

Learnings from Phase One of WALGA's Local Government Safe System Project

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Abstract:

WALGA's Local Government Safe System Project was established in May 2009, with the goal of increasing the uptake of safe system principles by Local Government, in a shared responsibility approach, for the implementation of *Towards Zero*.

The first phase of the project focused on raising awareness and understanding of the safe system approach within Local Government; clarifying the current level of capacity of Local Governments to adopt a safe system approach; identifying the barriers and enablers for Local Governments to move towards this approach; and developing a set of safe system principles to provide relevant guidance for Local Governments.

These strategies were designed to achieve the targets set for Phase One, which were to:

- Increase the awareness of the *Towards Zero* strategy within Local Governments by 10% by May 2011.
- Increase the knowledge of the safe system approach within Local Government by 10% by May 2011.
- Increase the adoption of the safe system approach into Local Government strategies, plans and policies by 5% by May 2011.

This paper will consider the outcomes of the first phase of the Local Government Safe System Project, and measure the progress towards the goal and targets of the project. Key learnings from Phase One will be explored, and the way forward for Phase Two of the project will be outlined.

Background:

WALGA's Local Government Safe System Project (LGSSP) was established in May 2009, through funding from the Road Trauma Trust Account via speed and red light camera fines. As part of WALGA's review of its role in road safety the LGSSP was developed in recognition of the crucial role of Local Governments will play in the effective implementation of *Towards Zero*, the road safety strategy for Western Australia 2008-2020. The LGSSP is designed to complement the policy, advocacy and leadership work of WALGA, and utilises the network of local level road safety partnerships developed across the state since the RoadWise Program was launched in 1994.

Local Governments are key partners in creating a safe road transport system and realising the *Towards Zero* vision of a future where crashes resulting in death and serious injury are virtually eliminated. Local Governments in WA collectively manage a road network of 128,147 kilometres, representing 72 per cent of the total road network.¹ Crash data for the period 2005-2009 shows that 61 per cent of all serious crashes (including fatalities and hospitalisations) in WA occurred on the Local Government road network (local roads)². As designers and operators of this extensive road network, and as leaders and influencers in local communities, Local Governments are well placed to have a positive impact on road safety outcomes.

Phase One of the Local Government Safe System Project commenced in May 2009 and concluded in July 2011. This initial phase of the project focused on establishing the baseline level of safe system understanding within the Local Government sector, and gauging the challenges and opportunities for Local Governments as they move towards a safe system approach.

Project goal, objectives and strategies:

The goal and objectives of the project are based on the *Towards Zero* road safety strategy for WA 2008-2020, and are designed to monitor the intermediate and long-term progress of the LGSSP.

The **goal** of the project is to increase the uptake of safe system principles by Local Government, in a shared responsibility approach, for the implementation of *Towards Zero*.

The **objectives** for Phase One of the project (May 2009 – July 2011) were to:

- Increase the awareness of the *Towards Zero* strategy within Local Governments by 10%.
- Increase the knowledge of the safe system approach within Local Government by 10%.
- Increase the adoption of the safe system approach into Local Government strategies, plans and policies by 5%.
- Increase the application of the safe system approach into Local Government procedures and practices (*n.b: baseline for this objective will be established in July 2011, and a target set for Phase Two*).

The **strategies** for Phase One of the project were to:

- Communicate the benefits of the safe system approach and the important role that Local Governments play in creating a safe system in our communities.
- Gather information and data on the current situation in Local Government regarding their capacity to implement a safe system approach.
- Work with the sector and other partners to develop safe system guiding principles to give Local Government more clarity on the application of the safe system approach.
- Identify the barriers and enablers for Local Government, to embed safe system principles in policy and practice, through consultation.
- Utilise data and information collected in Phase One to develop Phase Two Project Plan.

¹ WALGA, Report on Local Government Asset & Expenditure, 08/09

² Main Roads, pers comm., Nov 10.

