

Towards Zero & Safety Culture Communications – A new way of engaging with the community

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Abstract

As Victoria moves to implement the *Towards Zero* approach and adopt a safety culture, the nature of the Transport Accident Commission's (TAC) communications will also evolve. While the *Towards Zero* approach is a well-known philosophy amongst the road safety professionals, this is not well understood by the community. One of the key principles that underpin *Towards Zero* is a shared responsibility for road safety – of which the community needs to be an important part. To bring the community along on the journey *Towards Zero*, it is vital that they are privy to the same information as key designers of the system and are educated about the vision, its principles and key components.

Following substantial research and thinking, a new, long term, *Towards Zero* public education campaign is under development. The campaign aims to cement the long term goal of achieving zero road deaths and of providing information about how safe roads, safe cars, safe speeds and safe people interact to reduce road trauma. The Victorian community will, for the first time, be presented with a system's approach to trauma reduction.

This paper will detail the communication strategy and the first of the new *Towards Zero* public education campaign being used to engage the community as Victoria journeys *Towards Zero*.

Introduction

The Transport Accident Commission (TAC) is a Victorian Government owned organisation. Motorists in Victoria pay a transport accident charge as a part of their registration and this is used to fund the work of the TAC and pay for treatment and support services for people injured in transport accidents. In addition, the TAC works closely with its road safety partners (consisting of VicRoads, Victoria Police, Department of Justice & Regulation and Department of Health & Human Services) to reduce the incidence of road trauma through accident prevention programs, including public education campaigns.

One of the main responsibilities of the TAC within the road safety partnership in Victoria is the promotion of road safety. The TAC has a long history of producing innovative public education campaigns which educate the community about road safety behaviours. As Victoria

moves to implement the *Towards Zero* approach and adopt a safety culture, the nature of the TAC's communications will also evolve.

Towards Zero

At the heart of *Towards Zero* (otherwise known as Vision Zero, Sustainable Safety or the Safe System approach) is the belief that human health is paramount and that no one should die or be seriously injured when they use the road. The key principles that underpin *Towards Zero* are:

- As humans, we will all inevitably make mistakes
- As humans, we are vulnerable - our unprotected bodies can only withstand forces equivalent to an impact speed of 30km/h before the risk of death significantly increases
- Road safety is a shared responsibility between everyone in the community.

Understanding these principles, it is therefore important to build a safe road system that can accommodate people's mistakes and vulnerability and this will involve significant developments in:

- Safe roads
- Safe vehicles
- Safe speeds
- Safe people.

The *Towards Zero* approach is a well-known philosophy amongst road safety professionals, however, it is not a familiar concept within the Victorian community (Social Research Centre, 2013b). A key principle underpinning *Towards Zero* is a shared responsibility for road safety – for 'shared responsibility' to become reality, the community needs to understand and want to be involved in this new approach.

History of the TAC's Public Education

On 10 December, 1989, the first TAC television commercial (TVC) went to air. In the 27 years since, the TAC has produced in excess of 150 TVCs that have focussed on behaviours and issues which impact road safety significantly including speeding, drink driving, drug driving, distractions, drowsiness and fatigue, young drivers, parental role modelling, vehicle safety and technologies, motorcycle safety and police enforcement.

Traditionally, TAC campaigns have focussed on key road user behaviours and the role of the driver/rider and what individuals can do to reduce their risks on the roads. The campaigns have been successful in raising awareness of important issues such as drink driving and speeding and taglines such as 'If you drink then drive, you're a bloody idiot' and 'Wipe off 5'

are well known and understood by the community. As Victoria moves to implement *Towards Zero*, it is opportune for the TAC to consider and evolve its communication approach and the first step is to consider where the community is at with road safety.

Where is the community at with road safety?

The TAC regularly conducts surveys and focus group research to monitor the community’s attitudes and self-reported behaviour in relation to a number of road safety issues in order to better tailor communication campaigns suited to where the community is at.

Through the initiatives undertaken in road safety and in conjunction with the TAC’s public education campaigns, the community is currently well aware of the key behaviours that contribute to increased road trauma risk (refer to Figure 1) and find many of them socially acceptable (refer to Figure 2).

