

Title

Road Safety in Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Remote Communities

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Summary

Queensland Transport has initiated a range of actions to address the over representation of indigenous people living in the remote areas of Queensland, involved in road crashes.

Research indicates indigenous people throughout Australia are three times more likely to be involved in road trauma than non-indigenous persons. A survey of five remote Queensland communities indicated the over-representation could be as high as six times.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Road Safety Remote Communities Project started in 1997 – a six year project. . Outcomes of this project will influence future directions of road safety in Queensland. . Through a community capacity building approach, many road safety activities were conducted in aboriginal communities.

Community members, driven by an increased awareness of road safety, participated in a Queensland Transport facilitated working group, which developed a road safety action plan. It was identified that while actions can be taken in individual communities there were significant road safety issues common to most communities, including knowledge and access to obtain driver licences, safety standards of vehicles, infrastructure and public education. It was recognised that a co-ordinated approach was required to address these issues. Queensland Transport initiated committees/groups within the department and in association with other departments to address the major issues, while working within whole of government frameworks including Cape York Partnerships and the Cape York Partnership 2010 Plan.

Key Words

Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islanders, Road Safety.

Introduction

Queensland Transport plays a lead role in the delivery of Road Safety in Queensland. The Queensland Road Safety Strategies and supporting action plans have identified road safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Remote Communities as a priority, which is reflected in the Queensland Transport Strategic Plan. In 1996 special treasury funding was made available to Queensland Transport for three years to develop a strategy to address road safety in the remote indigenous communities of Queensland. Funding was extended to further develop the strategy and provide monitoring and evaluation processes.

Due to the concentration of remote indigenous communities in the northern region of Queensland Transport, the majority of activities occurred in this area. A project officer was employed to work closely with communities and other agencies. Since 1996, a number of actions have been taken and assessments completed.

In 2001, with the identification of common issues across the communities there has been a greater emphasis on a whole of department approach through the new Queensland Transport Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategic Group. Another significant achievement undertaken by Queensland Transport was working with the Department of Corrective Services to address the number of indigenous people in the prison system for transport related offences. A group is currently working to establish a training and testing process that could be applied within the prisons and communities to support more indigenous people to obtain driver licences. This paper will summarise the key actions, achievements and learning's associated with the development and implementation of the Queensland Transport Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Remote Communities Road Safety Project.

Method

The delivery of road safety in remote indigenous communities associated with the project has involved two distinct phases in line with the funding allocations. Phase one (1996 to 1999) was the development of a written strategy and the delivery of trial projects, in the northern and southern regions of the department. The projects were limited to defined communities and parameters for delivery. Phase two (1999 to 2002) included the extension of the project in the northern region only with a broadening to all communities. . Delivery was adapted according to requirements, with a greater emphasis on community participation in planning and processes to address identified problems through a co-ordinated whole of department and whole of government approach.

Phase one

Selection of the indigenous communities to conduct the trial project was based on hospital data. Local government areas were identified as the highest represented areas for injury to indigenous people resulting from road crashes. The Paroo Shire in Southern Queensland was identified and the aboriginal communities of Kowanyama and Hopevale in North Queensland were selected from within specified local government areas. Each community was extremely positive about participating in the trial projects.

The majority of the activities were focused on Kowanyama and Hopevale. The involvement with Paroo, an integrated community in south west Queensland, including the town of Cunnamulla, included funding for three months to employ a Community Development Officer who undertook a community needs analysis. Queensland Transport staff are continuing to provide support to this community.

In Kowanyama and Hopevale the project was managed by the Manager (Road Safety) Northern with the assistance of a project officer who was employed to work directly with the communities and agencies. Delivery of the project was through a partnership with each of the community councils who were provided with fortnightly funding to deliver the agreed road safety outcomes of:

*Increasing awareness of the risks associated with transport, and to plan and implement effective countermeasures in their community and;
To provide information to Queensland Transport on transport safety activities and road crash data.*

Both community councils chose to employ a Community Road Safety Officer (CRSO) to act as the liaison point between the communities and agencies. . To reflect the community based nature of the project, the communities named their road safety programs after important cultural symbols. These symbols were displayed on the uniforms of the CRSO.

Within a short period, maritime safety issues emerged in both communities due to their reliance on water transport. Queensland Transport funding was increased to include water transport safety in the project.

The CRSOs were trained in road and water safety as well as written and oral communication. The Queensland Transport project officer who visited each community monthly supported these officers. During this period a range of actions to promote road safety occurred in each community. In Hopevale, significant achievements included the establishment of a school crossing, infrastructure improvements including the reconstruction of a bridge, a road safety audit which recommended infrastructure improvements, a road safety awareness day targeting vehicle safety, a bicycle safety training course to accredit trainers in the community, community members attending courses in training and first aid, and general promotional campaigns.

In Kowanyama significant achievements included the reduction of speed limits in the town area, a road safety audit to recommend infrastructure improvements, the involvement of community police in breath testing of suspected drink drivers, infrastructure improvements, hosting a cultural awareness workshop for Queensland Transport staff associated with the project, and community education through word-of-mouth.

The full extent of the impact of this project in these communities is unknown and was complex to determine, as Queensland Transport was not fully informed of the road safety activities that were occurring within the communities. Data collection for road crashes was an issue, although there does appear to be a reduction in the number of reported road crashes, while accepting that many crashes are not reported.

Towards the end of this phase the CRSOs were involved in other positions within their councils. Unfortunately, neither council appointed liaison officers which meant Queensland Transport was dealing with a number of people within each community. However, many road safety activities continued after the closure of the CRSO positions. A planning workshop was conducted in Hopevale and the Women's Group conducted training for driver licences. Kowanyama obtained a bus to transport children to school safely and continued to promote transport safety in the community.

