

TRAFFIC SAFETY EDUCATION IN VICTORIA: THE BENEFITS OF A COORDINATED APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

Victoria's Traffic Safety Education (TSE) Action Plan, currently based on five strategic directions, was drawn up by the key TSE stakeholder agencies in Victoria. It describes the responsible bodies, approaches, resources and delivery mechanisms by which school aged children throughout the state are introduced to their roles and responsibilities as road users, present and future. A reference group, chaired by VicRoads, oversees and reports on progress in delivering the actions.

This paper describes how coordination of stakeholder agency TSE activities enables:

- Partnerships working towards an agreed set of objectives while maintaining agency priorities
- Agreed research to be undertaken and the findings shared
- Maximisation of limited financial and human resources
- Targeted, shared resource development and usage
- United, consistent understanding and use of key messages and best practice
- Effective use of networks and cross agency referrals
- Assistance to other agencies wanting to undertake road safety activities in schools in relation to best practice approaches and resource gaps.

It discusses how the effect of coordinated agency action and expertise is greater than the sum of their individual contributions.

BACKGROUND

The Victorian Government aims to reduce annual road death and serious injury by twenty percent during the period 2002–2007.

To achieve this goal a strategy was developed through stakeholder and community consultation to focus the resources and expertise available on addressing the challenges in an integrated manner. *arrive alive! Victoria's Road Safety Strategy* sets out the approaches to be used in addressing seventeen key road safety issues.

Central to both the development and implementation of the *arrive alive!* strategy is recognition that stakeholders have their own particular objectives, strengths, resources and areas of operation and that partnerships between stakeholders have the potential to deliver considerably greater benefits than each of the agencies acting on its own.

The Victorian Traffic Safety Education Action Plan 2002–2007 was developed using a similar consultative process to the *arrive alive!* strategy and arose directly from it. 'A new Traffic Safety Education Action Plan will guide the future directions and activities of the key stakeholders in relation to traffic safety education for schools and the community.' (VicRoads 2002)

The current TSE Action Plan is based on five strategic directions that relate to:

- The importance of having clearly defined roles for schools and parents and carers in relation to assisting children and young people to become safe and responsible road users;
- The need to influence school leaders to promote and support TSE in their schools;

- The unique opportunity presented by the early years of life to establish sound road safety practices that can last into adolescence and beyond;
- The windows of opportunity presented by children's progression through successive levels of road use independence (walking to school alone, using public transport independently, earning a Learner Permit);
- The need for children and young people to have as much supervised on-road practice of the essential safe road use skills (whether pedestrian, cycling or driving) as possible, preferably with a caring adult.

This paper is confined to describing the actions relating to schools only. Community based traffic safety education is organised very differently and relies on different partnerships, though parent/carer involvement is fundamental to both streams.

SCHOOL BASED TSE STAKEHOLDERS

1. Department of Education and Training (DE&T)

In relation to TSE, the DE&T has responsibility for:

- Curriculum implementation and monitoring
- Teacher professional development and support
- Development of administrative guidelines governing practical activities
- Provision of school facilities
- Provision of a safe environment for staff and students.

Its area of expertise lies in learning and teaching and its capacity to communicate with all schools in the state.

2. VicRoads

In relation to TSE, VicRoads has responsibility for:

- Legislation
- Preparation of road users for entry to the road and traffic system
- Research into safe road use practices
- Reducing the incidence and severity of road trauma in relation to young people
- Development and perpetuation of a road safety culture.

Its area of expertise lies in the identification and promulgation of sound road safety practices and in the development of sound traffic safety education teaching resources.

3. Transport Accident Commission (TAC)

In relation to TSE, TAC has responsibility for:

- Reducing the incidence of trauma and cost of claims made against it in relation to young people
- Supporting teacher professional development through DE&T
- Funding research into and development of best practice TSE programs
- Provision of a sports mentor visiting program to secondary schools
- Development and perpetuation of a road safety culture
- Provision of support to organisations and agencies offering sound educational experiences to schools

The TAC's area of expertise lies in marketing, market research, advertising and publicity and it has access to funds earmarked for reducing road trauma involving young people that can be allocated to TSE.

