traffic volumes that may not be a focus for the state operated Mobile Speed Camera Vehicles.

It may even be possible for several neighbouring councils to share a Mobile Speed Camera Vehicle to apportion the costs and the use of this vehicle. This has been done very successfully with the Local Government Weight of Loads Groups where a group of councils in a cooperative share the costs of heavy vehicle inspectors to monitor and enforce mass limits on trucks on the local road network.

The benefit of council Mobile Speed Camera Vehicles is they would focus on the speeding problems on local roads and they would be responding to the local residents' concerns of speeding and safety



Inconsistency of speed limits

The inconsistency of speed limits in rural areas (as noted in Speed Limits v Land Use section) creates confusion and frustration, which reduces desire to the adherence of the speed limits. The biggest issue to this inconsistency is the differing use of certain speed limits around the State. This may be a result of TfNSW regions assessing the speed limit on certain roads differently or even individual officers interpreting and implementing the guidelines differently.

It is clear there is a diverse use of the 40km/h and 30km/h zones in high pedestrian areas such as shopping strips on roads around the state. It is understood there is a program to increase 30km/h high pedestrian areas for the COVID recovery. However, it appears to be implementing at varying pace across the regions.

It would be beneficial plus remove the confusion of these shared speed limits if TfNSW provided clear advice on their use and if they were implemented consistency across the state. We have many towns and villages that are suitable, and they want to have the shared speed limits within their township. These zones would improve safety especially for pedestrians and tourists that do not know the local roads.



Slow response on speed limit decisions

The biggest frustration by residents and Council is the long-drawn-out review and decision making process of speed limits at TfNSW when a request has been submitted. Some applications for a speed limit review has taken years for the TfNSW to respond with a decision. This delay is extremely upsetting for the residents wanting a decision on roads that they have safety concerns, especially if they believe the problem is high speeds.

Council has made a submission in June 2021 for several 40km/h speed zones in high pedestrian and local traffic areas. It has been twelve (12) months since it was presented to TfNSW and we have not heard any response or comments on this submission, even after three follow up emails. MidCoast Council's 40km/h Zones Submission is attached in Appendix A.

One of the areas these delays create challenges is for new developments along an arterial rural road, such as a subdivision. The new development will likely have a speed zone reduction along this road to match this new activity. The developer may be required to rebuild or install traffic facilities (i.e. roundabout) with their increase activity this development will create. The designing of a road is related to the speed limit as one of the factors in the design. Therefore, it is best to design the road for the new speed limit after the development but it can be difficult to obtain a confirmation of the new speed limit from TfNSW.

Options

The use of delineation to support the posted speed limit with the follow up of enforcement with Fixed Speed Cameras and Mobile Speed Camera Vehicles would make the roads have a more consistent speeds and safer, especially in rural areas.

It is important for TfNSW to provide clear guidance on the speed limits and their use but more importantly make decisions on speed limits in a timely manner that supports the local community, especially in rural areas.

Conclusion

The most important factors in speed limits in regional areas is to have consistent zones across the state which is supported by the land use and road geometry that drivers can relate to while on the roads. This consistency will ensure drivers' behaviour relate to the speed limit and the conditions of the road and weather. This should have the follow up benefit of motorists accepting the speed limit and staying within this limit. The layout and delineation of the roads can be an important factors for drivers observing the speed limit.

The decision making process for speed limit changes needs to be improved and these decisions dealt with in a reasonable time frame. In regional areas the frustration by residents and road users increases as the length of time extends to make a decision on a speed limit change. The resultant frustration is motorists do not observe the existing speed limit or vehicles are travelling too fast on unsuitable roads.

The use of Fixed Speed Cameras and Mobile Speed Camera Vehicles on the road network, especially council roads, can improve safety and adherence of the speed zone. This would increase the residents' safety on their roads and the amenity of local rural communities would be enriched.

The discussion items within this submission are areas of concern on speed limits for the rural area and the suggested improvements would be beneficial to the users of the road network. MidCoast Council consider speed limits and the management of them to be of the highest importance for the safety of road users and the local communities.