At the conclusion of phase one, each community requested that funding continue for the next phase. However, if direct funding was not available, they would continue to support the road safety project.

Phase two

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Remote Communities Road Safety Project was a continuation of activities in the northern region with modifications based on a review of the successes and difficulties from phase one. During the previous activities Queensland Transport had received requests from several remote indigenous communities for assistance to deliver road safety programs.

The project was now extended to include all remote indigenous communities in the region while continuing to provide support to Kowanyama and Hopevale. The project was gaining community interest and involvement in road safety as this phase progressed. Initially, Queensland Transport experienced some difficulties in securing involvement in road safety from some communities. There were minimal requests for support, with activities uncoordinated and often not targeting priority issues. As the project progressed more communities sought advice and support on implementing road safety activities. There appears to be less focus on infrastructure and enforcement and greater efforts on the causes of the crashes and preventative measures. Communities are conducting road safety programs using community members to deliver training, with support from Queensland Transport.

Furthermore, Queensland Transport has created a *Road Safety Grant Scheme for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Remote Communities in north Queensland*. Eligible communities are able to apply for funds of up to \$2,000 to address road safety in their community. To date, there have been six successful applications with funds provided for community workshops, road signage, educational resources and incentive programs. Through the provision of funding in this manner, financial support may be provided to many communities rather than only two, as in the beginning of the project. Although the number of successful applications is relatively small there appears to be an escalation in potential applications as knowledge of the project and successful outcomes is increasing.

It was noted that communities were working individually to address road safety. However, there were similar issues raised in many communities that required agency involvement. To collate these issues and encourage the communities to focus on the causes of crashes in and between the communities, a Gulf and Cape Road Safety Forum was conducted in Cairns in May 2001. All communities in this area were invited to attend and over 90% of the communities were represented at the Forum. A draft Road Safety Action Plan has been developed from the outcomes of the Forum with the establishment of a community driven working group as one of the major achievements. This group regularly rotates between communities. The group will further develop the action plan and work with the communities to implement recommendations. Queensland Transport is currently arranging a similar process for the Torres Strait Island communities.

A regional Interagency Road Safety Reference Group was also established to address matters that require a cross agency approach. Through this group road safety has been included in resources developed by other agencies. All agencies that provide services associated with road safety to the remote indigenous communities are invited to attend. Current representation exceeds eight agencies including health groups, police, education and the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission and Dept of Main Roads. Individual communities or the working group are encouraged to submit road safety matters to the reference group if there is a requirement for agencies to work together. This mechanism immediately identifies responsible agencies and prevents issues circulating around departments.

Queensland Transport is one of the many agencies working towards improving the conditions in remote indigenous communities. The department supports a united approach and is working within other frameworks such as Cape York Partnerships and the Cape York Partnership 2010 Plan. Queensland Transport established the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategic Group to ensure a co-ordinated and collaborative approach,

guide strategic policy development and provide advice to relevant areas of the department on activities which impact on the success of the department facilitating transport solutions for remote indigenous communities.

This group's achievements include an information exchange system, furthering the departments employment strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and progressing the *On the road to reconciliation* number plates for Queensland Government vehicles. This initiative demonstrates a whole of Queensland government commitment to reconciliation as well as raising funds for indigenous road safety.

Results

Evaluation is currently underway and will provide an overview of the impact of the project. Measuring the effects of road safety interventions is complex and more accurate results can be attained over a greater period of time. There is an increased awareness of road safety in the indigenous communities which is demonstrated by the number of enquiries Queensland Transport is receiving from these communities. There is also a more co-ordinated approach by agencies who now meet at least twice a year.

One of the major problems that was identified in most communities is the difficulty that community members are experiencing in obtaining driver licences. Investigations have identified that the problem is far greater than first appearance as judicial records indicate that in North Queensland over 57% of inmates are indigenous, and of these approximately 50% are in the prisons for transport related offences such as unlicensed driving, drink driving or offences related to driving unregistered vehicles.

Queensland Transport is working with the Department of Correctional Services and their trainers Townsville's Stuart Prison to develop a program for the delivery of learner permit training to indigenous inmates who are due to be released within 12 months. The aim is to equip community people with the knowledge, and ability to legally drive which will also promote positive self worth. The program is investigating opportunities to accredit indigenous prison officers to conduct the testing process. It is proposed that some of the outcomes may be applied in the communities to encourage and support more people in the communities to attain driver licences and reduce the number of indigenous people being caught within the judicial system for licence offences. Through training people in the community to deliver the knowledge and skills to other members of the community, specifically driver licences, there will be an opportunity to provide sustainable employment within the communities and assist to promote community capacity building and self-empowerment.

Another problem that has emerged across communities is the safety standard of vehicles. Investigations are revealing that similar to the licensing issue, this is complex problem, resulting in the imprisonment of indigenous people. Queensland Transport has commenced further research and recommendations will be progressed through the existing networks.

Conclusion

A number of road safety activities are now occurring in the remote indigenous communities of north Queensland. There is still a requirement for a high level of support from Queensland Transport. However, many communities are demonstrating their capacity to plan and deliver their own road safety countermeasures.

The identification of issues relating to obtaining a driver licence is being investigated and will be addressed by Queensland Transport in association with other agencies. The impact of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Road Safety Project for Remote Communities has gone beyond the involvement of a limited number of communities when the project commenced in 1996. There is greater emphasis on planning road safety actions through working groups which provide a support mechanism to address complex issues.

There has been increased momentum to the road safety project. There appears to be an increase in trust between Queensland Transport and the remote indigenous communities of the northern region with improved communication and the implementation of successful road safety initiatives. To continue these activities it is important for Queensland Transport to secure additional funds to devote resources and continue to reduce the level of road trauma in remote indigenous communities.