

Organisational Commitment to Road Safety - How Serious Are We?

Paul Hillier¹ (Presenter); Nigel McDonald¹
¹TRL

Biography

Paul Hillier is a Principal Consultant (Highways) within the Investigations and Risk Management Group at TRL as well as being charged with the day-to-day management of the organisation's Australian office. Paul has 14 years experience in the civil engineering industry, and prior to joining TRL 4 years ago, gained experience in a number of highway management roles at a large UK road authority, progressing to be the organisation's principal highway management policy engineer.

At TRL, Paul specialises in incident investigations where highway provision and management are alleged to be an issue, and assisting public and private sector clients in reviewing and enhancing strategies, policies and systems through utilising the lessons learnt from TRL's vast number of investigations undertaken around the world. Paul has also developed a sound knowledge of road safety engineering strategies and methodologies so as to ensure that any highway management strategy and systems improvements recommended are consistent with wider organisational objectives.

Abstract

This paper examines the commitments a number of public and private sector organisations have made to road safety initiatives and practices in the United Kingdom (UK). The paper also looks the work of a selection of UK based companies in the undertaking of their global operations. Whether organisations in Australia should be considering similar commitments is then discussed.

The Transport Research Laboratory (TRL) has been involved with a number of the initiatives and practices introduced above, with the aim of extracting further road safety gains through cultural change. These include such initiatives as:

- the creation of innovative key performance indicators for road safety – rating the actions and contributions of road and safety authorities in other ways than traditional crash and injury statistics;
- the EuroRAP road assessment program – giving stakeholders performance information on road environment safety across Europe;
- the introduction of journey data recorders ('black boxes') into a range of vehicle fleets;
- the corporate commitment of large, multi-national companies to depot and on-road safety on key strategic routes;
- the UK Road Death Investigation Manual – which in very general terms directs more Police resources and emphasis to the investigation of fatal crashes; and

- the legal pursuit of road safety – such as the application of corporate manslaughter charges to company executives

This paper will present information on trends and specific initiatives within, and emanating from, the UK that could be expected to add value to existing Australian road safety initiatives, but require levels of commitment from a range of different groups to be successful. The paper then suggests a number of specific items for inclusion in consideration by government authorities, advocacy groups, private industry and community interest groups.

1. INTRODUCTION AND INTENT OF PAPER

The aim of this paper is to introduce and discuss a number of initiatives being undertaken by a range of organisations and industry groups within the UK to show what trends may be emerging, and to challenge whether the same type of organisational commitments to road safety can and should be being made here in Australia.

A number of examples will be given in the proceeding pages followed by a discussion by the authors of what relevance these may have to Australia. The visual presentation that accompanies this paper will discuss the topics in more detail, with this text serving primarily as an introduction to the topic areas.

2. MEASURING AND REPORTING ON GOVERNMENT AUTHORITY PERFORMANCE

Within the UK, there have been a number of initiatives developed by, and for, government agencies that are intended to produce competitive pressure to drive road safety performance.

The UK national government has established 'Best Value' Key Performance Indicators (BV KPIs) that are required by legislation to be measured and publicly reported. Indicators exist to cover the full range of the government's portfolios and measure high level trends in performance.

As their name implies, the indicators are predominantly focused on economic efficiency, although they have created a number of government entrenched goals related to overall crash and casualty reductions. TRL is currently working with the English Highways Agency to create additional, and essentially lower level, measures that ensure adequate focus and attention is given to safety measures by government agencies and their contractors.

The measures are in the development stage at the time of writing this paper, however, it is intended that they will measure detailed inputs and outcomes contributing to safety as they apply to design, construction, traffic management and highway maintenance operations. An element of this initiative is also likely to involve a review or audit of operations that delivers specific recommendations for action points, with the review being conducted by an independent external agency.

Due to the desire to 'push the envelope' and also measure road safety performance of comparatively short contract works, a significant focus of proposed measures has been the use of 'lead' indicators. Traditional measures have required 'lag' indicators which although useful as a true performance indicator, are not conducive to accelerating the rate of road safety improvement and supporting proactive and innovative measures.

