LOCAL GOVERNMENT ROAD SAFETY PROGRAMS
FROM PILOT TO SUSTAINABILITY
The experience of Fairfield City Council

Introduction –

In NSW the Local Government Road Safety Program is a memorandum of agreement between the NSW State Government and Local Government to deliver a partnered approach to road safety. It is designed to increase the community reach and involvement of communities in road safety countermeasures.

The Memorandum of Agreement between State and Local Government is a ten year contract that sees funds allocated by the State Government (approximately 7 million dollars per year) to fund the employment of Road Safety Officers within local Councils. These positions are charged with the delivery of behavioural and education programs aiming to address local issues.

Currently in NSW there is a concern in relation to the financial sustainability of Local Councils. The impending completion of the Local Government Road Safety Program funding agreement has given cause for reflection in terms of the efficacy of community based road safety countermeasures. This paper outlines the incorporation of road safety behavioural programs into the “business as usual” services at Fairfield City Council. It highlights the ability of a Local Government Authority to recognise the benefits of community action for road safety outcomes and to commit resources to ensure that this program is not threatened by a removal of State Government sponsorship. In summary this paper seeks to demonstrate or share how road safety programs have been set up at Fairfield City Council so that the external funding does not act as a pre-requisite for the continuation of behavioural road safety program delivery.

Employment fully funded by Local Government –

In NSW many Road Safety Officer positions are part funded by the State Government. The vision of the State Government in providing funding for the employment of a dedicated Road Safety professional was to demonstrate the efficacy of this investment in road safety gains. Fairfield City Council has reaped road toll gains since the employment of an officer in this role. As such the position was made a permanent position and has not been dependent on funding from the State Government. This has enabled the role to develop with a commitment to local issues and not as a satellite of State Government.

One of the most important outcomes in terms of the position being able to respond to the needs of Local Government has been that programs have been established and continue to be delivered in response to local needs. This has enabled a service delivery model for road safety programs to be created as such there has been built a distinction between "business as usual" programs versus "opportunistic project funding."
Pilot – Inception of the Local Government Program in NSW

In 1992 the core deliverers of Council road safety were the traffic engineers with an emphasis on engineering treatments as a response to community road safety concerns. Fairfield City Council was the first Council to embrace the program and a major selling point was established at the end of this year when the local road toll had reduced from twelve fatalities in this time-frame. Whilst this crash data driven decision had obvious flaws it resulted in the full-time incorporation of this position into the Council structure.

In the beginning all Road Safety Officers in NSW were employed on one year contracts. Whilst this was a high pressure contract Road Safety Officer’s quickly launched and delivered many community based road safety programs. Over the ensuing years these early programs have been summed up by some as a time of “stunts, gimmicks and balloons/stickers/community giveaways.” However, even whilst working now in a more sophisticated operating environment there are still many community requests to market road safety in this manner. It is considered to be a way of drawing attention and local response to a road safety concern.

When the Road Safety Officer Program was established there were at some Council’s a tension that arose from a belief that the NSW State Government (Roads and Traffic Authority) was diverting road safety funds that would otherwise be invested in engineering treatments, such as the provision of funding through the “Black spot” Program. As such it was important for Engineers to see value in the employment of an officer charged with enlisting behavioural change projects for road safety improvements. Like many Road Safety Officers, at Fairfield the position sits within Engineering Services. The analogy that simplifies this pragmatic approach by Engineers has been that a Road Safety Officer had to have a better cost/benefit ratio than the alternative application of a minor traffic calming devices.

The Role of Local Government in Road Safety

As discussed traditionally and certainly prior to 1992 the role of Local Government in road safety was focussed on engineering solutions. The Local Government Road Safety Program sought to integrate behavioural, educational and engineering solutions in consultation with the local community when tackling road safety problems at the local Council level.

This is methodology that is applied in delivering all of the sustained "business as usual" programs that we run at Fairfield. In an organisational context the Road Safety role at Fairfield City Council sits within Engineering Services.
The role has links to Community Outcomes Departments and some Road Safety Officers in NSW are placed within these sections of Local Government.

Road Safety has relevance across all of these corporate groups. For example:

- **Corporate Support** – within Risk Management which includes Fleet Safety
- **Environmental Standards** – within DA assessment with application of road safety auditing of proposed DA’s.
- **City Outcomes** – including Alcohol/Drug Action Planning, Cycleway Network planning and promotion/alternative transport for instance.
- **City Services** - which also includes community life as well as Engineering Services where I am placed.

However at Fairfield City Council it is a role with day to day input into traffic engineering works. Many road safety programs at Fairfield City Council have evolved in response to community issues and are now built into standard Council service delivery. They do not have a start and finish date; they are core to our Branch’s service delivery.