Development of evaluation plan:

Evaluation is a critical element of any project, and involves making an assessment on how successful, or otherwise, a project has been³. Success is commonly measured as the extent to which the project has met its original goal, objectives and strategies. The LGSSP team developed a comprehensive evaluation plan in the early stages of the project, which identified the indicators that would be measured at the conclusion of Phase One.

Data sources:

Data for the evaluation plan was gathered from a range of sources. The primary source for the evaluation of the project objectives is the two Local Government safe system surveys conducted by market research company Synovate on behalf of the LGSSP. These surveys were designed to measure Local Government understanding, activity and capacity to implement a safe system approach. The first survey was conducted in November 2009, with the survey repeated in June 2011. The initial survey attracted a response from 49% of all Local Governments in WA (n=67), while 39% of Local Governments (n=54) responded to the second survey.

Data has also been collected and analysed from the series of Local Government Safe System workshops conducted by the LGSSP during 2010 and 2011. The workshops were developed to provide an opportunity for Local Government officers and Elected Members to increase their awareness and understanding of *Towards Zero* and the safe system approach, and to provide an avenue to discuss the barriers and enablers they face in moving towards this approach. Participants attending the workshops completed a pre- and post-workshop evaluation to assess changes in awareness and understanding, while data was also collated from focus group sessions which explored the safe system cornerstones in more detail. A total of 16 workshops were held in all regions across the state, attended by 151 officers and Elected Members from 53 Local Governments.

Other data sources include records maintained by the LGSSP, communication reports, LGSSP contacts database and meeting minutes.

Context of Phase One of the LGSSP:

While the purpose of this paper is to consider the learnings from Phase One of the LGSSP, it should be considered in the broader context of road safety and safe system activity in Western Australia. WALGA's RoadWise Program, through a network of road safety officers, provides support to the Local Government and community road safety network throughout the state. This network provides a mechanism for engaging and involving the community and Local Government in road safety, and building social capital for the implementation of effective road safety activities. In 2010, more than half of all Local Government areas had an active RoadWise committee⁴.

WALGA also undertakes Local Government policy, advocacy and leadership activities in relation to road safety. This includes developing policy positions relating to road safety and

³ Nutbeam D & Bauman A 2006. *Evaluation in a Nutshell – a practical guide to the evaluation of health promotion programs*. McGraw Hill, Sydney.

⁴ Road Safety Program Achievements 2010, WALGA <http://www.roadwise.asn.au/documents/2010rsprograms>

transport issues, and advocating for increased funding for Local Government delivery of road safety.

At a broader level, a number of other Road Safety Council member agencies undertake ongoing road safety activities which involve and influence Local Government at some level. This includes community forums and community education campaigns conducted by the Office of Road Safety, and funding for Local Government road infrastructure managed by Main Roads WA.

Limitations:

The learnings from Phase One of the LGSSP have a number of limitations. The Local Government safe system surveys which form the basis of the evaluation had a response rate of less than 50% in both the 2009 and 2011 survey. While this is considered to be a good response in comparisons to other surveys of the sector, the results cannot be seen to representative of the sector as a whole.

Each of the survey results represents a random sample or snapshot at that time. The regular changes of Chief Executive Officers and Elected Members within Local Government means that there is likely to be very few respondents who completed the survey in both 2009 and 2011.

The project goal:

The goal of the project is to increase the uptake of safe system principles by Local Government, in a shared responsibility approach, for the implementation of *Towards Zero*. This is a long term goal, which will not be readily evaluated until the LGSSP has developed and progressed further than Phase One. Despite the fact that this is a long term proposition, a number of performance indicators have been identified as being strongly linked to the program goal. These can be seen on the following table. While these indicators will be refined as the project progresses, they provide an initial view as to how the overall program goal will be evaluated in the future.