It is anticipated that many of the measures will be publicly reported. However, irrespective of the final decision on public reporting, the measures are likely to be 'incentivised' by the introduction of program funding allocation or additional payments.

Such measures within Australia have the potential to demonstrate to interested parties that appropriate and targeted measures are being undertaken, as well as assisting in the promotion of an embedded desire to pursue road safety goals across various sections within and across government agencies.

3. RATING ROAD PERFORMANCE – EuroRAP

New Car Assessment Programs (NCAPs) run in Europe and in Australia have been outstandingly successful in driving advances in vehicle safety. It is considered that Road Assessment Programs (RAPs) have the potential to achieve the same for road environment safety.

The world's first RAP has been developed by TRL for the AA Foundation for Road Safety Research in the UK in partnership with leading European motoring organisations. The 'EuroRAP' program was implemented as a pilot during 2002 and is progressing through a number of stages of validation and on-going development.

At the time of writing, EuroRAP has been applied to more than 800 major UK roads, and thousands more in nearby European countries. The program utilises a similar 'star rating system' to the NCAP program (ie. 0 worst, 5 best). This is providing readily digestible consumer information which will ideally create the same momentum to overcome the same types of 'impossibilities' that were originally held up as barriers at the time of introduction of NCAP.

The EuroRAP system applies two protocols. The first being a risk rating based on the proven history of crashes along a route. The second assesses the protection provided by the road environment in relation to prominent safety issues along a route.

It is expected that EuroRAP will gain increasing prominence with the safety ratings of the British road network already publicly available on the internet, and ratings currently being included in the Automobile Association's 2003 road atlases.

EuroRAP provides a consumer driven competitive pressure to maintain road environment standards that compliments the measures being developed to monitor the performance or road authorities input into the network.

A system such as EuroRAP may well have great potential in driving road safety through attention to particular road environment characteristics in Australia. Watch this space.....AusRAP may soon be with us.

(for more information see www.eurorap.org)

4. USER COMPLIANCE MONITORING

While road environment measures have the potential to achieve sustainable benefits, the simple headline fact remains that road user behaviour remains the key contributing factor to crashes. Therefore, influencing behaviour on an ongoing basis has great potential to achieve positive outcomes.

Journey monitoring and incident data recorders are key initiatives that are now becoming common place in many fleet operations. A study of the introduction of 'black boxes' in one European police fleet found a significant reduction in incidents, and the use of journey monitors is achieving similar successes in commercial fleets.

Journey data monitors are being used extensively in a number of heavy vehicle fleets within the UK. The information is processed at regular intervals and driving advice passed back to individual drivers as part of an on-going driver learning experience (note: the use of data for disciplinary action is typically some way along the process, ie. education and self-improvement is much preferred). Such systems typically introduce established rules setting particular limits as that are used for exception reporting, particularly when the information is combined with vehicle tracking systems. Specific measures are being incorporated such as acceleration forces to record unacceptable speed behaviour on curves or occasions of sudden braking, with some fleets linking the information back to risks such as wet weather or icing risks. A petrochemical company is looking at bringing the same standard of monitoring in for its light vehicle fleet (eg. package vehicles, or business vehicles for sales forces and general purposes).

It is considered that Australian organisations charged with promoting and achieving road safety outcomes have the potential to lead the market in this particular initiative and encourage and assist local industry develop such schemes.

5. CORPORATE ROAD SAFETY – A CASE STUDY OF THE PETROCHEMICAL INDUSTRY

A number of operators of large fleets are increasingly putting procedures and policies in place to improve safety, and are growing seemingly keener to contribute to safety in the broader community.

One petrochemical client that TRL has assisted is so committed to improving safety that executive bonuses are heavily influenced by the safety performance of the workforce (with road safety being the key contributor to performance). This particular petrochemical company is currently in the process of establishing global minimum road safety standards for its haulage routes (typically a mix of private and public roads), irrespective of location or operation.