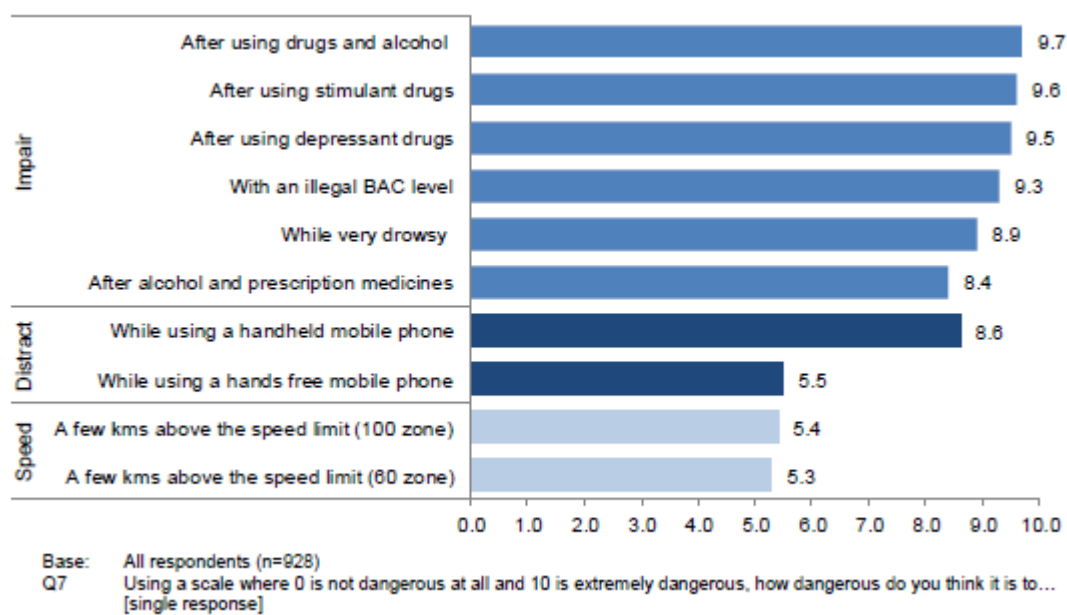


Fig. 1 – Community perception of level of danger in driving behaviours
 (Social Research Centre, 2013a)

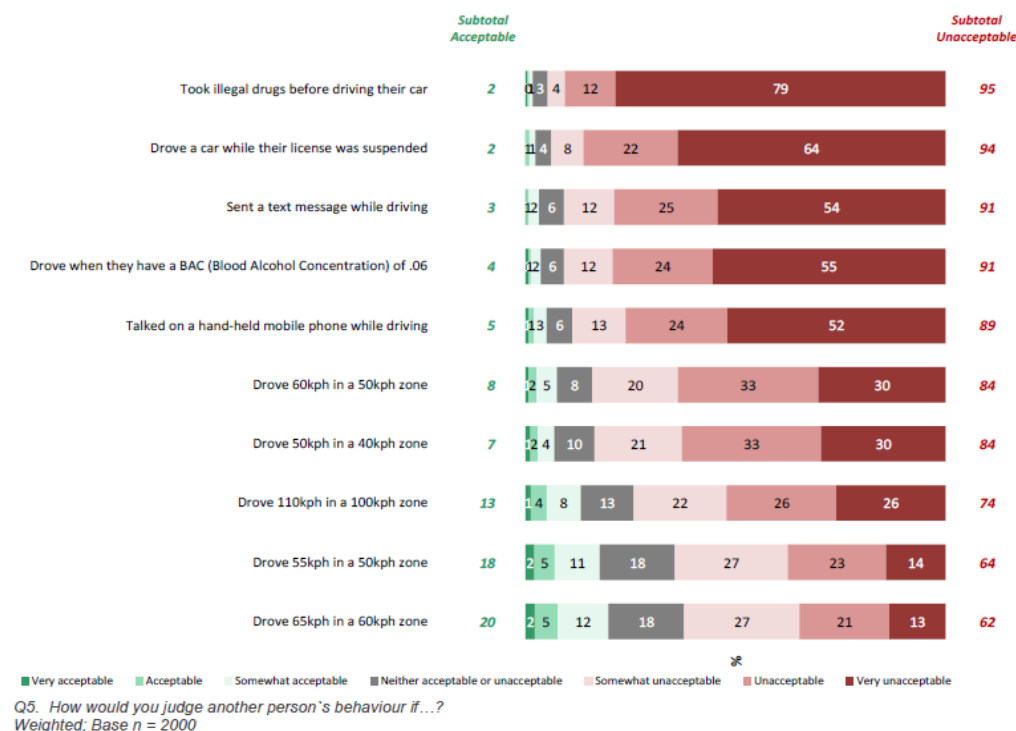


Fig. 2 – Social unacceptability of driving behaviours (Ipsos, 2014)

