

Enhancing police enforcement, evaluating the outcomes

Campbell, C¹, Elliott, M¹, Span, D², Lewer, C², Morel, E²

¹NSW Centre for Road Safety; ²AMR Interactive

email: claire_campbell@rta.nsw.gov.au

Introduction

The Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) and the NSW Police Force work in close partnership to reduce road trauma. The Enhanced Enforcement Program (EEP) is a major component of road safety activity in NSW designed to extend the effectiveness of police enforcement by providing funding to enhance visible police enforcement. Enforcement activity is supported by public education campaigns developed by the RTA.

The EEP is underpinned by five key principles. Enforcement must:

- be highly visible and effectively targeted.
- be additional to baseline levels committed by the NSW Police Force.
- target road safety behaviours known to contribute to road trauma.
- Enforcement must be supported by coordinated public education.
- Operational responsibility rests with the NSW Police Force.

The success of state-wide operations, particularly around holiday periods, has led to an important evolution of the EEP with a diversification from state-wide operations to regional and local operations supported by localised public education strategies.

The RTA commissioned both qualitative and quantitative research to determine the effectiveness of the local enforcement model and explore community attitudes, motivations and self-reported behaviours regarding police enforcement.

Phase 1: Quantitative study

Method

In 2006, the RTA commissioned AMR Interactive to conduct a telephone survey to evaluate smaller scale police operations, implemented at the level of an individual police Local Area Command (LAC). The survey was set up and managed by a computer assisted telephone interview (CATI) system. The survey questionnaire included questions on demographics, awareness of public education and enforcement activity, behaviour in the past week, and attitudes to enforcement and road safety.

Surveys were conducted in three distinct geographical locations before the operation commenced, during the operations (around specific periods of enhanced enforcement), and at the end of operations to assess awareness, attitudes and behaviours. Postcodes were used to define each of the three locations for the purposes of sampling drivers.

Quotas were set by age and gender in each survey period in each location. Male drivers were over sampled to make up two thirds of the total sample in each location, with males aged 17-49 years contributing half of the total sample.

EEP funded operations were implemented during the period 1 October to 16 December 2007, in three LACs in NSW:

- Sutherland;
- Richmond (North Coast), focused on Casino, Ballina and Lismore; and
- Yass, particularly activity on the Barton Highway.

The operations differed between the three locations:

LAC	Enforcement	Public Education
Sutherland	10 weeks of local enforcement. Supplemented by additional regional enforcement.	Radio advertising. VMS & roadside banners.
Richmond	4 of 10 weeks of local enforcement. Similar operation conducted in the previous quarter.	Radio advertising. VMS and roadside banners. Print advertising.
Yass	5 of 10 weeks of local enforcement focusing on the Barton Highway.	Radio advertising. Roadside banners on the Barton Highway. Unpaid print and television editorial.

The operation in Yass had the highest level of spend of the three operation locations with Richmond having the smallest budget relative to the driver population.

Results and discussion

Sutherland:

- Increases in awareness of enforcement activity.
- Larger increases in sighting of RBT compared to mobile or stationary speed enforcement.
- Increases in awareness of public education.
- Larger increases in awareness of outdoor advertising (bridge banners & VMS) compared to radio advertising.

Richmond:

- High levels of baseline awareness of public education and enforcement with no increase during the operation.
- Reduction in the sighting of both speed enforcement and RBT.
- It is likely that the operation was able to maintain the relatively high levels of awareness established prior to the operation commencing.

Yass:

- Increases in awareness of both public education and enforcement activity.
- Largest increases in awareness of roadside signs on the Barton Highway.

- Unpaid media coverage of the operation contributed to the increase in awareness of the operation.
- Increases in both the perception of frequency and sighting of enforcement activity.

Recommendations for a local operation model:

- Ensure a balance of media and enforcement activity.
- Consider the size of the operation in the context of the population size, road network and driver travel patterns.
- Have regular bursts of activity to generate and maintain longer term perceptions of activity (as occurred in Richmond), or be able to focus the operation by targeting driver travel patterns over shorter enforcement periods (as occurred in Yass).
- Utilise outdoor advertising (signs, banners & VMS) on main travel routes to support more detailed information using radio and print media.
- Unpaid media exposure that supplements paid media and enforcement activity will increase the effectiveness of the operation.

Phase 2: Qualitative study

Method

A total of 12 groups of male drivers were recruited for in depth focus groups also completed by AMR Interactive. All participants were regular drivers aged between 18 and 49 years. Focus groups were split by age (18-29 years and 30-49 years).

Areas selected for the research covered Sydney, Northern NSW and Southern NSW. Regional towns with smaller and larger populations were chosen within Northern and Southern NSW.

Results and discussion

The groups discussed a number of themes around the role and intent of police enforcement for speeding and drink driving as well as the concept of 'local policing'. Current public education materials that supported EEP operations were also reviewed and discussed.

The key factors in positively influencing driver behaviour were credibility and relevance of campaign messages together with a visible police presence.

Participant's perception of 'local policing' was determined by how well operations are targeted to local conditions, the history of policing in a particular area as well as attitudes to enforcement. Country drivers reported local police may be more likely to 'let off' drivers whereas visiting police can introduce uncertainty and unpredictability of enforcement. Universally all drivers reported that localising the public education supporting police enforcement improves relevance and credibility however materials should not contradict local knowledge about enforcement patterns.

Participants reported different perceptions about the role and intent of police enforcement for speeding versus drink

driving. The perception of 'revenue raising', particularly for speed enforcement, and the predictability of speed enforcement locations contributed to a negative perception of police speed enforcement. Drivers tended to believe that there needed to be a clear justification about how locations are selected based on safety and/or crash risk identification.

In addition to participants experience regarding the predictability, frequency and intent of speed enforcement there was significant discussion regarding the tolerances and discretion of police when conducting both mobile and stationary enforcement. 'Moderate' risk takers (those recruited for the focus groups had been screened to fit a moderate risk profile) reported that police were more likely to target drivers travelling at excessive speed and this reinforced their behaviour that by driving just over the speed limit they would avoid detection. This pattern reduces general deterrence of speeding and reinforces driver belief of higher tolerances for speed enforcement by police as opposed to fixed cameras.

Driver's perceptions and behaviours regarding drink driving was influenced by the social unacceptability of drink driving, and the process and severity of the penalties. Drivers also reported the use of mobile RBT was a significant deterrent. There is significant investment in drink driving public education to reinforce these beliefs.

Conclusions

Results from the quantitative research indicate that funding localised programs is beneficial but only when applied to a well defined local area. The fundamental nature of the approach (i.e. being localised), incorporating public education and enforcement, is not as well suited to the Sydney metropolitan area. The boundaries are less defined, the program cannot be as easily positioned as 'local' through mass media, and in some ways the program cannot be as easily targeted. The lack of a definable boundary would be influenced not only by travel patterns in a large metropolitan area but also by how the drivers themselves perceive their localisation, especially compared with people living in regional areas.

Findings from the qualitative research suggest that the public perception regarding the role, intent and frequency of police enforcement is very different for speeding compared to drink driving. A visible police presence is of particular importance as a speed countermeasure, as a complement to fixed speed cameras, to address specific deterrence. Police activity has the potential to create unpredictability as well as having greater coverage, and hence pose a greater threat, than fixed speed cameras.

Findings from the two studies are being used to guide a new public education strategy to support the EEP in NSW.

References

- AMR Interactive (2008). Evaluating the effectiveness of EEP funded local police operations. Prepared for the RTA.
- AMR Interactive (2008). Survey of community attitudes on police enforcement. Prepared for the RTA