

Partnering for Road Safety at Level Crossings: New South Wales Traffic and Highway Patrol Command

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Abstract

Between April 2012 and January 2018, three vehicle occupants died in crashes with trains at level crossings (LX's) in NSW. Some 2,000 lives were lost in all road crashes over the same period.

LX crashes may be low likelihood, but the consequences are extreme. On 4 January 2018, 19 people were killed when a truck ploughed into a passenger train in South Africa.

How then can authorities apply safe systems thinking to drive behavioural change?

Working with an expanding range of partners, NSW Police Traffic and Highway Patrol Command leads LX programs and initiatives that go well beyond enforcement.

Towards Zero and Level Crossings

New South Wales Police Force (NSWPF) is responsible for enforcing level crossing road rules. The development of the following strategies represent a departure from the siloed E's approach to road safety.

Level Crossing Awareness and Enforcement Campaign (LXAEC)

Since 2011, Traffic and Highway Patrol Command (THPC) has partnered with Transport for New South Wales (TfNSW) to deliver the LXAEC. Until it began, an average of one person each year died in crashes between road vehicles and trains in NSW which has 1,400 public road LX's.

The LXAEC delivers 3-4 localised campaigns each year. Site selection criteria includes crashes, offence data (disobey LX controls) and "near miss" reports. Local Councils, regional RMS and rail infrastructure managers also assist.

TfNSW and NSWPF generate local public awareness using media releases, radio interviews with police, variable message signs at target sites and letterbox drops. Messaging is aimed squarely at local drivers who are most likely to disobey level crossing controls near where they live.

The hashtag, #TrainYourselfToStop, was devised by an Albury Highway Patrol officer who won an internal competition.

Public awareness is reinforced by two weeks of highly visible TfNSW-funded enforcement where Highway Patrol and generalist police detect and deter offences at target LX's. Since 2017, the commencement of the enforcement phase of the campaign has been publicly announced via a media/press conference that is held in local towns adjacent to a targeted level crossing. Speakers include police and local high-profile officials such as the Mayor.

NSWPF and TfNSW have learned a lot about driver behaviour at LX's since 2011. For example, the new target behaviour for 2017-18 is speeding near LX's. This is a particular road safety issue where

there is an “S” bend at the LX and follows cases in 2016-17 where vehicles crashed negotiating these bends including a fatality. Distracted drivers using hand-held phones are also targeted.

In 2015, Deloitte reviewed the engineering, educational and enforcement interventions carried out in NSW and determined the benefit to cost ratio of the LXAEC to be 7:1.2.

NSWPF Social Media

As of 23 January 2018, the THPC Facebook page had 352,000 “likes”, a figure increasing by 500 each week. The monthly reach of the page is over 2.7 million. In addition, the NSWPF Facebook page has over one million “likes”. These metrics are capitalised on through regular posts on LX safety. The Centre for Road Safety has also used social media to promote LX safety initiatives.

There is a public appetite for the strategic use of social media promoting LX safety.

Pacific National

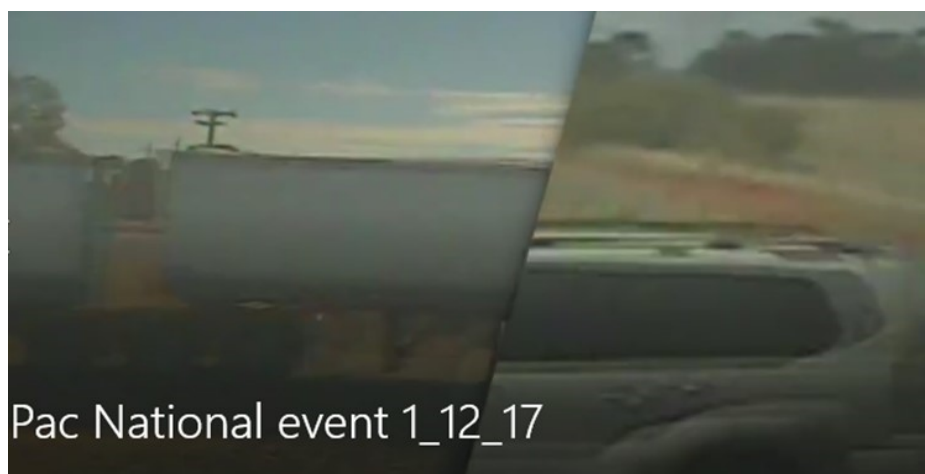
During 2017, a series of LX crashes impacted Pacific National trains. THPC approached the company who partnered to deliver a joint media event, highlighting the risks faced by their train drivers at LX’s. This is the first time that THPC had engaged with a private train operator.

Pacific National released video from forward-facing cameras fitted to locomotives, featuring vision of two crashes involving the same driver, that occurred only weeks apart. It was dramatic footage of LX crashes which has unavailable from government rail operators or infrastructure managers.

The event on 1 December 2017 received national coverage and an estimated social media reach into the millions.

THPC and Pacific National continue to explore partnership opportunities. On 18 May 2018, police organised a *safe systems* site inspection at Mitchell Avenue Kurri Kurri that had been the site of two crashes in a short space of time. As a result of that inspection, stakeholders agreed to a short-term program of works at the site including signage and road markings with a view to including the site in the 2018-19 LXAEC.

Figure 1. Seeing double: Vision from the Locomotive from Pacific National.



Conclusion

These initiatives are global best practice and have brought Safe Systems thinking to this often overlooked area of road safety.

References

Centre for Road Safety, Road Traffic Casualty Crashes in NSW 2016, p16. Retrieved from <http://roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au/downloads/crashstats2016.pdf>

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