What the community is not as well aware of is the *Towards Zero* philosophy. When asked in research whether they have heard about the Safe System (i.e. *Towards Zero*) approach to road safety, only 11% of respondents indicated that they have (Ipsos, 2014). This is perhaps not surprising. Even though *Towards Zero* is the underlying philosophy that has been embraced by road safety professionals and is referred to in many policy documents, there has not been a systematic approach to educating the community about the concept.

The aim of *Towards Zero* is to have zero deaths and serious injuries on the road. Currently, research shows that a large majority of the community (78%) think that the idea of no road deaths is unachievable, with some of the barriers being:

- Human error (68%) and people will always make mistakes (20%)
- Driver stupidity (14%)
- Driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol (11%)
- Technology would never be fully safe (10%) (Ipsos, 2014).

However, when *Towards Zero/Safe System* was explained as an approach in which nobody needs to be killed or severely injured on Victoria's roads based on safer road users on safer roads, with safer speed limits and in safer vehicles, 38% of respondents believed that *Towards Zero/Safe System* is achievable (Social Research Centre, 2013b). It can be argued that the community would require some context and information on how road trauma can be reduced in order to believe that zero deaths is ever achievable.

The community may also require some convincing that road safety is an issue that concerns everyone, including themselves personally. With 25% of the community believing that the barrier to achieving zero is due to driver stupidity or deliberate risk taking (Ipsos, 2014), they may think that they are immune to the effects of road trauma if they do not engage in those behaviours. Past campaigns have focussed on poor driver behaviour, but the fact that accidents can happen even when not deliberately taking risks (eg. making a mistake) is not highlighted. With 81% of people rating themselves as better than average or much better than average drivers (Social Research Centre, 2014), the key principle of everyone makes mistakes need to be clearly communicated to convince road users that road trauma can happen to anyone that makes a mistake, including those that believe they are good drivers and hence the need build a road system to accommodate for instances where people do make mistakes to prevent death and serious injuries.

In relation to who is responsible for reducing road trauma, focus group research indicate that more work needs to be undertaken to foster a sense of ownership of the problem in the community. For example:

People feel that this (road safety rules) have been imposed upon them, they need to feel they have ownership of it...Like I said, we need to feel ownership of this thing. We don't. I don't, I don't feel it apart from playing my own little business on the road I don't have any ownership or part to play in what those statistics are showing. (55+ years Melbourne) – (Kerryn Alexander Research, 2014).

The community has also indicated that they would like more information that provides the rationale for why certain strategies are implemented or actions are taken. One example is speed limit setting. In focus group research there appeared to be a greater acceptance of changes to speed limits, once the link between human tolerance and impact speeds was explained:

That gets back to the point that it needs to be communicated. Everybody needs to be aware of the numbers and what everybody is trying to do to prevent it. There is not a lot out there about it. I didn't know a pedestrian could get killed at 30 k's. (Female, 20-30 years, Bendigo) - (Kerryn Alexander Research, 2014).

I think explaining the reason would be part of it. I think you're right if people don't understand the reason they're not going to change their behaviour. If they understand this is going to save lives and statistically based say it saves lives I think it will have more of an impact. (Melbourne CBD) - (Kerryn Alexander Research, 2014).

With Victoria moving to implement *Towards Zero*, road safety agencies will need to consider where the community is at with road safety and how to engage them to the embrace the vision, their role within the system and foster a sense of shared responsibility. Public education is one key avenue and to this end, the TAC has taken into account the research and has developed a new communications approach to bring the community on the *Towards Zero* journey.