Overall performance indicators	
Policy performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Uptake of safe system principles by Local Government ○ Ambitious local road safety targets set ○ Commitment stated at Local Government level
Implementation indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Awareness of the <i>Towards Zero</i> strategy within Local Government ○ Knowledge of the safe system approach within Local Government ○ Adoption of the safe system approach into strategies, plans and policies within Local Government ○ Application of the safe system approach into procedures and practices within Local Government
Outcome indicators	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Number of people killed and seriously injured in crashes* ○ Fatality and serious injury rate per million vehicle
* <i>Note: these indicators</i>	

<p><i>are still be determined, and will be subject to the availability of data</i></p>	<p>kilometres travelled*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Number of people killed or seriously injured in crashes according to crash type, i.e. run-off-road, intersection, head-on, other* ○ Changes in fatality and serious injury risk as estimated from observed changes in mean speed measured at a representative sample of metropolitan, regional, and remote sites*
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Phase One objectives:

This section of the paper outlines the evaluation of the objectives of the project during Phase One, with particular focus on any recorded changes identified during the evaluation process. The project objectives are evaluated predominately using impact evaluation measures, which assess short to medium term changes such as changes in awareness, understanding and application.

Objective 1: Increase the awareness of Towards Zero within Local Governments by 10% by June 2011.

With Local Governments recognised as key partners in the *Towards Zero* strategy, it was considered critical to establish and then increase the level of awareness of the strategy within the sector. The final *Towards Zero* strategy was endorsed by State Government in March 2009 following a comprehensive consultation process. While many Local Governments had been involved in the consultation and the sector was informed through the State Council process, in many ways it could still be considered early days in terms of awareness of the strategy across the sector as a whole.

Activities undertaken by the LGSSP during Phase One to support this objective included regular communication through Local Government channels, along with the series of LGSSP workshops which had a strong focus on *Towards Zero* and its relevance to Local Government. These activities are in addition to the ongoing work of the WALGA Infrastructure Unit to raise awareness of *Towards Zero*, and the work of other road safety partner agencies.

The results of the Local Government safe system surveys demonstrated that awareness of the *Towards Zero* strategy increased in 2011 compared to 2009. The top three responses to this question all showed a higher percentage of responses in the 2011 survey.

The weighted average⁵, which allows for an overall comparison of responses in the two surveys, shows an increase of seven percentage points. While this is marginally below the target of a 10% increase, it shows an increase in a relatively short time frame. This result is encouraging and provides a strong basis for further increases in the future.

⁵ The weighted average is calculated by the multiplication of each component by a factor reflecting its importance. In this case a weight was allocated to each response, ranging from 100% weight for those who responded that all staff are aware of *Towards Zero*, to 0% for those who said that no staff are aware.

Objective 2: Increase the knowledge of the safe system approach within Local Governments by 10% by June 2011

In Australia, the safe system approach has been articulated in the National Road Safety Strategy 2001-2011, and more recently the National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020. Along with the *Towards Zero* strategy, the safe system approach provides the theoretical basis to the strategies of a number of other jurisdictions in Australia. Knowledge of this approach is highly relevant to Local Governments as owners and managers of an extensive road network, and influencers in all areas of road safety.

The overall goal of the LGSSP is to increase the uptake of the principles that underpin the safe system approach by Local Government, to support the implementation of *Towards Zero*. Therefore it is crucial to the project that Local Government staff and Elected Members develop an understanding of the safe system approach and its relevance to the strategies and operations of Local Government.

As for the first objective, the activities undertaken by the LGSSP to support this objective during Phase One included comprehensive communication along with the Local Government safe system workshops.

The two surveys conducted during the first phase of the LGSSP demonstrated a significant increase in the level of understanding of the safe system approach reported by respondents. The weighted average for this indicator increased by 16 percentage points, above the target of 10% set for this objective.

