The Serendipity of Road Safety Planning

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"Whatever you can do - or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it."
Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 1749-1832
Paper Synopses

Title of Paper: The Serendipity of Road Safety Planning
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Theme
New Beginnings - Road Safety and Traffic Management

Synopses:

With road fatalities and trauma increasing, road safety authority technical staff are under pressure to address this increase through infrastructure and services. Intuitively we know that each and every one of us has a role to play in road safety. But what is it? Councils in Queensland typically address road safety through their involvement with State Government agencies as well as various ad hoc local responses presuming all civil road design is undertaken using best practice with a high level of safety. But is civil design and ad hoc responses enough? A road safety strategic plan provides a framework for the development of road safety strategy and actions plans with a role in the co-ordination and delivery of community based road safety programs. So why don't all local government authorities have such a plan? These questions are the basis of this paper and the journey taken by the author to pilot the introduction of a Road Safety Officer into his organisation and the development of a Road Safety Strategy and Action Plan (RSSAP) for the Moreton Bay Regional Council in a Road Safety Pilot (RSP) project.

The Roads Alliance Team (Main Roads and LGAQ) had identified an opportunity to assist Councils to develop a coordinated approach to road safety. Serendipitously, Pine Rivers Shire Council was developing a RSSAP and during the first stages of stakeholder consultation the Roads Alliance progress was revealed which led to an amalgamation of the two trains of thought. The MBCC RSSAP will involve temporary employment of a Road Safety Officer who will work on the plans development. It is hoped that learnings that arise from the pilot will be used to refine the RSSAP prior to further pilots or a state-wide rollout to develop appropriate road trauma reduction strategies and actions at the local level.
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1 Introduction

With road fatalities and trauma increasing, road safety authority technical staff are under pressure to address this increase through infrastructure and services. Intuitively we know that each and every one of us has a role to play in road safety.

Road safety is certainly not a new concept and campaigns have been running for many years in an effort to impact on road trauma. Yet the road crash statistics are still unacceptable and in 2007 it seems that fatalities in Queensland will reach a 10 year record level. On this basis, either:

1. Additional focus for those who undertake road safety campaigns is required;
2. A framework to provide a clear direction and vision for road safety is required for those who have an ad hoc approach; or
3. Finally, for those who do no have any focus on road safety, vision and commitment with clear direction is essential.

Each one of these three objectives can be achieved with a Road Safety Strategic and Action Plan.

This paper briefly discusses existing road safety initiatives, why strive for a safe road environment and the journey the author has to taken to date on the development of a Road Safety Pilot incorporating a Road Safety Strategic and Action Plan for the Moreton Bay Regional Council.

With the majority of the member Moreton Bay Coast and Country Councils amalgamating into the Moreton Bay Regional Council (making it the third largest Council by population in Australia) and the current road crash record for Queensland, a fresh look at road safety is not only timing but seemingly a necessity.
2 Existing Road Safety Initiatives

At all levels of Government road authorities aim to provide and operate safe roads. In Australia, each State Road Authority has a different view on the task however they all share the similar vision or theme of reduced road trauma. This posed the question:

*What then is the role of Queensland Local Governments in road safety?*

This section briefly discusses existing road safety initiatives from around Australia and relevant roles.

2.1 Federal Government

Road safety involves individual and shared responsibility. All road users have primary responsibility for making safe decisions. Governments' share of the responsibility is to provide the necessary leadership and resourcing to improve road safety, including developing and enforcing laws, providing safer roads, informing the public about road safety issues and fostering improvements in vehicle safety (Australian Transport Council, 2006).

The 2007 and 2008 National Road Safety Action Plan was developed to provide a clear focus on initiatives that offer the most realistic prospect of substantial safety gains. The mix of measures adopted in individual jurisdictions and the details of specific measures are intended to reflect local circumstances and priorities. It states that approaches to improving road safety in Australia will continue to be guided by ‘safe system’ principles, which fundamentally involve two objectives:

- making the road transport system more forgiving of human error, while
- acting to minimise the contribution of unsafe road user behaviour to road crashes.

2.2 State Government

State Government Road Safety initiatives are administered and managed in a variety of ways throughout Australia. By understanding what does and more importantly does not work in other justifications, key elements can be incorporated in new road safety initiatives.

Whilst it is clear that across Australian there is range of approaches with varying institutional arrangements, the primary objective of community road safety is always the reduction of road trauma (Austroads 2002). While Austroads and a number of Australian State Agencies refer to this approach as ‘community road safety’ it should be
understood that for the context of this paper the approach is associated with local government.