A New Communications Approach

Public Education

One of the key principles that underpin *Towards Zero* is a shared responsibility for road safety – of which the community needs to be an important part. If it is believed that the community is a key part of the road system, it will be important for community members to be privy to the same information as available to the designers and builders of the road system in order for them to understand why changes are being made and what government are working towards. Road safety agencies and the government cannot realise the *Towards Zero* vision without all parts of the system doing their part - and this means gaining the support of the community.

Historically, the TAC's public education campaigns and communication have focussed on the behaviours and responsibilities of individual road users, of which they are now well aware of. They have rarely engaged or informed road users about the State's overarching road safety strategy and or longer term vision. It is argued that this lack of context and subsequent rationale for the communications, for some can act as a barrier to behaviour change.

If the community is to engage and join in the journey *Towards Zero* they need to be fully informed. Moving forward, the TAC's aim will be for more transparent communications that share with the community any knowledge about issues such as the human body's tolerance to energy forces, how wire rope barrier works to protect people, why ABS on road bikes is so important to motorcyclists' safety, in order to increase their level of understanding and buy in to the vision. Previous communications concentrated efforts on advising road users about how they should behave. New communications will be about sharing the data and evidence base the road safety partners use to inform Victoria's Road Safety Strategy and the resulting actions and providing the information that will help the community make the best decisions for themselves.

Safety Culture & Communications

The new TAC approach will aim to develop a safety culture in Victoria where it is acknowledged that the majority of people on the road behave in a safe manner. Under *Towards Zero*, road safety is a shared responsibility rather than the traditional 'blame the victim' approach where road users are assumed to be at fault or made to bear the majority of the responsibility in the event of a crash. Media reports will often note that alcohol, drugs or speed were thought to be involved but how often are issues such as the lack of barriers or a 2 star car was a major reason for a crash reported? In future, public education and media communications will tonally be quite different, with more emphasis on positive outcomes and on a range of issues that show that all parts of the road system have a part to play.

For example, instead of reporting the number of people Police caught transgressing in an operation, the report can instead focus on the number of people that behaved safely. This will normalize the positive behaviors in the community, rather than highlight the transgressions of a few and this will help develop a culture where safety is the norm rather than the exception.

Another example is when key spokes people are interviewed about a crash. Instead of speculating what road user behavior (such as speeding, drink driving, mobile phone use etc.) could be a causal factor, they can also comment on how the safety of the vehicle or the road could have played a part in either contributing to the death or injury or how if the driver was in a safer car or if there were barriers on the sides of the road, the tragedy could have prevented.

The first of the TAC's *Towards Zero* public education campaigns signals the change to this new approach in engaging with the community.

Towards Zero Public Education Campaign

The launch of *Towards Zero* will be a phased campaign designed to introduce the community to the key *Towards Zero* principles of mistakes and human vulnerability, and to understand how safe roads, safe cars, safe speeds and safe people interact to reduce road trauma. This campaign is about providing key information and encouraging the community to go to the *Towards Zero* website to find out more detailed information.

Naming the vision

The vision of achieving zero deaths and serious injuries is referred to around the world by a number of different names such as Vision Zero (Sweden), Sustainable Safety (The Netherlands) and the Safe System approach (Australia). In deciding on a name that would best engage the community, research indicated that *Towards Zero* would best serve this purpose (Kerryn Alexander Research, 2014). Generally, the community does not consider zero road trauma to be achievable. 'Towards Zero' was embraced in research because it conveyed an achievable goal, and more importantly was not immediately rejected. For example:

Towards Zero, I think it acknowledges it's a journey and it's not a tomorrow thing but we're on the path. (Melbourne CBD) - (Kerryn Alexander Research, 2014).

Phase 1 – The Ethical Approach

At the heart of *Towards Zero* is the belief that no one should be killed or seriously injured when using the road system. In focus group research, most participants agreed with this principle but, road trauma does not appear a top of mind issue for most people and the

community's awareness of how many people are killed each year was low. There was also a consistent view that Victoria's reduction in the number of road deaths is a good achievement and if we can halve that number again or continually improve, that would be an acceptable goal (Kerryn Alexander Research, 2014). Only a small number of people indicated zero should or could be the goal.