Appendices

Appendix A – MidCoast Council 40km/h Zones Draft Proposal to TfNSW – 24 June 2021



MidCoast Council 40km/h Zones Draft Proposal to TfNSW

Version 1 - 24 June 2021



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1	Draft	JJH	24/06/2021
2	-		

1. Introduction

MidCoast Council is proposing to install several 40km/h zones around the LGA. This proposal document outlines five locations (Round 1) and lists a further six areas to be considered at a later date (Round 2).

Following the Draft Proposal phase the selected sites will be presented to the Local Traffic Committee for comment and then further consultation with relevant local stakeholders as necessary.

2. Criteria for selection

The steps followed for identifying suitable sites and treatments are outlined in the TfNSW document “40 km/h speed limits in high volume pedestrian areas – a guide to identifying and implementing 40 km/h speed limits in high volume pedestrian areas”.

Within this round of submissions are four High Pedestrian Activity Areas (HPAA) and one Local Traffic Area (LTA). The procedure for selecting a HPAA treatment was also used for the Local Traffic Area.

Step 1 – Identification of a high volume pedestrian road/area

“Council to determine whether the type of roadside development activity generates relatively high pedestrian volumes in the area”

All High Pedestrian Activity Areas (HPAA) put forward in this proposal meet the criteria for a pedestrian precinct treatment as outlined in the “40km/h High Pedestrian Activity Area Guidelines” from Category A: Servicing a business or commercial area. The proposed Local Traffic Area has been previously discussed with TfNSW (then RMS) and approved for implementation.

The identified locations for Round 1 40 Zones as well as future sites proposed for further investigation (Round 2) are listed below. More detail is provided on The Round 1 sites below in Section 3.

Round 1 Sites

- Old Bar CBD (HPAA)
- Taree CBD expansion (HPAA)
- Nabiac CBD (HPAA)
- Milligan Street, Chatham (HPAA)
- Winda Woppa (LTA)

Round 2 Sites

- Bulahdelah CBD
- Forster CBD expansion
- Marine Drive, Tea Gardens
- Carrington / Tahlee
- Blueys Beach
- Green Point

Step 2 – Selection of treatment options

“Council examines possible treatment options and submits draft proposal to TfNSW”

The procedure for determining the treatment type is shown below in Figure 1. All treatments in this proposal are on local and regional roads and are therefore all either Treatment 1 (gateway treatment only) or Treatment 2 (gateway treatment with traffic calming measures i.e. speed humps/raised platforms, road narrowing etc.). The typical gateway treatment for entry into a 40 area is outlined below in Figure 2.

