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# Healthy Roads

## Local Government



# What is Healthy Roads?

Healthy Roads is a project that has been funded through the Road Trauma Trust Fund since 2009. The primary focus of the project is on developing an advocacy framework that adds value to the work currently conducted by the Office of Road Safety, supporting the Towards Zero Strategy. We aim to strengthen the links between road safety and public health.

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## Road Safety in Western Australia

Road safety continues to be one of Western Australia's most serious public health issues - it affects all of us, whether driving, walking or cycling. The road toll in Western Australia is one of the worst in Australia<sup>1</sup> (RAC doc). Every year in Western Australia there are approximately 3000 serious injuries and over 190 deaths as a result of road crashes.<sup>2</sup> Road crashes place a heavy burden in terms of both individual and community cost, with annual road traffic crashes costing the state AUD\$1.9billion.<sup>3</sup>

The WA road safety strategy, Towards Zero Getting there Together (2008 – 2012) is based on four key concepts- the limit of human performance; the limit of humans to tolerate force; shared responsibility; and a forgiving transport system. It involves a shift in thinking to prevent death and serious injury within the transport system.<sup>4</sup>

There are four Safe Systems cornerstones of the strategy- safe roads use, safe roads and roadsides, safe speeds and safe vehicles.<sup>5</sup> If all cornerstones of the strategy are effectively implemented over the 12 year period, it has been estimated that 16,000 people would be saved from being killed or seriously injured on WA roads.<sup>4</sup>

## Including road safety in public health plan

The government has committed to the introduction of the Public Health Act in 2012. At present, the Public Health Bill requires local governments to develop a Public Health Plan. A Public Health Plan is a comprehensive set of proposed activities that informs the way in which public health is managed within a local government and also provides an avenue of communication to your community. Road safety prevention could be included within this Public Health Plan, provided it is identified as a need within your community.

The Integrated planning report gives local governments a framework for establishing local priorities and to link this information to operational functions. Currently, regulations are being drafted under S5.56(2) of the Local Government Act to briefly outline the minimum requirements for developing a plan for the future. The minimum requirement to meet the intent of the plan for the future is the development of a Strategic Community Plan and a Corporate Business Plan. The Strategic Community Plan outlines community long term (10+ years) vision, values, aspirations and priorities, with reference to other local government plans, information and resourcing capabilities.

Road safety could be included within this Strategic Community Plan, provided it is identified as a need within your community. Healthy Roads have identified areas of local government work that can impact positively on road safety including but not restricted to;

- Partnerships with other local governments for appropriate action to increase road safety funding from state and federal governments
- Reviewing road safety data for your local government and developing appropriate action based on the data
- Alcohol education and public awareness of drink driving
- Speed limits within local governments
- Infrastructure development
- Fleet safety
- Development of a shared system



# Priorities

Healthy Roads believe that local governments can impact positively on reducing the road toll and associated injuries on our roads by changing the road safety culture and attitudes within their local government and community. Recognising that there is no single solution in reducing death and serious injuries on Western Australian roads from road related incidents and that other organisations are active in areas such as alcohol, Health Roads has focused on three priority areas for action that we feel local governments can adopt:

1. Speed limits in local communities
2. Shared system – pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles
3. Fleet vehicle safety

## Priority 1: Speed limits in local communities

Speed management has a flow on effect for your local community

It has been acknowledged that speed is at the centre of the road injury problem; it influences both crash risk and consequence.<sup>6,7</sup> The probability of being seriously injured in a collision rises with even a small change in impact speed.<sup>7</sup> As speed increases, so does the number and severity of injuries.<sup>6</sup>

Since the reduction from 60km/h to 50km/h inception in 2001 there has been 20 per cent fewer crashes. Evaluation has shown that the 50km/h default in built up area speed limit has impacted positively on vulnerable road users (young people, older drivers and pedestrians).<sup>8</sup>

Speed management within your local government area including lowering speed limits has a flow on effect for the safety of pedestrians, cyclists, moped drivers and motorcyclists.

A combination of lowering speed limits, road design and traffic calming devices would see the most benefit in reducing speed related injury and death on the roads.<sup>9</sup> Reducing speed limits in high pedestrian areas such as shopping and café strips would benefit both pedestrians and cyclists. Adjusting speed limits to complement the road infrastructure also benefits all road users.

## Priority 2: Recognition of a Shared System

Local government need to build upon current standards, finding innovative solutions for a safer shared transport

The road transport system is a shared system- the interaction between road users, roads and roadsides, travel speeds and vehicles needs to be considered and managed holistically.

Road safety affects everyone whether they walk, drive or cycle. Local governments must respond to this when they are planning the road transport systems.

The safe system principles demand a holistic approach to road safety – we need to manage all components of the road systems together; speed, level of protection offered by our roads and the safety of the vehicles we use. This will not only minimise the number of crashes but the severity of injuries sustained.<sup>12</sup>

Safe system interventions such as infrastructure improvement, and speed reduction initiatives generate benefits for cyclists and pedestrians.

## Priority 3: Fleet vehicle safety

Purchasing 4 or 5 star ANCAP rated vehicles for your fleet is an effective policy intervention- it reduces the amount of vehicle related death and injury

The most common cause of work related death, injury and absence from work in Australia is road crashes.<sup>7</sup> In WA local government fleets are substantial — they collectively have over 14,500 vehicles worth \$459, 386, 181.<sup>10</sup>

Local governments are in a position to promote higher standards than are required by law. One of the most effective policy interventions that a local government can adopt to reduce the amount of vehicle work related death, injury and absence from work is through the purchasing of vehicles with high safety standards (4 and 5 star ANCAP rated) for their fleets.<sup>11</sup>

There are many reasons for developing fleet safety policies within your local government<sup>10</sup>-

**Social:** By introducing a fleet safety policy workers may develop a safer driving culture away from work, setting an example for and influencing their family's choices. Fleet vehicles will also be circulated into the wider community every 2-3 years.

**Legal:** Integrating a fleet management system into OH&S framework has the potential to reduce injury risk and death and reduce associated costs.

**Business:** Local governments with a fleet safety policy can stay ahead of regulations and offer good public relations as a leader in road safety initiatives. There are many benefits in having fleet safety policies- reduced costs, off the job awareness, improved productivity and enhanced quality of service.

**Financial:** Work related crash costs cut into the budget of an organisation — an average crash costs \$2000.



# References

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# About PHAIWA

The Public Health Advocacy Institute of WA (PHAIWA) works closely with its partner organisations and other public health groups to promote public health interests and action in priority areas such as obesity, alcohol, environment & health, injury, child health, Indigenous health, road safety and public health expenditure. The PHAIWA is an independent public health voice that aims to promote, support and develop public health advocacy in Western Australia.