Therefore, the aim of the first phase of the *Towards Zero* campaign is to put the ethical principle of no one should be killed on the road on the community's agenda. Phase one communication will personalise the issue of road trauma and help the community to understand and agree why zero is the only acceptable goal to aim for. The concept is centred around the idea that no one wants their family to be killed on the roads. We want the community to recognise that everyone that is killed is someone's family and there is no one someone won't miss, if they are gone. Therefore the only acceptable road trauma goal is zero.

Phase 2(a) - Why we need to build a safe road system and how do we do it?

People are fallible. Everyone will make a mistake at some point, whether it is on or off the road and whether they are aware of it or not. However, people should not die or become seriously injured on the roads because they made a mistake. There are over 4 million drivers on Victoria's roads – to expect every driver to not make a single mistake every time they drive is unrealistic.

However, currently, zero road deaths is not considered achievable by the community, with the key reasons being that human error is inevitable and that accidents are unavoidable (Kerryn Alexander Research, 2014; Ipsos, 2014). As mistakes is a key barrier, the campaign needs to acknowledge that people will always mistakes, and that a part of *Towards Zero* is about building a system that can accommodate people's mistakes, which if done successfully, will ultimately help us get to zero.

As the logical question that could be raised following Phase 1 communications is how zero road deaths can be achieved, Phase 2(a) aims to:

- share with the community what a safe road system can look like
- help the community understand that people will inevitably make mistakes when driving
- help the community understand how through building a safe road system, we can protect people when mistakes do occur.

The central idea for Phase 2(a) is 'Then and Now'. In 1970, Victoria recorded its highest number of road deaths. However, 40 plus years on, despite the growth in population and vehicles, Victoria has now managed to reduce the number of road deaths to approximately 250 a year. By looking back at historical trends and what has been achieved, the aim is to demonstrate to the community that Victoria can continue to do better, until the goal of zero is

reached and the way forward is to build a safe road system involving safe roads, safe vehicles, safe speed and safe people, which can accommodate people's mistakes.

Phase 2(b) – Human Vulnerability

Humans are inherently vulnerable. There is only so much force bodies can withstand before they start to break, with death and serious injuries as a certain outcome. The unprotected human body can only withstand external forces up to the equivalent of 30km/h before the risk of death significantly increases. Focus group results indicate that community awareness of human vulnerability at different impact speeds and scenarios vary widely (Kerryn Alexander Research, 2014; Luma, 2015; Kerryn Alexander Research, 2015)

Humans are the centrepiece of *Towards Zero* and every action taken under the areas of safe vehicles, safe speeds, safe people and safe roads is about protecting the vulnerable human and the mistakes they make. Most initiatives to be implemented under *Towards Zero* will be based on the human vulnerability and tolerance principle. The community, therefore, needs to know about and understand this principle in order for them to appreciate and accept why certain measures need to be put in place to help further reduce deaths and serious injuries.

Phase 2(b) will be communication about human vulnerability and aims to increase awareness and understanding of how the human body can only withstand external forces up to the equivalent of 30km/h before the risk of death significantly increases. This piece of communication will then complete the picture of why we need to build a safe road system.

Sponsorship and PR

A key avenue through which the TAC engages with the community about road safety issues is via the use of sponsorships with sporting clubs and a range of other community partners. For example, Melbourne Victory Football Club and the TAC have been in partnership since 2005 and the club has assisted the TAC in promoting a range of road safety messages. Melbourne Victory has been an early adopter of the *Towards Zero* messaging – starting to promote it in their 2014-2015 season. A recent survey of Melbourne Victory supporters revealed a high awareness rate of *Towards Zero* and zero deaths and serious injuries messages (EY Sweeney, 2015), indicating sponsorship is one avenue to raising awareness of *Towards Zero*.

As TAC moves to further implement *Towards Zero* projects and engage with the community on the *Towards Zero* messages, sponsorship and supporting PR activities will play a vital role and the tone and method will be consistent with the TAC's new communication approach.

Conclusion

The *Towards Zero* campaign signals a change in approach to the TAC's communication and engagement with the community. The Victorian community will, for the first time, be presented with a systems approach to trauma reduction and be privy to information that helps guide and shape Victoria's wider approach to road safety. As road safety is a shared responsibility between everyone in the community, the new *Towards Zero* campaign will be the first step to sharing and engaging the community in the vision of zero road deaths and serious injuries and for them to join us in the journey *Towards Zero*.

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