Notwithstanding, a number of subsidiary objectives include:

- Creating an informed community;
- Raising the salience of road safety issues, creating informed views on road safety, creating informed activism;
- Mobilising local resources to road safety ends;
- Mobilising additional resources; creating a sense of ownership, encouraging community involvement, enhancing the sense of community;
- Promoting effective action,
- Targeting resources to risk in the community, complementing and enhancing Statewide objectives.
- Effective contribution to road safety outcomes, encouraging good practice, encouraging innovation, influencing key stakeholders;
- Integrating activities; and
- Ensuring mutually supportive activities, creating a road safety culture.

Some of these approaches are outlined in the following sections. It should be noted that these subsidiary objectives and approaches may have changed in recent years, however the principles are generally current.

2.2.1 New South Wales

In NSW road safety there has been a ‘long established use of community road safety program which covers most of the larger municipalities and many smaller municipalities. Participating municipalities have a full-time or part-time Road Safety Officer. Most municipalities have developed or are in the course of developing a road safety plan’ (Austroads, 2002). The State Road Authority, the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) has an active influence over the activities of the Road Safety Officer ‘as it contributes to the funding of the position, gives considerable support, and controls the distribution of project grants.

Road safety programs are supported by engineers working in the NSW local government and include complimentary programs aimed at elected representatives. The local road safety Officer programs in NSW aim to complement and enhance State road safety initiatives.

2.2.2 Western Australia

In Western Australia local government road safety is delivered by RoadWise, a small central unit owned and operated by the Western Australia Municipal Association.
Municipalities are encouraged to set up RoadWise committee, which receive advice, practical assistance and a small amount of funding from RoadWise. The Roadwise committee is encouraged to develop a strategic plan and is the mechanism through which communities apply for grants under a range of road safety programs (Austroads, 2002).

2.2.3 Victoria

Victoria has had several years experience in the operation of Community Road Safety Councils which cover a number of different local government areas and are supported by a coordinator having a high level of autonomy over activities and use of the media. The work of the Councils is routinely supported by VicRoads regional staff in the form of presentations and seminars (Austroads, 2002).

2.2.4 Queensland

In Queensland there is no formal road safety program similar to the other Australian State and is left typically for individual Councils. State road safety programs are delivered through Queensland Transports regionally based road safety consultants supporting a number of community activities, such as driver reviver programs and local initiatives to create safety training facilities (Austroads, 2002). Queensland Transport Road Safety Officers primarily typically focus on school based safety initiatives including crossing supervisors.

Queensland Councils are typically involved in addressing road safety through involvement with State Government agencies such as Queensland Police, Queensland Transport (Road Safety Officers), Main Roads and the Roads Alliance\(^1\) as well as various ad hoc local responses.

\(^1\) The Roads Alliance between Local Government and Main Roads was established in 2002 through a framework working in partnership sharing expertise, knowledge and decision making to achieve a rigorous and objective identification of safety risks and prioritisation of road works to achieve safety outcomes across the region; Agreed regional economic, social and environmental objectives; Becoming efficient road network managers; Making better use of limited technical resources in MR and LG; using available funds efficiently irrespective of road ownership or boundaries.
2.3 Local Government Alliance

Presumably, in addition to Queensland Councils typically addressing road safety through involvement with State Government agencies, the Roads Alliance as well as various ad hoc local responses, civil road design is undertaken utilising best practice with a high level of safety.

The Queensland road toll is trending upwards for local government controlled roads while the for state controlled roads is traveling in line with the desired downward trend\(^2\). As a result of this trend a number of Queensland Councils have raised concerns with the Roads Alliance project team about the road toll on their roads and have indicated that they would like assistance to develop appropriate road trauma reduction strategies.

*Is civil road design and ad hoc responses to localised safety issues enough?*

This level of concern therefore suggests that good civil design and ad hoc responses is not enough to address the climbing road trauma. As a result Officer level discussions have been held between the State Government agencies, LGAQ and IPWEAQ, to investigate the best way to assist local government to develop a co-ordinated strategic approach to reducing road trauma on local roads.

As long as there is road trauma, road safety is essential. Civil design with road safety principles is important and whilst this may have a localised benefit, there are efficiencies and greater gains that can be achieved with a coordinated framework in the form of road safety strategic planning.

A road safety strategic plan provides a framework for the development of a multiple year road safety strategy and an annual action plan with a role in the co-ordination and delivery of local government based road safety programs ensuring effective use of resources and resolving conflict between competing priorities with a clear vision and direction.

2.4 Local Government

Under its adopted Integrated Local Transport Plan (2001) Pine Rivers Shire Council had resolved\(^3\) to develop a road safety action plan which coordinates with Federal and State Government initiatives. It did however take nearly five years before the initial development of a Pine Rivers Shire Council Road Safety Strategic and Action Plan, which commenced in November 2006.