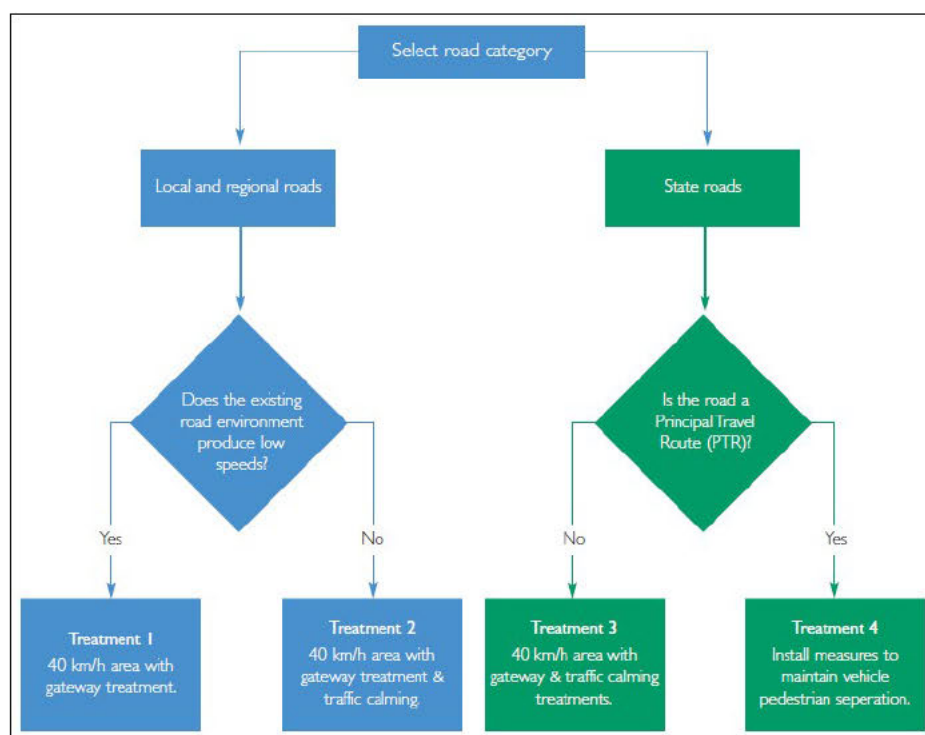


Figure 1: Flowchat for identifying appropriate treatment options (from Guidelines)

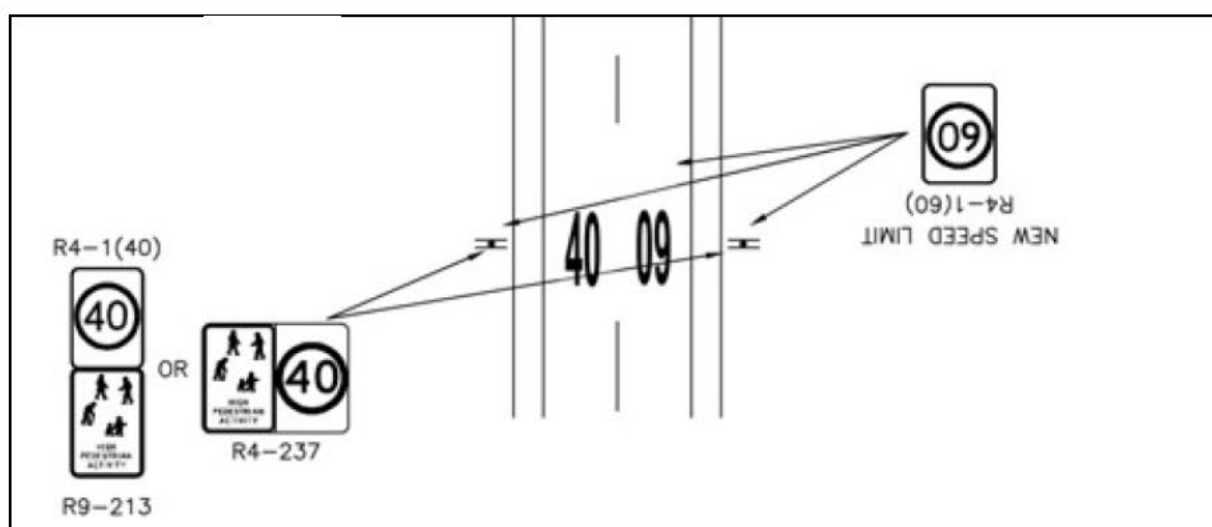


Figure 2: Typical Gateway Treatment

3. Round 1 Site Detail

Old Bar CBD

- Category A – “Servicing a business or commercial area”
- Proposed 40 km/h HPAA with gateway treatments
- Existing traffic calming facilities in place on Old Bar Road

Existing 85th percentile speeds

Old Bar Road
Waterman Street

East of David Street
North of Old Bar Road

50.4 km/h (2014)
44.7 km/h (2019)



Taree CBD

- Category A – “Servicing a business or commercial area”
- Existing 40km/h HPAAs in place along Victoria Street between Commerce and Manning Streets
- Propose to expand 40 area and through surrounding streets in CBD

Existing 85th percentile speeds

Victoria Street	Commerce to Pulteney	47.9 km/h eastbound (2020)
		50.3 km/h westbound (2020)
	Pulteney to Manning	34.6 km/h eastbound (2015)
		41 km/h westbound (2015)
Albert Street	Commerce to Pulteney	43.6 km/h (2012)
	Pulteney to Manning	37.8 km/h eastbound (2012)
		35.6 km/h westbound (2012)
Pulteney Street	Victoria to Albert	39.6 km/h (2012)



