

Safer Roads through Community Partnerships –  
Recent Experience in Tasmania.

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ABSTRACT

Since 2003 Tasmania's Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources (DIER) has introduced a new Community Road Safety Partnerships (CRSP) Program. The aim of CRSP is to develop partnerships with local government authorities and associated community networks to improve road safety at a local community level.

DIER recognised that community road safety was becoming an accepted part of good practice, as documented in an Austroads review of programs in Australia and New Zealand (Cairney 2002), and that these programs delivered worthwhile benefits.

CRSP links with existing community networks, such as local road safety groups and community safety organisations. It is all about "grass roots" community development processes supporting communities to implement their own informed locally-based solutions to road safety issues. Sustainability of programs has been at the forefront of all CRSP initiatives, along with a strong focus on evaluation.

ARRB Consulting conducted a major independent evaluation of the CRSP program in August 2005. The framework for good practice in the Austroads report was used as the framework for the evaluation. CRSP evaluated well on all the major aspects covered – *institutional arrangements* were well catered for through the partnership of DIER and local government; *integration* of activities on a geographical basis and in terms of single actions to deal with multiple problems was evident; community visits and the extent of media coverage provided evidence of an *informed community*; the extent of local government input and local industry sponsorship attested to the *mobilisation of local resources*; and the existence of a road safety plan for each committee encouraged priority for *effective actions*. Evaluation reports for four activities were examined in detail and found to compare well with reports from other community road safety programs.

This presentation discusses what has been learned about the developing road safety partnerships in the first years of operation and the major findings of the 2005 CRSP Evaluation. It also shares the plans to incorporate new local government partners in the future.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Community Road Safety Partnerships (CRSP) Program was initiated by the Department of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources (DIER) in 2003 with the aim of establishing partnerships with local government authorities and associated community networks to achieve a greater focus on road safety outcomes at a local community level. The program came about through a recognition that community road safety was becoming an accepted part of good practice in the delivery of road safety programs (DIER 2003), as documented in an Austroads review of programs in Australia and New Zealand (Cairney 2002), and that these programs were delivering worthwhile benefits. In Tasmania at that time, the capacity of community programs to deliver messages was 'largely untapped' (DIER 2003, p.4).

At that time, the Tasmanian Government was promoting community ownership and partnership with the State Government as the basis for future social and economic development in Tasmania, as expressed in the 'Tasmania Together' charter. A move to develop community road safety partnerships was seen as consistent with this direction.

The Land Transport Safety (LTS) Division within DIER was seen to have strong links with local government through its engineering activities, but had little contact with the community directly or with the community-focused aspects of local government.

The LTS Division at that stage was focused on two activities - providing education in schools, and delivering road safety programs on a state-wide basis. The CRSP was seen as representing a new opportunity to work with local government, by providing services and operations which would have an impact at the local level.

## 2. DESIGN / IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CRSP PROGRAM

In designing the strategic and operational approach for the Tasmanian CRSP program, other community road safety programs were researched, particularly those in New Zealand, Victoria and South Australia. Also at the forefront of designing the approach to be taken were the recommendations of the review of community road safety in Australia and New Zealand carried out for Austroads (Cairney 2002). These recommendations were incorporated into the design of the CRSP program.

A major consideration in the design of CRSP was the importance of involving local government authorities as key 'players' in community programs. Consequently local government authorities were invited to participate in the program from the outset. Initially 22 of the 29 Tasmanian local government authorities registered interest in the CRSP program, out of which 12 became involved in the program. These communities were Burnie, Kentish, City of Launceston, Dorset, George Town, Break O'Day, West Tamar, Glenorchy City, Brighton, Kingborough, Hobart City and Glamorgan / Spring Bay.

Each participating community then identified advisory committees to oversee the development of action plans and the implementation of local road safety activities, which targeted key local and state issues. In some instances the advisory committees were established specifically to oversee the partnership, but in several communities an existing committee was used, such as a local community safety group or Police/community liaison committee. This latter strategy saw CRSP become quickly adopted into an established network.

A major challenge for the DIER consultants, who were initiating contact with important stakeholders such as local government managers and key community contacts, was building confidence and trust in all 'players'. To foster this process an initial Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) was developed between DIER and each local government authority. The MOU served to clarify negotiated roles and responsibilities of the two major parties, thereby forming an agreed platform from which to develop the partnership.

In order to further build trust and confidence the DIER consultants ensured that they made regular visits to and kept close contact with the key advisory committee members in the developmental planning stages of each CRSP group. This allowed for direct personal communication as each partnership was emerging.

