

Adding trains and trams to Safety Town: A government and not-for-profit road/rail education partnership leading the way in NSW

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Abstract

One third of pedestrians hospitalised due to serious injuries at level crossings each year in Australia are young people (Henley & Harrison, 2017), and heavy and light rail infrastructure investments are increasing across NSW. The TrackSAFE Foundation (TrackSAFE) identified opportunities to integrate rail safety education content into the existing evidence-informed road safety education resource 'Safety Town', funded by Transport for NSW (TfNSW) and widely used by schools across NSW. Through a comprehensive program review process, new content was added to help primary students learn about pedestrian and passenger safety near trains, trams, platforms and tracks.

Background

Road safety education is well established and supported in NSW schools through the NSW Joint Planning Committee, Road Safety Education, which includes representatives from the NSW Department of Education, Association of Independent Schools NSW, Catholic Schools NSW, and Kids and Traffic Early Childhood Road Safety Education Program (TfNSW, n.d.). The committee supports the teaching of road safety to students by classroom teachers, and authorises the content included in the curriculum-based programs and resources funded by the Centre for Road Safety, Transport for NSW including 'Safety Town' (TfNSW, n.d.). Safety Town is a road safety education resource for teachers, students and families, including a variety of learning activities for students from Kindergarten to Year Six (TfNSW, n.d.).

TrackSAFE identified an opportunity to strengthen the existing resources, approached the committee and gained approval to develop content to help children learn knowledge and skills about rail safety. Australia wide, 34 percent of the 133 pedestrians hospitalised due to serious injuries at level crossings each year are young people (Henley & Harrison, 2017). In NSW, with more than 9,500 km of track; 3800 level crossings; thousands of students commuting to school via rail each day; and the new Sydney CBD and South East Light Rail project due for completion in 2019, rail safety education is becoming increasingly important to students and teachers in all areas of the state.

While TrackSAFE runs TrackSAFE Education, a stand-alone rail safety education program (TrackSAFE, n.d.), it recognised an opportunity for a new landscape for rail safety education through the development of partnerships with evidence informed road safety education programs. Road safety is taught in NSW schools as a compulsory part of the Personal Development, Health and Physical Education (PDHPE) syllabus from Kindergarten to Year 10 (Neagle & Fegan, 2017), and as such integrating rail safety content into a program teachers already widely use has the potential to increase students' knowledge about safety near trains, trams and tracks in NSW.

Rail safety content additions

The Safety Town resources were reviewed, and TrackSAFE suggested new content or additions to existing content, for example pedestrian safety near trams, trains, tracks, on platforms and at level crossings; and passenger safety on trains and trams. All content was designed in the spirit and tone of the original resources aligning with the underpinning values of the program as well as the K-6 Syllabus outcomes for PDHPE (NSW Government, 2014). A pilot was not carried out as both the Safety Town and TrackSAFE Education resources are already used in the classroom extensively. New content can be viewed at safetytown.com.au.

Discussion

This collaborative partnership between TrackSAFE and TfNSW has fortified the transport safety education experience for NSW primary school students, in an environment where multiple transport modes are increasingly popular for point-to-point trips and active transport is encouraged for health. The changes to the Safety Town resources have the potential to increase the knowledge of NSW primary students in how to stay safe as a pedestrian or passenger around trains, trams and tracks.

References

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