

## **Catch Ya Later Condo - an alternative transport option for rural communities**

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### **Abstract**

In larger centres it seems that buses are being used more often as a way to get patrons home safely. However in smaller rural communities the cost of running a bus is prohibitive. This is why the Condobolin Liquor Accord with the assistance of Lachlan Shire Council's Road Safety and Injury Prevention Officer, developed an alternative transport scheme utilising the local taxi company. A model which has taken the central west region of New South Wales by storm.

The premise of the scheme is to separate people from their vehicles before they start drinking. The project encouraged people to leave their cars at home and get rewarded for doing so.

*Catch Ya Later Condo* was piloted for 16 weeks in 2007 with amazing success. Over 300 people utilised the scheme. Anecdotal feedback shows that less cars are parked outside pubs/clubs (even up to two months after the scheme was operational) and police recorded a drop in the number of drink driving offences detected.

Since its inception the model has attracted state-wide and national media attention and been trialled in 10 Liquor Accord areas during Christmas 2007.

In May 2008 the project won the Local Government Excellence in Road Safety Award at the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia (NSW Division) Conference.

This paper will explain the alternative transport model and discuss the results of the Condobolin pilot.

### **Keywords**

Drink driving, alternative transport, behaviour change, liquor accords

### **Introduction**

Condobolin is a small rural town located in the heart of New South Wales. With a population of around 2,500 people it is the largest centre in the Lachlan Shire Council area. At present Lachlan Shire Council are the 13<sup>th</sup> largest local government area in the State, covering some 15,000 square kilometres. The major industries of the Shire are agriculture, fishing, forestry and retail. Condobolin is located in the middle of the drought belt, which means that many families are doing it tough.

In May 2002, Lachlan Shire Council partnered with Parkes and Forbes Shire Councils to employ a Road Safety and Injury Prevention Officer (RSIPO), to develop, implement and evaluate local road safety education programs across the three shires.

Over the Christmas/New Year periods of 2005 and 2006 the RSIPO implemented projects in conjunction with the local taxi company, Condo Cabs, to encourage people to use the taxi

service rather than drink and drive. One project provided a \$2 discount on the cab fare home if people caught a taxi to a licensed venue during the party season. The other project placed all taxi patrons into weekly prize draws for \$100 fuel vouchers. While both of these schemes were utilised by Condobolin residents, the RSIPO hoped to eventually develop a scheme that would remove the temptation for people to drive home after a few drinks by separating them from their vehicle at the beginning of the night out. Both previous projects had missed this mark and it was this premise that spawned the *Catch Ya Later Condo* model.

## **Project Development**

In mid 2006 the newly formed Condobolin Liquor Accord expressed concern over getting their patrons home safely (particularly at closing) and were investigating running a town wide courtesy bus.

Liquor Accords are a partnership between license holders, Government Agencies and the local community who work together and develop strategies to reduce the incidence and severity of alcohol related harm and crime.

The RSIPO convened a round table meeting of the Project Steering Committee to discuss the town's alternative transport options. Present were representatives of the Condobolin Liquor Accord, Condo Cabs, Ministry of Transport (MOT), Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) and the RSIPO.

The following RTA crash data was tabled to the Project Steering Committee. Between 2002 - 2006 there were eight alcohol related crashes recorded in the town of Condobolin; two of which were fatal. Alcohol related crashes accounted for 8% of motor vehicle collisions in the Lachlan Shire, with all of the drink driving crashes involving local drivers. This meant that local residents could be reached and targeted with a localised alternative transport scheme, which could have a positive effect on lowering the local drink driving road toll.

The cost of operating a town-wide courtesy bus was soon discovered to be out of reach, so a scheme was developed utilising the local taxi company. It was called *Catch Ya Later Condo* and it encouraged people to leave their car at home if they were planning to drink and get rewarded for doing so. It was a very ambitious idea that would see all the stakeholders working together to combat a local issue.

The project objectives included;

1. Increase the number of Condobolin residents who use taxis on both the to and from journeys to the pub/clubs on Friday and Saturday nights.
2. Provide a transportation option that is safe, inexpensive and appealing to the targeted consumer group.
3. Reduce the incidence and prevalence of drink driving offences that occur in Condobolin.

The *Catch Ya Later Condo* scheme operated as follows;

1. Anyone who caught a cab to a participating licensed venue on Friday or Saturday night would receive a voucher from the driver after paying their fare.
2. Upon presenting the voucher to bar staff the patron would receive \$5 worth of freebies compliments of the licensee.
3. For just \$1 more the bar staff would validate the voucher so the patron would receive a free cab ride home.

Vouchers were limited to one per trip on the return journey and were colour coded and numbered to represent each week the project was operational to assist with the evaluation. Condo Cabs agreed to charge a flat fare of \$5 per voucher. Further the \$5 worth of free merchandise was at the discretion of the licensee and could be money off counter meals, meat raffle tickets, Christmas raffle tickets or a free drink. All 10 licensed venues in Condobolin agreed to take part in the project.

Grant funding for the project was sourced through the RTA, MOT and Lachlan Shire Council's Road Safety Program. The Project Steering Committee decided to pilot the project for an eight week period that would encompass all of December 2006 and January 2007.