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\(^2\) Advised by the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) statistical analysis.

\(^3\) Council resolution M/P 01/3774-5 ILTP Strategy S18 : Improve Road Safety. ILTP Action 18.1

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This raises the question, why did it take so long to begin the development of the actions identified in Integrated Local Transport Plan? It is suggested that the answer to this question parallels the question:

*Why do Queensland local government authorities typically not have a Road Safety Plan or see the value in strategic road safety planning?*

It is suggested that the reasons are two fold, the first associated with the ability of government to demonstrate the cost/benefit of road safety initiatives specifically during the decision making process of funding allocation and secondly, a lack of resources.

With regards to the former, it is often difficult to demonstrate that road trauma has been prevented. Minor works may not seem to be as beneficial as say, a new car park or a new road. As Councils are accountable for their funding allocation it is easier to defend funding allocations or attract funding, once there is a demonstrated road trauma history particularly where there are fatal crashes.

There are also issues in relation to the potential conflict between what the community expect and what Council Officers recommend. Often a community is likely to be driven more by issues which they perceive as unsafe.

These issues can create political tension and uncertainty which ultimately affects the allocation of funding towards road safety initiatives.

Lack of resources needs little explanation. In a time when finding staff is proving to be the single greatest challenge facing the work force, competing demands for projects does affect resource allocation. Typically, following the difficulty in demonstrating the benefits of road safety, resources are allocated elsewhere.

However, the road crash statistics are still unacceptable and in 2007 it seems that fatalities in Queensland will reach a 10 year record level. On this basis, either:

1. Additional focus for those who undertake road safety campaigns is required;
2. A framework to provide a clear direction and vision for road safety is required for those who have an ad hoc approach; or
3. Finally, for those who do no have any focus on road safety, vision and commitment with clear direction is essential.

Each one of these three objectives can be met at a local government level with a Road Safety Strategic and Action Plan (RSSAP).
3 Road Safety Pilot

Despite the difficulties faced with road safety planning, over time a culture was developed at Pine Rivers Shire Council for funding of an annual road safety audit program. Once this culture of road safety had been established it was a natural progression to take it to the planning level with the introduction of a RSSAP.

Towards the end of 2006 a resource became available in a former NSW Road Safety Officer who was immediately tasked to commence the development of a Pine Rivers Shire Council RSSAP. Over the subsequent months a draft document was prepared for initial stakeholder consultation.

As part of the consultation, at the Moreton Bay Coast and Country Regional Roads Group (RRG) Technical Committee meeting held on the 18 May 2007 the RSSAP was raised and discussed. The Principal Engineer – Traffic and Transport suggested that perhaps there was some merit in expanding the RSSAP to the wider road group Councils.

Serendipitously, Officer level discussions had been held between the LGAQ, Main Roads (MR), Queensland Transport (QT), Queensland Police Service (QPS) and IPWEAQ, to investigate the best way to assist local government to develop a co-ordinated strategic approach to reducing road trauma on local roads. They had begun work on a strategy which included a range of elements designed to assist local government to develop a co-ordinated strategic approach to reducing the road trauma on local roads.

It seemed logical to combine work being undertaken by each party into one pilot project. This was the genesis of a Road Safety Pilot (RSP) project combining work commenced on the Pine Rivers Shire Council RSSAP and the work done by LGAQ, DMR, QT, QPS, IPWEAQ expanding to cover the member Local Governments of the Moreton Bay Coast and Country Regional Roads Group.

All that was needed to pull this pilot together was someone to take ownership, coordinate and drive it. It was at this time, just as the former NSW Road Safety Officer working for PRSC resigned another resource seemingly out of nowhere became available in the form of a former Senior Queensland Transport Officer with extensive experience in road safety. This Officer became an obvious choice as project manager for the RSP.

A pilot project had began bridging the gap between Federal and State Policy to individual input of local Councils. It is hoped that learnings that arise from the pilot will be used to refine the RSSAP prior to further pilots or a state-wide rollout to develop appropriate road trauma reduction strategies and actions at the local level.
3.1 ROAD SAFETY PILOT DELIVERABLES

Whilst the full extent of the RSP is still being determined, it is anticipated that it will deliver the following:

- A guide to preparing a Local Government Road Safety Strategic and Action Plan (RSSAP);
- A draft RSSAP for Moreton Bay Coast and Country Regional Road Group and the Roads Alliance or the Moreton Bay Regional Council for consideration;
- A discussion paper on the issues faced while developing the RSSAP;
- Identification on the gaps between QT regional safety initiatives and local needs/issues;
- Possible solutions or initiatives to address identified gaps identified above;
- An evaluation mechanism to determine the effectiveness of the RSP; and
- All supporting data utilised.