Another challenge which had to be met in the planning phase was ensuring that local CRSP committees were focused on relevant road safety issues. To ensure that this occurred several discussions were conducted with each community planning group in which the Tasmanian Road Safety Strategy 2002-06 was highlighted and key target areas such as speed, restraints, fatigue, distraction and drink driving were nominated as foci for projects. While this strategy successfully guided and scoped the types of projects undertaken, it still allowed for local and less relevant issues to be discussed and flagged for attention.

## 3. EVALUATION OF CRSP

ARRB Consulting was contracted to conduct a major evaluation of the CRSP program. The following information (Section 3) relating to evaluation of CRSP is a compilation of extracts from the Evaluation of the Community Road Safety Partnerships Program report (Cairney 2005).

### 3.1 Framework for evaluation

As previously mentioned the design and objectives of the CRSP program were influenced by a review of community road safety in Australia and New Zealand carried out for Austroads (Cairney 2002). That report reviewed the conceptual foundations of community road safety, and described current consensus regarding its objectives. It also tried to identify the basic requirements in terms of institutional structures to ensure sustainable programs. The objectives of community road safety and requirements for institutional structures set out in that report was therefore used as the framework within which the evaluation was carried out. The Austroads report discussed the fact that evaluating road safety programs at the community level in terms of crash reductions is not practical due to the small number of crashes which occur in any one community. The response to this has been to focus on process evaluation, i.e. to consider what has been delivered, how many people it reached, and how well it was delivered rather than what impact it has had on crashes. The way out of this dilemma suggested in the Austroads review is to focus on behaviour which is known to be related to road safety outcomes, such as restraint wearing or vehicle speeds, and which can be readily measured. This approach to evaluation was encouraged for the projects undertaken as part of the CRSP project.

### 3.2 Data collection tasks

The evaluation was based on a number of separate data gathering tasks, namely:

- visits to three local governments which involved discussion with the key individuals and a group meeting with partnership members,
- a questionnaire to each CRSP committee,
- questions targeted at CRSP issues which were embedded in a statewide survey of road users which sought opinions on a wide range of road safety issues,
- an analysis of print media coverage of CRSP projects and events, and
- four evaluation reports completed as part of individual CRSP projects.

Data was also gathered from a major Road Safety Community Attitudes Survey (DIER 2005), which involved telephone interviews with 1800 respondents across Tasmania, including the 1200 from the participating CRSP communities.

The methods and detailed results for each of these tasks are reported in the Evaluation of the Community Road Safety Partnership Program Report 2005 (P Cairney 2005).

### 3.3 Elements of the evaluation

#### 3.3.1 Institutional support

The framework for the delivery of community road safety programs suggested in the Austroads review (Cairney 2002) is shown in Figure 1. The starting point for this assessment of CRSP was the extent to which the institutional arrangements supporting CRSP meet these requirements.

The diagram specifies what central government (above the Community Road Safety Program in Figure 1) and local government or the community has to provide (below the Community Road Safety Program).

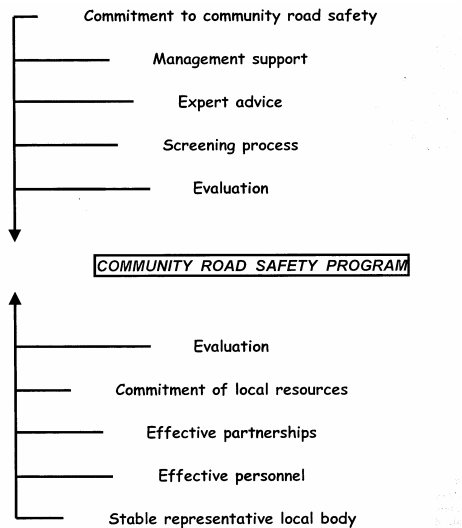


Figure 1 Organisational framework for sustainable community road safety

### 3.3.2 Goals of the CRSP program

Since the CRSP program was developed to conform to the recommendations of the Austroads review (Cairney 2002), it is assumed that its aims are closely aligned with the aims of community road safety as described in that report. These are succinctly outlined in Figure 2.