The Local Government Road Safety Program project development model that has been developed can in practice be somewhat limiting when creating a change to Local Government service delivery that is sustainable.
LOCAL GOVERNMENT ROAD SAFETY PROJECT DEVELOPMENT MODEL

This is due to the fact that it works on project inception, development, evaluation and final completion report. It does not recognise that the inclusion of a road safety project may be an improvement to existing service delivery. It does not encourage a permanent adoption of road safety projects into Local Government service delivery. In summary, the standard grant management process adopted in NSW as part of a State and Local Government partnership can in fact create a barrier to the sustainability of the Road Safety Officer role within Councils.

I argue this from a position of having put together many projects using this model and noting that there are benefits in terms of raising the profile of road safety issues but that the short term nature of the project delivery often compromises effective evaluation. This paper, however, attends to the evolution of road safety programs within Fairfield City Council that have become embedded into the role of Council and are not dependent on external funding for delivery. The role of the Road Safety Officer at Fairfield City Council is intrinsic, it provides a permanent behavioural component to the otherwise engineering focussed deliverables of the Council.

Building Road Safety into Core Business of Local Government

There are a number of road safety sustained activities at Fairfield City Council that have been delivered for nearly ten years. In the first instance these were programs that were identified in terms of community need, designed, formally launched and implemented but have been adopted as ongoing Council deliverables.
Some of these programs have been showcased and adopted by other Local Government Authorities in other jurisdictions. Some examples of permanently sustained road safety deliverables at Fairfield City Council are:

- **Illegal Street Racing and Burn Out Program**
  This program provides a response to requests for engineering treatments which are requested by the community but not warranted for construction. It puts in place a more appropriate and measured response to the issue of antisocial behaviour. This program relies on a partnership between Police and Council and is a standard intervention for the offence of burn outs and illegal street racing.

In response to resident information a mail out to the targeted streets is undertaken by Fairfield City Council. This letter informs residents and often the offender that Police have strong powers to prosecute “hoon” drivers. Residents are encouraged to report for charges these offenders. This program has resulted in the confiscation of offending driver’s vehicles, heavy fines and license disqualifications. It has been an appreciated, appropriate and effective response to a road safety issue that generally presents to Council in the form of a request for speed hump installation.

- **Trail Bike Riding**
  This program targets the illegal use of trail bikes and is enacted similarly to the Illegal Street Racing and Burn Out Program. Similarly, this partnership between Council and the Police has seen prosecutions for this offence.
- **Slow Down in My Street**

Fairfield City Council routinely receives letters requesting traffic calming in residential streets. Funding for traffic calming is heavily prioritised and previously Council informed residents that their street did not meet priorities for engineering treatments.

The intervention that has been introduced by the Road Safety Officer is the use of the "Speed Check Radar" in residential streets when engineering treatments are not appropriate. This response is coordinated with resident mail out information as to the scope of the problem and a tasking of Fairfield Highway Patrol to the street.

This program has resulted in measured reductions to 85th% speed in the targeted local streets.

![Coordinated education and enforcement in residential streets.](image)

- **Go 40 For Me**

No longer a grant funded project "Go 40 for Me" has been maintained in Fairfield since the project launch seven years ago.

Schools continue to display project banners and the City Gateway signs are altered at the beginning of each school term to reflect the need to travel at 40km/h in school zones.

A high profile program of both courtesy and Police radar checks is undertaken for the first three weeks of each school term. The priority of the targeted school zones is set in consultation with school communities. Media releases and school newsletters information is distributed each school term to highlight school zone speed limits.
St Gertrude's Primary School – supporting “Go 40 for ME”.

- Safety Around Schools –

Fairfield City Council works with its fifty-two local schools to ensure that they have a Traffic Management Plan that balances road safety and the requirements for school access.

These plans are created in partnership with local schools and reviewed routinely. The education of the Traffic Management Plans is undertaken and coordinated with Council Enforcement Officers.

WESTFIELDS SPORTS HIGH SCHOOL
TRAFFIC MANAGEMENT PLAN
Hamilton Road

Westfields Sports High School

1. **KISS & DROP ZONE**
   - 2 minute parking
   - drop off only

2. **Bus Zone 8am - 4pm**

3. **NO STOPPING**
   - morning times
   - No stopping area lengthened on the approach to the crossing

**IMPORTANT - KNOW THE PARKING REGULATIONS AT OUR SCHOOL**

- Parking signs regulate traffic movements and must be obeyed.
- Parking enforcement is undertaken regularly, heavy fines and demerit points apply.

**LEGEND**

1. **NO PARKING** (Kiss and Drop) - enables the drop off and collection of passengers.
   - The driver must not leave the vehicle and must move on within 2 minutes.
2. **BUS ZONE** - only for buses within stated times. Parking permitted at other times
3. **NO STOPPING** - morning times
   - No stopping area lengthened on the approach to the crossing
   - Never STOP or PARK in these zones.