It is not the intention of the RSP to replace or duplicate current or proposed QT regional road safety effort rather it is intended to further support and assist wherever possible with greater coordination of road safety outcomes across a region in a way that addresses local needs or issues.

At this time it is intended that the focus of the RSP will be on the local government controlled road network only.

3.2 ROAD SAFETY STRATEGIC AND ACTION PLAN

Without question the key deliverable of the RSP will be a draft Moreton Bay Regional Council Road Safety Strategic and Action Plan (RSSAP).

The RSSAP will provide links across Council and Community activities in the achievement of road safety objectives under the broader framework of the council’s management plan. Its development will be consistent with the Federal and State Government’s focus on achieving road safety outcomes through the Roads Alliance.

Focus of the RSSAP will be on the following:

- road trauma reduction;
- influencing reduction on car dependence;
- road use behaviour;
- road engineering and design; and
- leadership, co-ordination and partnership.
3.2.1 RSSAP Objectives

The RSSAP objectives include the following:

- Reduction of road trauma by delivering safer road infrastructure;
- Preparation of a draft RSSAP for consideration;
- Provide road safety direction for the Council, Community, Community Groups and other interested groups and organisations;
- Establish road safety as a priority within Council in the planning and management of transport and land use;
- Integrate the activities of different Divisions/Sections of Council in the achievement of road safety objectives; and
- Develop community awareness, ownership and participation in improving local road safety.

One issue that has been raised during the development of the RSP is the need for a greater emphasis or focus on information dissemination or distribution of road safety initiatives between government agencies and organisations. There is a wealth of information across the country and could be used if information was known. If an initiative is having success in one region then perhaps it may work in others. It is the communication of these successes which requires greater emphasis.

3.2.2 RSSAP Benefits

The benefits of having a road safety strategic plan include:

- Reduction of road trauma and associated costs for the Council and the local community;
- Setting clear road safety objectives and direction for Council and the Community;
- Improving community relations for the council through closer contact, increased publicity and better understanding of community concerns;
- Promoting consideration of road safety when priorities are determined for local roadworks;
- Promoting community involvement and ownership of road safety issues;
- Positioning the Council to take greater advantage of federal and state road safety funding programs;
- Prioritising road safety when new building and streetscape developments are proposed;
- Establishing an information base for cohesive, long-term planning for the development of the local road network and services; and
- Improved understanding of road safety issues and improved co-ordination and planning of road safety and related strategies.
3.3 **Road Safety Officer**

A key element of the Road Safety Pilot is the temporary employment of a Road Safety Officer (RSO) who will work on the RSSAPs development. This Officer will provide a regional road safety resource to facilitate the road safety assessment, planning, programming and delivery of safety initiatives as part of new Moreton Bay Regional Council and Roads Alliance area through the RSP.

As mentioned, a former Senior Queensland Transport Officer with extensive experience in road safety has been employed as the RSO will work the Pine Rivers Shire Council and along with the other member Regional Road Group Councils to develop the RSSAP. It is expected that this employment will be for a 12 month period.

Part of the RSP is to determine and evaluation the effectiveness of a RSO in the development of RSSAPs.

It is expected that the RSO will have an understanding of both behavioural and road management issues and they will undertake or co-ordinate the following types of activities:

- Produce the RSSAP;
- Analysis of road crash data;
- Identify current road safety activities and linkages;
- Identify priority road safety issues, conduct research and recommend solutions;
- Develop strategies to raise the priority of road safety within Council and the Community;
- Liaise and coordinate activities with councils and across the region
- Liaise with QPS, MR and QT Road Safety Advisors; and
- Develop community engagement strategies.
4 Conclusion.

This paper heralds an exciting new beginning of road safety focus for the Moreton Bay Regional Council and Moreton Bay Coast and Country Regional Road Group.

The Road Safety Pilot and Road Safety Strategic and Action Plan development at this stage is expected to last for 12 months and it is very clear from preliminary discussions with key stakeholders that there are to be tangible, measurable outcomes.

Serendipity played a large role in bringing the various aspects of the RSP together and reinforces the notion that when opportunities like those that presented themselves through the RSP inception stage should be willingly accepted and embraced.

Notwithstanding the fortune to this point in time, perhaps the greatest risk to the success of the RSP will be the continued participation and ownership from all stakeholders.

From here, it is intended to finalise the program for the RSP and commence ‘full steam ahead’. It is hoped that as part of the pilots evaluation process a report discussing the success and outcomes of the RSP (to that point in time), will be provided to the 2008 IPWEAQ State Conference.
5 References