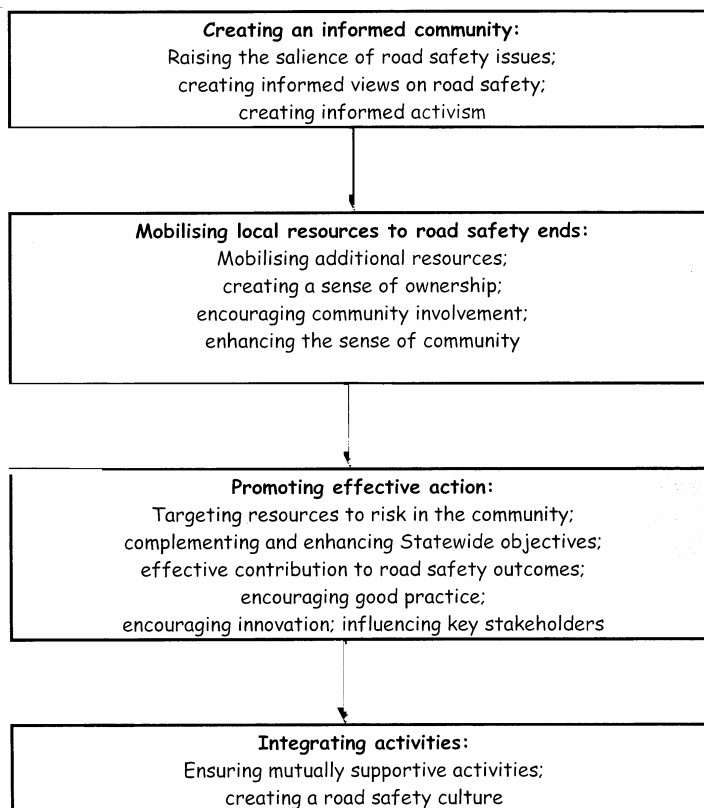


Figure 2 Goals of community road safety

The information below discusses in detail how well the CRSP program is achieving these aims.

### *Creating an informed community*

There are three main lines of evidence on this point: the interviews and group discussions, the documentation of press coverage, and the community survey.

The interviews and group discussion frequently mention how over time the committees have come to better understand the issues and possibilities arising from community road safety, and that the committees have become more capable as a result. They have also cited raising awareness in the community of road safety issues as one of their significant achievements.

The press coverage listed a total of 81 articles. Only one CRSP had no press articles. For the remaining eleven, the total of 81 represents an average of 7.4 per CRSP, or approximately one every 2-3 months. However, there is considerable variation among partnerships, with Glenorchy generating approximately one article every month.

Almost half the articles appeared in Tasmania's major papers: the Mercury (11), the Examiner (6), the Advocate (15) and the Sunday Tasmanian (3). For the program as a whole, this represents approximately 2 articles per month in a major publication.

The third line of evidence is the number of individuals in the community surveys who said they recalled the main CRSP activity running in their municipality at the time of the survey. This ranged from a low of 12% in Break O'Day, to 75% for Burnie's 'Who's Des Tonight?' and 77% for Glamorgan/Spring Bay's Roadside Crash Marker program.

### *Mobilising local resources to road safety ends*

The evidence is that the CRSP has succeeded in attracting additional resources to road safety from local sources. The most important of these is probably the committee itself – where none existed before, there is now in each of the participating municipalities a motivated group of people with good community connections who are applying their efforts to identifying and solving some of the community's road safety problems, and whose knowledge of the issues and the potential range of solutions and how to implement them is steadily improving.

The interviews and group discussions made it clear there is a high degree of ownership and involvement in the partnerships. The discussion at Glenorchy was particularly clear on the point that community road safety complemented other community development goals, and so was an element in enhancing the sense of community.

### *Promoting effective action*

Care was taken to develop a road safety plan for each CRSP committee, so that action proceeded from an informed assessment of the risks facing the community. Priorities, however, were determined largely by the committee's views on community priorities. This reflects Tasmania's strong tradition of community development activity. While the objective analysis of road safety issues determines the range of possibilities which DIER will support in the partnership, the priorities for acting on these possibilities was determined by the community in discussion with DIER. To the extent that this is seen as giving the committee responsibility for the direction of the partnership, it should be a powerful way of encouraging ownership and commitment. As there are always more road safety issues of significance than can be addressed at any time, there need be no conflict between community priorities and DIER objectives. However, the fit between community priorities and statewide objectives may be rather loose.

The evaluation reports indicate that those projects, which have been evaluated, do contribute to safety outcomes.

- Glenorchy 'Best Bets' project – increase in public transport use, especially to go home from the Hobart Cup meeting.
- Glenorchy wheelie bin speed limit sticker project – substantial reduction in operating speeds, even on days when the bins were not put out.
- Burnie 'Who's Des Tonight' project – substantial reductions in drink driving compared to previous year, reverting to close to five year average, reduction in assaults.