Objective 3: Increase the adoption of the safe system approach into Local Government strategies, plans and policies by 5% by June 2011

Adoption of safe system principles into strategies, plans and policies is an important step in moving towards integrating the safe system approach as part of everyday business of Local Government.

The surveys conducted by the LGSSP showed that respondents in 2011 were slightly more likely to report that their Local Government had adopted safe system principles in any of its strategies, plans or policies than in 2009. Responses to the survey indicate that Local Governments have adopted safe system principles at a strategic level through inclusion in policies, road design and maintenance, and safe vehicle purchasing.

The changes identified in the surveys equates to a three percentage point increase for this objective. While this is marginally below the 5% target for this objective, it is a positive indicator in the early stages of the LGSSP. It should also be considered in the context that many Local Governments are still in the earlier stages of increasing awareness and understanding, and may not yet have progressed to the point of strategic adoption and implementation.

It is important to note that providing Local Governments with more targeted support, tools and resources to incorporate safe system principles at a strategic level will be a focus of Phase Two of the LGSSP.

Objective 4: Increase the application of the safe system approach into Local Government procedures and practices.

This objective was measured for the first time in the 2011 survey. The application of safe system principles into the procedures and practices of Local Government is seen to be another step in the progression of integrating the safe system into the core business of Local Government, and was therefore determined to be more appropriate to delay the inclusion of this question until the second survey.

The results showed that 36% of respondents in the 2011 said that their Local Government already includes safe system principles at an operational level in their organisation. Examples of how respondents reported that this was being addressed included inclusion in general policies and operations; by undertaking road safety investigations; through strategic planning; and via road construction and maintenance.

A target will be set for this objective for Phase Two of the LGSSP. Phase Two of the LGSSP will provide targeted focus on working with Local Governments to progress the application of the safe system at an operational level.

Phase Two Project Plan:

Phase One of the LGSSP has focussed on assessing the needs of Local Governments as they move towards a safe system approach. This information has been gathered through a variety of means including surveys and workshops, and has allowed the LGSSP to establish the current level of safe system knowledge, application and capacity within the Local Government sector.

This information has been incorporated into a plan for Phase Two of the project. Phase Two will focus on the adoption and implementation of the safe system approach into Local Government strategies and operations. This phase of the project will build on the comprehensive work undertaken during Phase One to assess the needs of Local Governments in moving towards a safe system. The information gathered in Phase One gave a clear picture of a sector that understands the importance of road safety and their role in preventing crashes, but requires additional support to move into the next stage of adoption and implementation. Phase Two aims to provide the relevant support and resources to Local Governments to enable the progression towards a safe system.

A summary of the project plan for Phase Two of the LGSSP can be found in Appendix A.

Overall aspects of the project:

This part of the paper reviews the overall aspects of the project. It provides an opportunity to assess factors such as relationships and partnerships, the reach of the program, as well as detailing any future actions required.

Reach of project strategies:

A database of contacts has been maintained throughout Phase One, in order to record information regarding participation in all aspects of the project. This includes completion of surveys, participation in workshops, participation as a panellist in the development of the

Safe System Guiding Principles for Local Government, and inclusion in the distribution list for the Safe System News. The number of contacts on the database has increased during Phase One, and consisted of 347 contacts as at July 2011. These contacts include individuals from Local Government, State Government agencies, research organisations and others.

The LGSSP has had contact with Local Government officers and Elected Members from 90 (65%) Local Governments in WA. The reach of the project strategies has been most comprehensive in the metropolitan, Kimberley, Gascoyne, and South West regions, with more than three quarters of Local Governments in each area having some engagement with Phase One of the project. The Wheatbelt South region was the only region with less than 50% of Local Governments reached throughout Phase One (42%).