One company has banned mobile phone and two-way communication use across the workforce and in all company vehicles while they are operating – including when not engaged in company business. Exemptions can only be granted by the most senior officers of the organisation worldwide. The same company also recognises that it is not enough to have a policy alone, they are putting in place compliance measures for all levels of staff from the lowest paid to the head of the company. Compliance has been proposed to be checked by random calls, checking a random selection of phone bills against journey logs and data recorders, and will be included in the organisation's investigation process for incidents.

The same company also has a process of peer reviewing the safety of various operations, particularly following incidents and some near-misses. A range of different skill sets and seniorities are bought in, often with complimentary external expertise. The team then speaks to every level of employee and external service providers to consider appropriate road safety responses. In a recent exercise, this led to changes in staff transportation (from individual cars to buses), the provision of defensive driver training to an external transport provider, and formation of partnerships with external government organisations to target mutual benefit issues.

A competitor went one step further and decided to not only review safety along routes they were operating, but to also have relevant professionals propose road safety countermeasures and fund a high proportion of the measures desired on public roads, with these to be installed by the local road authority.

It is TRL's experience that local road authorities have been receptive to the organisations (no doubt pleased of a securing an additional funding source !), even having established some prior contact and expressions of willingness to co-operate.

The authors believe there is much potential within the Australian marketplace for road safety authorities to be more proactive in soliciting working partnerships with organisations of this nature, and to have established policies and procedures in place to facilitate easy and useful contact with key external stakeholders and interest groups.

6. POLICE ROAD DEATH INVESTIGATION MANUAL (RDIM)

RDIM was produced to detail how Police forces in the UK should deal with the investigation of road death. The key objective of the manual being to ensure that road deaths are treated with the same level of appropriate attention as any other unlawful killing.

However, this should not be seen merely as a new manual alone. The manual is only part of an overall commitment for appropriate resources, expertise and follow through for the investigation of serious incidents and contributing factors.

Further detail will be provided within the presentation that accompanies this presentation.

7. LEGAL PROCESS

The legislative process is providing a strong incentive for organisations to manage road safety as an intricate part of their business. As has been well documented, the incidence of civil proceedings has tended to increase over time, being brought against organisations whose actions have been contributory to personal injury. However, an emerging focus on criminal action is generally a new development.

Following a recent rail accident in the UK, corporate manslaughter charges were brought against individuals with the rail authorities. Similarly, Police within the UK are taking criminal action for road crashes against those not directly involved in the crash itself. Examples include: actions against officers within road authorities where the placement of roadside safety barriers is in question; transport companies that failed to collect or act on information that would have signaled fatigue as a problem; and employers who did not adequately monitor or manage the driving practices of their workforce.

The legal process has enabled these actions to take place whereby they were previously not sought or were not possible. Although the authors do have some concerns about this recent development it has undoubtedly served to focus the minds of people in positions of greatest influence.

8. DISCUSSION

The authors believe that a parallel can be drawn between road safety in Australia at the current time and the 'position' that occupational health and safety was at a number of years prior. It is

generally recognised that safety is a worthwhile cause and there are general policies and philosophies to promote it, however safety is yet to be engrained as “part of the way we do business”.

The examples given within this paper and the accompanying presentation have been chosen to show that in some countries (including the UK), road safety is steadily gaining a position whereby it is becoming a culture, ie. “part of the way things are done around here”.

The paper and presentation have hopefully shown a number of areas that can be advanced within Australia for the sake of the safety of network road users nationwide (and ultimately to contribute to driving the road toll even lower still).

It is considered that governments and government agencies can take a leading role in showing a greater organisational commitment to road safety. For example, other than statistical information on the incidence of crashes, much more reporting may be possible of what activities government agencies are undertaking to drive road safety. Such reporting and strong commitment to initiatives will serve to provide a focus on safety as a co-ordinated deliverable of government, in addition to driving government suppliers and contractors towards achieving the same objectives.

Paul Hillier
Principal Consultant
TRL Limited
Australia
phillier@trl.co.uk

Nigel McDonald
Principal Consultant
TRL Limited
Australia
nmcdonald@trl.co.uk

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