A logo for the project was developed and used to help brand the scheme. It was used on all the promotional items that were developed as well on all newspaper advertising. It was a simple black, red and white design that featured a hand hailing a cab (see below).



An assertive promotional strategy included;

- Taxi side advertising for both of the Condo Cabs cars.
- Coasters explaining the project being used in participating pubs, clubs and restaurants while the project was in operation.
- A3 posters on display at prominent places in the pubs, clubs and restaurants in the lead up to the project commencing and throughout its implementation.
- Radio commercials that were voiced by the President of the Liquor Accord were written, produced and aired on the local radio station in the lead up to the launch and throughout the project.
- Newspaper advertisements were developed and booked in both local newspapers in the lead up to the launch and throughout the project. They featured a photo of the President of the Liquor Accord.
- T-shirts promoting the scheme were developed and given to all bar staff and cab drivers to wear throughout November, December and January. They featured the project's logo and the text "ask me about".
- Regular media coverage was organised by the RSIPO. Media releases were issued that discussed the launch of the scheme, a testimonial from a resident who used the scheme, information on random breath testing and blood alcohol concentration limits for learner and provisional license holders.

To coincide with the promotion of the *Catch Ya Later Condo* scheme the RSIPO decided to remind drivers that if they chose to drive after they had been drinking they could be caught by Police. A radio commercial was voiced by a member of the Lachlan Highway Patrol. It alerted drivers to the fact that every Police car in New South Wales was able to conduct random breath tests so there was more chance of getting caught. Newspaper advertisements with the same message were developed and booked in both local newspapers.

The RTA were very supportive of the project offering to run their *Paranoia* TV and radio commercials in the region during the trial period. The *Paranoia* commercials are in the same vein as the local Police advertising outlined above. The commercials tag line is "Paranoid. You should be!" and shows a young male hallucinating that he is seeing Police everywhere he looks while driving home from the pub. To compliment the broadcast of the commercials *Paranoia* resources were made available to the licensees - these include; coasters, posters, bar runners and t-shirts.

### **Project Implementation**

*Catch Ya Later Condo* was launched at the end of November 2006, the week the scheme commenced operation for a trial eight week period. The official launch was held at the Condobolin RSL and saw all stakeholders in attendance and attracted local and regional media coverage.

During the first eight weeks of the trial, every Monday the RSIPO would contact Condo Cabs and a number of venues to check what had occurred with the scheme over the weekend.

Initially there was a lot of confusion about which licensed venues were participating and how the scheme worked. As Greg Cooper, the President of the Liquor Accord, voiced the radio advertisement and his photo was used in the newspaper advertising some locals reported that they thought it was a scheme that could only be used at the Condobolin Hotel/Motel (Greg's venue).

There was also confusion about how the scheme worked. There were a number of vouchers given out by the cab drivers and redeemed at the venue but people left them behind and couldn't get their free cab ride home. It was felt that the coloured cardboard vouchers that were produced in-house weren't substantial enough for people to think it was important to keep.

After Christmas (halfway through the pilot period) the Liquor Accord decided to change their advertising to help clear up some of the confusion over where the scheme was on offer. A photo of all 10 licensees was used in the newspaper advertisements and a new generic radio commercial was written, recorded and aired.

The Liquor Accord also decided to send out a letterbox drop to all Condobolin residents featuring the names of all the participating venues. A smaller version of the poster was used for this. Following the above-mentioned changes business picked up and support and use of the scheme grew.

Once the initial eight week pilot period was complete some 123 locals had used the service and anecdotally were very happy that it was on offer.

Due to the success of the trial period the Liquor Accord asked the funding bodies if they could run a second phase of the project, an additional eight week period in March and April 2007. It was suggested that Thursday nights should be included in the scheme as it was a busy night in Condobolin. The Liquor Accord also decided to get the vouchers professionally designed and printed for this phase. Again the RSIPO contacted a number of venues and Condo Cabs every Monday to ascertain what had occurred with the scheme over the weekend.

*Catch Ya Later Condo's* second phase was even more successful than the first. Some 209 took part in the second eight week trial which took the total number of participants in the scheme to 332.

The Office of Liquor Gaming and Racing (OLGR) were very impressed with the results of the project and published a story about the scheme in their quarterly Bulletin which is sent to every licensee in NSW. The RSIPO was also invited to present the project to Regional Liquor Accord Conferences to highlight the scheme and the benefits of a Liquor Accord working together and with other organisations to combat local problems.

Police supported the project by maintaining a high profile and conducting random breath tests. In phase one 1,412 random breath tests were conducted with 11 drink driving offences detected. Phase two saw this figure fall with only five drink driving offences detected from 854 random breath tests.

## **Results**

Evaluation of the project included patron evaluation surveys, the number of people using the service, media coverage and Police enforcement figures.