Working relationships, partnerships and networks:

The first phase of the LGSSP has seen the establishment of a number of working relationships and partnerships. The formation of the LGSSP Advisory Group provided a formal avenue for working with a number of partner agencies. Advisory Group members represent the following organisations:

- WALGA
- Institute of Public Works Engineers Australia (WA Branch)
- Engineers Australia (WA Branch)
- Local Government Managers Association (WA Branch)
- Main Roads WA
- Office of Road Safety
- Local Government representative

The LGSSP has also provided regular updates on relevant issues to WALGA State Council and the Road Safety Council throughout Phase One, in order to keep these two important groups informed regarding the progress of the project.

Conclusion and recommendations:

Phase One of the Local Government Safe System Project has explored new ground in terms of the adoption of the safe system approach by the Local Government sector in Western Australia. The communication strategy and development of the Safe System Guiding Principles for Local Government has helped to engage Local Governments and encourage the change in thinking that will be required to move towards a safe system in the future. The information gathered through the surveys and workshops has provided a solid base of understanding of the views, challenges and opportunities of Local Government officers and Elected Members as they work to move forward and reduce serious crashes in their communities.

The evaluation of Phase One noted positive changes in the knowledge of *Towards Zero* and knowledge of the safe system approach amongst Local Governments. There were also small but noteworthy increases in the adoption of the safe system into strategies, plans and policies, and application into procedures and practices.

The information collected during Phase One of the project has been analysed and considered on an ongoing basis, allowing the planning for Phase Two to begin prior to the

formal completion of Phase One. The findings of the final evaluation of Phase One, as seen in this report, fits well with the planning that has already occurred for Phase Two. A summary of the Phase Two plan can be found in Appendix A.

Phase Two will build on the findings of Phase One, and work to assist Local Governments to implement the safe system approach and make a tangible contribution to the effective delivery of the *Towards Zero* road safety strategy 2008-2020. The objectives and strategies identified to be achieved in Phase Two of the project will provide the tools, resources, advocacy and structures to support Local Governments in the transition to adopting a safe system approach.

Recommendations:

- That the plan for Phase Two of the Local Government Safe System Project be implemented; and
- That a comprehensive evaluation be undertaken at the conclusion of Phase Two, to continue to monitor progress towards the goal and objectives of the project.

Appendix A: Local Government Safe System Project – Phase Two Summary Plan

Goal:

To increase the uptake of safe system principles by Local Government, in a shared responsibility approach, for the implementation of *Towards Zero*.

Objectives:

- Increase the awareness of the *Towards Zero* strategy within Local Governments.
- Increase the knowledge of the safe system approach within Local Government.
- Increase the adoption of the safe system approach into Local Government strategies, plans and policies.
- Increase the application of the safe system approach into Local Government procedures and practices.

Sub-objectives:

- Build Local Government commitment to *Towards Zero*.
- Facilitate knowledge transfer and access to safe system learning opportunities for Local Government staff and Elected Members.
- Facilitate and motivate organisational change within Local Government to embrace the safe system approach.
- Promote and encourage the uptake of the Safe System Guiding Principles for Local Government.

Strategy	Methods
Develop tools and resources to assist Local Governments to adopt and implement the safe system approach	Develop and pilot Local Government Safe System Improvement Program framework Develop Local Government Safe System Toolkit, including: Case studies Templates Model policies Checklists
Develop and implement engagement strategy	Incorporating: Newsletter Workshops Presentations Publications Promotion of external and internal (WALGA) training opportunities, conference, study tours etc.
Advocate on behalf of the sector for improved structures to support the implementation of the safe system approach by Local Government	Investigate and recommend links between funding and Local Government policies Maximise opportunities in new funding agreement Investigate/participate in review of Austroads guides/Australian Standards to support safe system principles Negotiate regular analysed and interpreted crash data for local roads Update Regional Road Group policy and procedure manuals
Foster safe system leadership within Local Government	Develop and promote the Declaration for road safety Identify, develop and support champions and mentors within the sector (WALGA, LG and RRG) Encourage/support demonstration or pilot projects Encourage/facilitate safe system training opportunities, conferences, study tours and secondments