4. Victoria Police

In relation to TSE, the Victoria Police have responsibility for:

- Reducing the incidence and severity of road trauma in relation to young people
- Development and perpetuation of a road safety culture
- Provision of a visiting road safety educational resource and presentation for secondary schools
- Support for teachers implementing sound, relevant, well founded TSE programs in schools.

The Police areas of expertise and authority lie in their knowledge and enforcement of the Road Rules.

5. Metlink

In relation to TSE Metlink has responsibility for:

- Preparation of young people for entry to the public transport system
- Reducing the incidence and severity of public transport related trauma to young people
- Development and perpetuation of a responsible and safe public transport use culture
- Promotion of the risks associated with the interface between roads and public transport.

Metlink's area of expertise encompasses all aspects of public transport safety.

6. Royal Automobile Club of Victoria (RACV)

In relation to TSE, the RACV's responsibility is consistent with the aims and objectives of the organisation to further the interests of its members – the motoring public.

It has the capacity to undertake research and develop unique, targeted programs for secondary schools and also provide support for a limited number of primary schools delivering relevant, well founded TSE programs.

Representatives from all these agencies form the TSE Reference Group that meets bi-monthly with VicRoads taking the lead role. It reports through the *arrive alive!* strategy, Road Safety Management Group, to the Road Safety Executive Group (when appropriate).

CHALLENGES

1. Traffic Safety Education in schools is a core **responsibility** of all the agencies mentioned above, but it is not a core **function** of any of them to **deliver** traffic safety education to students in schools.
2. It is not compulsory for schools to include TSE in their programs. Schools operate on the principle of self governing administration and determine their own areas of study in order to meet the needs of their students and their learning outcomes within the curriculum guidelines (Victorian Essential Learning Standards).
3. Teachers are not road safety experts.
This means that schools have to be convinced of the importance and relevance of TSE to their students in order to include it in their already crowded learning programs. Teachers need access to pedagogically appropriate and appealing resources and easily accessible professional development that explains their use. In addition, student learning outcomes must fit within the state's curriculum framework and ideally have strong community support. This last requirement is essential as parents/carers are vital to the development of their children's pedestrian, cycling and driving skills.

4. TSE is not regarded as a highly valuable countermeasure in the array of road safety initiatives available, primarily because of the difficulty of and expense involved in demonstrating its effectiveness – both in the short and long term.
5. As a consequence, funding is allocated to initiatives with more apparent, measurable and/or immediate benefits. This principle has particularly affected VicRoads, where TSE has to compete for funding against engineering projects.

CHALLENGES, OPPORTUNITIES AND RESEARCH SHARING

In Victoria a new curriculum framework called the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS) was developed during 2004, has been validated throughout 2005 and will commence implementation in 2006.

As a consequence, key teaching resources required review and updating.

It was decided by the TSE Reference Group that these challenges provided the opportunity to review current best TSE practice internationally and to develop a new approach that could be:

- well targeted
- easily integrated into the VELs
- supported effectively by all agencies
- cost effective and resourced by current budget levels
- measured (both to be accountable and to lift the profile of TSE as a legitimate countermeasure).

TAC, on behalf of the TSE Reference Group agencies, funded the review and contracted Mr Barry Elliott, consultant psychologist, to undertake the work. Subsequently, a contractor was engaged to develop a new TSE strategy for Victoria based on the findings and recommendations of the Elliott review and in consultation with the TSE Reference Group stakeholders. At the time of preparing this paper, the new strategy is awaiting approval from the Road Safety Management Group.