- Brighton ‘Turn Right’ project – highly successful in encouraging people with low literacy skills and/or low income to progress towards obtaining a driving licence.
- Although not formally evaluated, the Voluntary Code of Behaviour for Heavy Drivers and Operators project run in the Northeast seems to have substantially reduced the number of complaints regarding log trucks.
- Other projects not yet delivered or evaluated at this relatively early stage in the life of the CRSP appear to be well thought-out, and their evaluation should be of great interest.

#### *Integrating activities*

It is perhaps the case that the program has not yet enjoyed much success in integrating road safety activities. This is hardly surprising in a new program where the priorities have been establishing the program, developing networks and capacity, and demonstrating that the program can deliver worthwhile projects. There are, however, a few exceptions.

Dorset, Break O’Day and George Town combined effectively to develop and implement the Heavy Vehicle Program and promote the Code of Behaviour. This involves both integration across local government boundaries, and integration of the efforts of the logging transport sector and the community.

Potentially the most effective integration has been in terms of the impact CRSP activities have had on broader social problems. The ‘Who’s Des Tonight?’ project run in Burnie not only appears to have reversed a trend towards increasing drink driving, but also to have reduced the incidence of assaults as well. Although this cannot be conclusively demonstrated on the available data, it is believed this occurred because many people were taken straight home when the licensed premises closed, rather than hanging around in an intoxicated state to wait for a taxi. Further examples with even greater impact are the Brighton ‘Turn Right’ and the Glenorchy ‘First Gear’ and ‘Top Gear’ projects. By assisting people with low literacy and low incomes to obtain their licence, they fulfil the road safety goals of equipping these individuals to drive safely and providing them with a powerful incentive to drive within the law in order to retain their licence. They also enhance self-esteem for individuals who have previously had limited success with any form of test or assessment, and greatly increase the employment opportunities open for them.

#### 3.3.3 Conclusions from the Evaluation

It is clear that the CRSP has achieved much in less than two years of operation. The impressive aspects of CRSP’s performance, which can be compared to experience in other Australian jurisdictions, are:

- Programs running in twelve municipalities, representing just over 40% the municipalities in the state. New South Wales and Western Australia, although there are differences in the programs, still fall short of 100% participation after more than ten years’ operation.
- The four evaluation reports to date are of a broadly equivalent standard to the best papers devoted to reporting community projects at the NSW Local Government Road Safety Conference or the Victorian Saferoads conference.
- Some of the programs already running or about to be launched are ambitious in their scope, and have involved intense collaborative effort in overcoming major challenges.

- It is also evident that an appropriate institutional framework for a sustainable program has been developed. After some initial hesitation on the part of local government, relationships are developing well within this framework and a solid commitment to road safety activities at the community level is evolving. It was also evident that the objectives for community road safety programs as defined in the Austroads review (Cairney 2002) were being met in terms of creating an informed community, mobilising local resources for road safety, promoting effective action and integrating activities. This success is due to DIER being able to build on two pre-existing developments:
- the experience of other organisations in Australia (and, to a lesser extent, overseas) in developing community based programs; and
- Tasmania's existing commitment to community development, and the existence of an effective community development capacity in local government. DIER's achievement has therefore been to recognise the opportunities these two developments presented, and to make full use of them in developing a vibrant program with strong commitment from stakeholders, and achieving this in a very short time. The commitment and enthusiasm of DIER staff involved in the program was a point spontaneously mentioned in the three programs visited as a critical factor in bringing this about.

In conducting this evaluation, efforts were made to identify problems and grounds for dissatisfaction with the program. Only one or two problems of a relatively minor nature were identified and this is greatly to the program's credit. However, it is worth remembering that these are early days for the program yet, and that is almost inevitable that occasions for disagreement and discontent will grow as the program expands and more ambitious and resource-intense programs come on line.

#### 4. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As a result of the success of CRSP over the first 3-year phase, DIER will continue the CRSP 'approach' with future community operations. The State Government has committed a further \$795,000 over the next 3 years to consolidate and sustain impetus with the established CRSP partnerships and to expand the program to new community partnerships across Tasmania. At the time of writing this paper, DIER consultants are designing the next 3-year phase of the program, which will involve renegotiation with existing partners and the invitation for new partners to enlist.

A significant challenge for DIER will be to design a process to extend the CRSP program more broadly across the state with the creative use of existing personnel. DIER intends to maintain the positive expectations of community CRSP contacts and ensure the quality of the work achieved to date continues.

#### REFERENCES

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