Milligan Street, Chatham

- Category A – “Servicing a business or commercial area”
- Proposed 40 km/h HPAA with gateway treatments
- Existing kerb extensions used as threshold treatments
- Traffic count below prior to traffic calming work

Existing 85th percentile speeds

Milligan Street

Latham Ave to Bruntnell St

52.6 km/h (2013)



Nabiac CBD

- Category A – “Servicing a business or commercial area”
- Proposed 40 km/h HPAA with gateway treatments
- Existing road narrowing on Clarkson Street at entry points

Existing 85th percentile speeds

Clarkson Street	South of Nabiac Street	38.3 km/h (2019)
	North of Nabiac Street	41.4 km/h (2019)
Nabiac Street	East of roundabout	30.3 km/h (2019)
Nabiac St Roundabout	South of roundabout	24.8 km/h (2019)

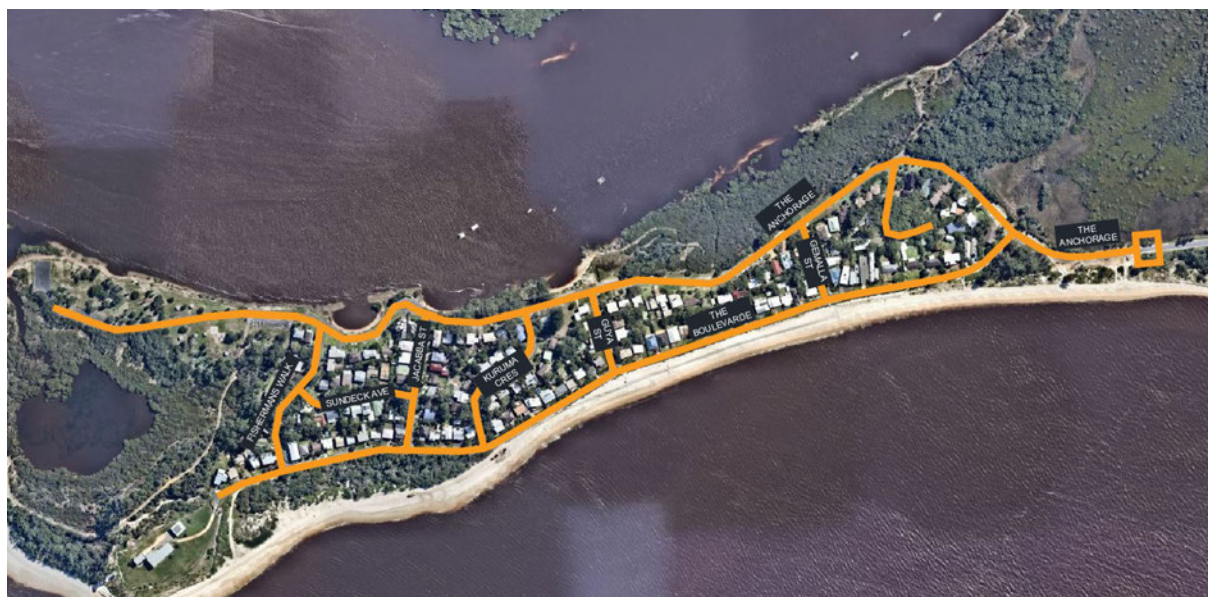


Winda Woppa

- Proposed 40 km/h Local Traffic Area with gateway treatment and traffic calming
- Propose raised platform entry treatment on The Anchorage for traffic calming

Existing 85th percentile speeds

The Boulevarde	West of The Anchorage	50.5 km/h (2014)
The Anchorage	East of The Boulevarde	61.2 km/h (2014)
	West of The Boulevarde	57.6 km/h (2014)
	East of Gemalla Street	57.2 km/h (2014)



Appendix A – Round 1 Concepts

See attached PDFs for each site.

Appendix B – Council Contacts

██████████	– Traffic Engineer	████████████████████	██████████
██████████	– Team Leader Transport	████████████████████	██████████
██████████	– Manager Transport Assets	████████████████████	██████████