Adopting the safe systems approach to road safety for Aboriginal people in NSW: Safety assessments of roads and roadsides for Aboriginal communities

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INTRODUCTION
The cost of road trauma is inequitably borne by the NSW Aboriginal community.
Aboriginal people are 3.4 times more likely to die in a transport related crash than non-Aboriginal people. These trends are consistent with data from South Australia, Western Australia and Northern Territory It can also be argued that as Aboriginal communities are characterised by strong family connections, the personal cost of road trauma and resulting community impact is even greater. The population of the NSW Aboriginal community is 148,178; South Australia is 26,044; Western Australia is 77,928 and Northern Territory is 66,582.

DISCUSSION
The NSW Government has recognised the gap in living conditions experienced by Aboriginal people and has developed a comprehensive strategy under the NSW State Plan Priority F1: Strengthening Aboriginal Communities, for which the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA) is the lead agency. NSW Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) is the lead agency for delivering Priority S7: Road Safety (Reduce road fatalities to 0.7 per 100 million VKT by 2016). RTA is working in close partnership with DAA and others to assess road safety issues affecting Aboriginal communities.

A substantial number of Aboriginal people in NSW live on isolated community reserves, the formal ownership of which was transferred to NSW Aboriginal Lands Council under the Land Rights Act (1983). These communities are often isolated from mainstream communities. The NSW Centre for Road Safety (CRS) has adopted the safe systems approach to review safety conditions affecting those communities by assessing roads within a number of reserves across the State: leading a team, that includes council representatives, to assess unclassified connecting roads as well as assessing connecting State managed roads.

The key in undertaking this project is to develop and maintain effective strategic partnerships. It was essential to identify partners / stakeholders who could influence and assist in developing partnerships at the local level. An interagency steering group was formed to oversee the project. This group reviews and approves the final report. The management team also reports to the steering group. The steering group is made up of representatives from DAA, Department of Local Government, NSW Aboriginal Lands Council, and with Local Government & Shires Associations as an observer.

Department of Local Government, and Local Government & Shires Associations have facilitated access to individual local governments that provide officers to participate in the assessments, particularly on roads under their jurisdiction.

Likewise, the NSW Aboriginal Lands Council facilitates entry to local Aboriginal Land Councils, representatives of which lead the assessment team onto Aboriginal reserves. DAA identified 63 Aboriginal reserves that were to be assessed for a wide range of infrastructure needs under Priority F1: Strengthening Aboriginal Communities. The RTA team, led by the CRS, included staff from Regional offices including Aboriginal Programs Advisors who were familiar with local issues and communities.

It is important that a project such as this will have working partnerships at senior levels as well as at the ground level. Both levels of partnership are essential to understand the range of issues affecting road safety outcomes.

As a result, this project is an Australian first, bringing together a diverse range of stakeholders for the purpose of improving road safety for Aboriginal communities using the safe system as the model.

The safe system model promotes mobility that is safe, noting that road users will all make mistakes and that all elements of the road transport system must work together so that crashes are reduced and in the event of a crash, the incidence of death and serious injury is reduced.

CONCLUSIONS
Experience learned from conducting previous route reviews on the Pacific and Princes Highways in NSW has demonstrated that carefully targeted works have the potential to save lives and injuries. Surprisingly, many of these works are relatively inexpensive and can often be incorporated into maintenance programs.

RTA is already implementing all recommendations relating to State managed roads as part of this project.

Typically, types of works include: adjusting speed limits, traffic calming in residential areas, signs, delineation, footpaths, intersection widening and pedestrian facilities.

This is an important project that demonstrates that a diverse range of agencies can work together to improve road safety outcomes for disadvantaged communities. The project uses safe systems principles and strategically targeted works to improve road safety performance on different types of roads.

REFERENCES
2. Population distribution of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2006 ABS Cat. No. 4705