(From time to time other stakeholder agencies have undertaken research into different aspects of influencing children and young people to adopt safe practices and attitudes towards road use. These findings are shared with the reference group who follow up the issues of most relevance to their agency's operations.)

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Regardless of whether or not the strategy is accepted in its current form, new resources for teachers are urgently needed. They must relate to the VELs, reflect current best teaching and road safety practice and be high quality and appealing. Resources must be appropriate for the technology commonly used by schools and as cost effective as possible to update and reproduce.

Again, it is proposed that the process of resource development be a joint undertaking. An agreed brief has been prepared for a contractor and there will be ongoing consultation and progress reports to stakeholders throughout the development and trialing of the materials, learning experiences and teaching activities. All agencies will contribute expertise and/or financial support.

BENEFITS

To the stakeholders

As a result of having common objectives, a research based strategy and TSE Action Plan, and resources that reflect the key road and travel safety responsibilities of all stakeholders a number of positives emerge.

- Ownership engenders a level of commitment, enthusiasm and mutual support among TSE Reference Group members, some of whom have no prior experience of teaching or the education sector.
- Use of a common language by all agencies means consistent messages are conveyed to senior management, regionally based staff, schools and the community.
- A coordinated and integrated approach shares expertise and legitimises expenditure on resources that address all agencies' responsibilities.
- A range of regionally based stakeholder networks can potentially be called upon to provide local assistance to schools that will be consistent with the teaching materials, best practice approaches and key messages that are supported by their own agencies.
- Other agencies, such as emergency services, that also elect to work with schools, believe that it is desirable to fit their program, presentation or materials into the existing action plan and well researched teaching programs. This belief enables the TSE Reference Group to influence the nature and content of their activities so that they complement or integrate the agreed road and travel safety messages. Without this influence, there is a risk that developmentally and psychologically inappropriate programs could be offered to schools, that would not contribute to young people adopting safe road use practices.
- In the future it is expected that by adopting a more targeted approach, focussing only on the essential road safety skills and by simplifying the array of products available to teachers, more schools will take up TSE thus meeting the agencies' collective objectives in relation to this program.

To schools

For teachers in schools, there are benefits in being responsible for the delivery of a single state-wide TSE program. The following will certainly apply in the future and mostly occurs at present.

- Resources, materials and support are all underpinned by research, age appropriate activities and best practice approaches.
- No matter which agency is approached for advice, the response will be consistent and relate to the same teaching resource/s.
- Where one agency is unable to provide the service requested, it is likely to refer teachers to another that can or to other relevant resources.
- The professional development available to schools will cover all aspects of road safety and all the targeted year levels.
- The resources (such as visiting road safety experts) available for use by schools will relate to and complement each other, no matter which agency they are attached to.
- Schools approached by other organisations offering confusingly similar programs or materials will be able to compare them with the DE&T recommended, best practice program.
- The key, essential skills, knowledge and attitudes for each developmental stage will be clearly identifiable.
- A wide range of enrichment activities that further reinforce the key skills, knowledge and attitudes will be available through the stakeholder agencies for those schools already undertaking the core, essential road use skills development program.

To students

Students should be largely unaware of the sources of their TSE. They should undertake traffic safety educational activities that are:

- relevant to key stages of their development
- match their road use experience
- are integral to the rest of their studies
- involve their parents/carers.

In the future these key features will remain but in addition their experiences will be:

- organised by teachers who are confident, enthusiastic and well resourced
- very much the same if they change to a new school.

They will not be confused by conflicting messages from different agencies or in the media and their parents will be provided with information that will assist them to build their young people's skills and establish responsible attitudes and resilience in the face of peer pressure.

TO SUM UP

The approach described in this paper demonstrates the synergistic benefits of working together in a targeted and coordinated manner, offering the best opportunity for TSE in Victoria to be supported and valued as a means of providing young people with the knowledge, skills and experience to become safe, independent road users and contributing to the establishment of a road safety culture in the community.

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