

## **Saving Lives on Country Roads Campaign: Helping Achieve the Towards Zero Target in Regional NSW**

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### **Abstract**

Country residents make up one-third of the NSW population, yet two-thirds of the state's road fatalities occur on country roads. The 'Saving Lives on Country Roads' campaign is the first comprehensive education campaign focused on country roads. It aims to raise awareness of the size and nature of the road trauma problem on country roads, and help achieve the State Priority target in regional NSW. The campaign encourages drivers to re-think common excuses used to justify risky driving behavior and to make safer choices. Ultimately, no risk taking on the road is acceptable and can result in serious life-changing consequences.

#### **The crash problem**

In 2016, 380 people were killed on NSW roads. Of these, 252 people (66%) were killed on country roads. From 2012-2016 a total of 1,185 lives were lost on NSW country roads. There is a commonly held belief that city people or tourists unfamiliar with regional roads are most at risk, when in fact the majority of drivers and riders involved in fatal crashes on country roads are country residents. In 2016, of the 342 drivers and riders involved in fatal crashes on country roads, more than three quarters (77%) were country residents. Of these country residents, the majority (61%) were locals who crashed in the same local government area as they lived. Based on the fatality rate per head of population, country residents are four times more likely to be killed in a road crash than metropolitan residents.

There are a number of factors contributing to the increased likelihood and severity of crashes on country roads. These include higher speed roads, roadside hazards such as trees and embankments, longer travel distances and older vehicles. However behavioural factors are more likely to contribute to road crashes. Speeding, driver fatigue, drink driving, and not wearing a seatbelt are more likely to contribute to country fatalities compared to fatalities in metropolitan areas and statewide (Table 1). This indicates there are higher levels of risk taking behaviours amongst country drivers and riders.

**Table 1. Percentage of fatalities by behavioural factor and urbanisation, 2016**

	All NSW	Metropolitan NSW	Country NSW
<b>Excessive or inappropriate speed</b>	42%	32%	47%
<b>Fatigue</b>	21%	8%	28%
<b>Illegal alcohol</b>	16%	6%	20%
<b>Seatbelt non usage</b>	18%	9%	21%

#### **The need for a targeted campaign**

Despite the fact that the majority of fatalities on country roads are local residents, Transport for NSW qualitative research found that country drivers may resist the notion that the way they drive puts themselves or others at risk (Centre for Road Safety, 2017). There is a tendency for complacency, over-confidence and lower perception of risk when driving on familiar roads.

The 'Saving Lives on Country Roads' campaign was developed to challenge these perceptions by helping drivers acknowledge that their everyday excuses used to justify risky behaviours have no place on the road. Acknowledging this and making safer choices on the road will help local communities drive the road toll towards zero. The key messages are:

- Country people are dying on country roads. It could be your mates, your families or you.
- The everyday excuses drivers use to justify risky behaviours have no place on the road.
- Your decision to drive too fast, drive while tired or to have one more drink can result in serious consequences for yourself and others.
- We need to be aware of the risks on the road at all times and avoid them, even on familiar roads.
- We all have a part to play in keeping ourselves and our communities safe on the road.



*Figure 1. Campaign creative*

The primary campaign audience is regional males aged 30 to 59 years who make up the largest proportion of fatalities on country roads. However the campaign also encourages friends, family and local communities, through a significant public relations and outreach program, to influence safe driving behavior in an effort to work towards zero.

## References

Centre for Road Safety, 2017. *Research to inform the development of the Country Roads Campaign Communications Strategy*. Unpublished report prepared by Snapcracker Research and Strategy for the Centre for Road Safety, Transport for NSW.