The RSIPO hired a two person survey team to conduct the patron evaluation survey in the participating venues on a Friday and Saturday night a few weeks after the conclusion of both phases of the scheme's operation. The Team's worked from 5.30 - 7.30pm and again from 9 - 11pm with the aim of capturing a range of different people with different drinking habits. The first half of the survey asked how the patron got to the venue, where their car was parked and how they were getting home. The second half of the project asked specific questions about the scheme.

One hundred and fourteen patron evaluation surveys were conducted following phase one of the project and 234 patron evaluation surveys were completed at the conclusion of phase two.

The major findings of the patron evaluation surveys were;

- 51% of people left their car at home, 11% at a friend's house and 6% at work.
- 33% of people drove to the pub/club and they all reported that they were going to drive home.
- 16% of people caught a cab and all reported that they were catching a cab home.
- 25% of people walked and had a range of strategies for getting home.
- There was a 21% increase in the number of participants who had heard of the project from phase one to phase two.
- There was a 7% increase in the number of participants who reported using the scheme.
- The major reasons cited for not using the scheme included walking or receiving a lift home.

- The perception of police enforcement, in particular Police conducting random breath tests, doubled from the first survey to the second - to an enormous 66% of respondents.

All up there were 332 vouchers that were redeemed by participants whilst the scheme was operational. The Project Steering Committee was very pleased with these figures as Condobolin is a small town with a population of 2,500 people.

Media coverage included 13 articles in the local Condobolin newspapers, 10 radio interviews conducted with the local AM and FM station and a further two radio interviews recorded with ABC Central West. The state-wide Bulletin from OLGR was also a huge feather in the Liquor Accord's cap and attracted interest from a number of Liquor Accords in the region.

Police reported that there were less cars parked in the CBD area of town on Friday and Saturday nights whilst the scheme was operational and up to two months after its implementation. Police figures show a 54% reduction in drink driving offences detected when comparing the results of phase one to phase two.

### **Sustainable road safety benefit**

It must be stated that two months after both phases of the *Catch Ya Later Condo* scheme were completed, anecdotal feedback from Police was that there were less cars parked in front of pubs/clubs in the main street of Condobolin. It can be said that the message to leave your car at home at the beginning of the night out is getting through to the community.

Following the success of the project in Condobolin a number of Liquor Accords made contact to learn more about the scheme so they could implement it in their area during December 2007. These Liquor Accords include; Moree, Parkes, Leeton, Narrandera, Cootamundra, West Wyalong and Temora.

As the first two phases of the project were very successful, the Liquor Accord decided to run a third phase in December 2007. Some 100 people took part over the 11 days the scheme was operational in December. Many of the recommendations outlined later in this paper were used by the RSIPO to improve the project.

### **Innovation and improved practice**

*Catch Ya Later Condo* was an innovative demonstration of an affordable and effective model for a rural alternative transport scheme which can be employed in any similar community. It saw all 10 venues in Condobolin working together harmoniously and the model encourages people to leave their cars at home before they go drinking and rewards them for doing so, which is an innovative new approach. The scheme has a demonstrable impact on lowering the crash risk and detected drink driving offences. The project also created a new level of cooperation between Condo Cabs, Lachlan Shire Council, NSW Police, RTA, MOT and local media outlets.

As a result of the success of the *Catch Ya Later Condo* scheme, the RSIPO has been approached by Western Region RTA to develop an alternative transport project manual. The manual will be available across the region for other RSOs, Councils, Liquor Accords and taxi companies. It will highlight the best practice in terms of alternative transport schemes

implemented by Liquor Accords in partnership with local taxi companies and be based on the lessons learnt and successes with the *Catch Ya Later Condo* project.

## **Conclusions**

While the project was operational it increased cab usage, provided residents with an inexpensive and safe transport option as well as reduced the prevalence and incidences of drink driving in town and reduced the number of alcohol related crimes that were committed. The project objectives focused on increasing people using the scheme as well as reducing drink driving occurrences. It can be said that while *Catch Ya Later Condo* is a very worthwhile campaign it also met all of its objectives.

In May 2008 the project was named the winner of the Local Government Excellence in Road Safety Award at the Institute of Public Works and Engineering Australia's (NSW Division) Conference. The judging panel said "the project addressed a local road safety issue through innovative and sound methods. It incorporated excellent community and stakeholder involvement and followed best practice principles. The project evaluation included an analysis of recorded drink driving offences and surveys of patrons at participating venues. The success of *Catch Ya Later Condo* has encouraged Liquor Accords in other areas to adopt this approach. This is a standout project."

## **Recommendations**

Suggestions for future projects utilising this model include;

- Conducting interviews with the bar staff at the busiest venues at the completion of the project. The staff are at the coalface of the scheme, they collect the vouchers as well as honour the patron's freebies. Their feedback from what they observe and what occurs could be very interesting in shaping and tweaking the scheme and its future promotion.
- Modifying the voucher to include a major prize draw as an added incentive for patrons to utilise the scheme. The prize draw could be funded by the Liquor Accord Members and offer a holiday prize, camping package, fuel vouchers.
- Write a training policy/manual for bar staff and cab drivers that explains how the scheme works and what they need to do to implement the project. The policy/manual could provide a space for each venue to include house policies and a section for staff to sign to acknowledge that they understand how the scheme works.

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