**School Zone Traffic Management Plan**

This work is supported by presentations at Kindergarten Orientation Days, Parent and Citizens meetings and School Council sessions.
Free monthly child restraint fitting service

This program was developed in 1999 in response to research findings delivered by South Western Sydney Area Health Service. The report quantified a very low level of compliance with seatbelt and child restraint legislation in the Fairfield Local Government Area.

Fairfield City has a significant level of "new arrivals" in terms of migration and refugee intake and as a result has one of the most ethnically diverse populations of any Local Government Area in Australia. The South Western Sydney Area Health Report cited a lack of understanding of the requirement for child restraint reflected by these groups.

In response, Fairfield City Council introduced a monthly free child restraint fitting service, recognising that demonstration of restraint fitting is not language dependent. The program has been operating for the better part of ten years and major improvements to child restraint use have been measured.

The service is booked out each month, some weeks in advance and the word of mouth education that it has encouraged through migrant groups has seen marked improvements. There is a measured increase in the understanding of the importance of appropriate child restraint. To date nearly 3,000 fittings have been undertaken by Fairfield City Council. Council is in the process of accrediting the Works Depot as an Authorised Child Restraint Fitting Station.

Fairfield City Council – Child Restraint Fitting

Young Driver Education

A well attended program for young drivers has been developed and delivered by Fairfield City Council in partnership with Fairfield Local Area Command.
The program was developed in consultation with young drivers and consists of a series of workshops held over a four week period. The program is delivered by voluntary presenters and held at Council Chambers. Each session has hosted up to one-hundred young drivers. The program was independently evaluated by the University of Western Sydney in 2006. The results indicated that young drivers recorded a change to their attitudes to driving. There was a self-reported indication that they were likely to apply low risk driving practices.

Young Driver Program – A Graduating Group

- Alcohol Accord Foundation –

Fairfield City Council provided the foundation of a local Alcohol Accord for the Local Government Area in 2000. This Accord has resulted in a number of sustained activities delivered by local Licensees. Local Licensees now provide the following as routine practice around the service of alcohol:
  - Free drinks for designated drivers
  - Free breath testing facilities
  - Courtesy bus provision

- Road Safety Auditing –

The Road Safety Officer at Fairfield City Council is a registered Level 3 Road Safety Auditor. As such road safety audits have been provided on a fee for service basis to other local Councils.

There is also a commitment to Road Safety Auditing the detailed designs of proposed engineering treatments in the Fairfield Local Government Area.
The Pro's and Con's of sustained Local Government Road Safety Programs

In building road safety projects into the service standards of Council’s Engineering Services Division a number of benefits have been recorded. However, there are also some impacts on the program in terms of capacity for the delivery of one-off campaigns and the development of road safety promotional projects, which can be argued to decrease the excitement of the role.

A summary of the considered pro’s and con’s are:

PROS
- Creates a minimum service standard for the road safety program
- Builds road safety projects into core business delivery by Council
- Creates a resident expectation that these road safety services are part of their expected service levels as rate payers
- Systematic approach to planning can reduce labour

CONS
- Repetitive processes in place.
- Difficult to highlight ongoing programs as a good news/exciting communication/media
- Low level use of road safety officer skills as project maintenance does not take the drive and vision of new programs, yet there is a reduced capacity in terms of time to launch new initiatives.

Opportunistic funding versus service delivery funded by Council –

Fairfield City Council includes road safety outcomes and programs as part of the Management Plan deliverables. As such Council provides a budget for the delivery of these programs and the Road Safety Officer is a position funded by Council.

Opportunistic funding opportunities are still explored but the maintenance of standard road safety behavioural program delivery does take the allocation of the full-time position. The funding by the State Government in NSW has become prescriptive over the years so this has not been of major concern.

The sustained projects outlined in this paper, are inexpensive to maintain and because they are part of Council’s reported outcomes with attached budgets the funding of their continuance can be enabled through the normal funding bidding processes of Council. This comment is made with reference to continuing pressures of funding upon Local Government and concerns in relation to the financial sustainability of NSW Councils under current conditions.

However, Fairfield City Council has embraced road safety behavioural projects as a cost effective and important deliverable. As such the position
has recently been restructured to that of only five senior positions within the Engineering Services Department.

**RELATIONSHIP GRAPHIC**

Senior Positions within Engineering Services at Fairfield City Council

**CONCLUSION**

Behavioural road safety projects have become a legitimate and cost effective response to resident complaints. The work of the Road Safety Officer is integral and complementary to that of professional engineers.

There continues to be insecurity of tenure for many Road Safety Officers employed in NSW. In the light of this concern, it is very important for the asset of a Road Safety Officer to be considered as an item with a high cost/benefit ratio.