

Changing Direction... Picking up the Pace A Review of Community Road Safety in Western Australia

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Biography

Terri-Anne has a background in nursing, the hospitality industry and small business.

In 1997 she completed a science degree (majoring in health promotion) at Curtin University, then gaining research experience in a position at the Centre for Health Promotion Research. She has since commenced post graduate studies in Applied Epidemiology.

Terri-Anne joined the WA Local Government Association in 1998 and spent four years working with the communities of the Mid West Region as the Regional Road Safety Officer before transferring to Perth in 2001 to take up the role of research and evaluation officer. Currently Terri-Anne is the Program Manager for RoadWise, the Local Government and Community Road Safety Program in WA.

Abstract

RoadWise was established in Western Australia in 1994 as the Local Government Road Safety Strategy and has operated within a community development model to facilitate community participation in road safety.

In 2002, coinciding with a review of the draft WA Road Safety Strategy, the Western Australian Local Government Association initiated the establishment of a Taskforce to review the roles and relationships of RoadWise.

This review process has resulted in a shift from community development to a community organization model. Associated with the rationalization of strategies and approaches to implementing road safety at the community level is a change and clarification of the structural, reporting and advisory links between RoadWise, the Local Government and Community Road Safety Program and other road safety stakeholder agencies in WA.

This paper provides an overview of the findings and recommendations of the Taskforce, subsequently endorsed and adopted. It outlines the significant change in strategic and operational direction, and explores the challenges and opportunities experienced or envisaged as a result of this review of the community road safety program in WA.

1. BACKGROUND – THE WAY WE WERE

In 1994, the then Western Australian Municipal Association (WAMA) launched RoadWise, as The Local Government Road Safety Strategy.

Through the establishment of local road safety committees, fostered by Local Government and in a partnership with the community, the aim was to develop and implement local road safety strategies based on ten key areas (Western Australian Municipal Association 1993):

- Community participation and education,
- Road and transport planning,
- Pedestrians,

- Cyclists
- Work zone safety
- Road safety audit and accident investigation
- Enforcement, alcohol and fatigue
- Road trauma management, and
- Funding

The Local Government Road Safety Council was established as the management group to oversee the operations of RoadWise. At that time state coordination of road safety efforts was undertaken by the Traffic Board of WA, with varying degrees of direct stakeholder agency involvement in implementation at a regional and local level. Coordination and collaboration at the local level was enabled and enhanced through the establishment of local RoadWise Committees.

According to an independent evaluation this approach was effective in gaining Local Government support and community participation. Recommendations from that evaluation supported the expansion of the program by establishing a team of Regional Road Safety Officers. (Western Australian Municipal Association 1997)

So from humble beginnings, one dedicated and visionary Road Safety Community Development Officer and funding provided for a one-year trial-period, RoadWise has expanded since then to include 70 RoadWise Committees across the state, now serviced by ten Regional Road Safety Officers together with a management and support team all employed by the Western Australian Local Government Association (which replaced WAMA in 2001).

During this period the program operated from a community development approach allowing road safety activity to be guided by locally identified road safety issues - local solutions for local problems. Strategies were developed and tailored, based on local knowledge, to meet expressed needs and perceived road safety priorities, aligned to the key areas of the Local Government Road Safety Strategy.

In the late nineties the Road Safety Council (which replaced the Traffic Board in 1997) adopted regional road safety strategies, priorities were determined through community consultation in each region. This resulted in practitioners implementing a range of strategies with differing priority issues - a state road safety strategy, ten regional road safety strategies and potentially 144 local road safety strategies (there being 144 Local Governments in Western Australia).

2. THE REVIEW - ROADWISE ROLES AND RELATIONSHIPS TASKFORCE

Nearly a decade on it became evident that road safety structures and frameworks had evolved sufficiently to generate a certain lack of clarity in regard to the reporting and advisory responsibilities of RoadWise. In particular, the relationships between the WA Local Government Association (Association), the RoadWise Program, the Local Government Road Safety Council and the Road Safety Council of WA.

The Western Australian Local Government Association replaced the WA Municipal Association, when launched in December 2001 as the single, united voice of Local Governments in Western Australia. The Association represents the political interests of Local Government at state and federal levels, provides a suite of value-adding services and facilitates communication and information exchanges between member Councils. Given that Local Government is a major road safety stakeholder (with responsibility for more than 80% of the road network in WA), the Association aims to work in partnership with the Road Safety Council, through RoadWise, to encourage and support the involvement of Local

Governments and the community in activities that compliment and enhance the priorities agreed by the Road Safety Council to reduce the level of road trauma occurring in WA.

In 2002, the Association established a Taskforce that sought to review, clarify and re-define the various current roles, responsibilities and interrelationships (funding and reporting) between the Association's RoadWise Program, the Road Safety Council and the then Local Government Road Safety Council. The terms of reference for the Taskforce were subsequently expanded to include reviewing the administration of the Community Road Safety Grants Program with a view to developing a new funding model.

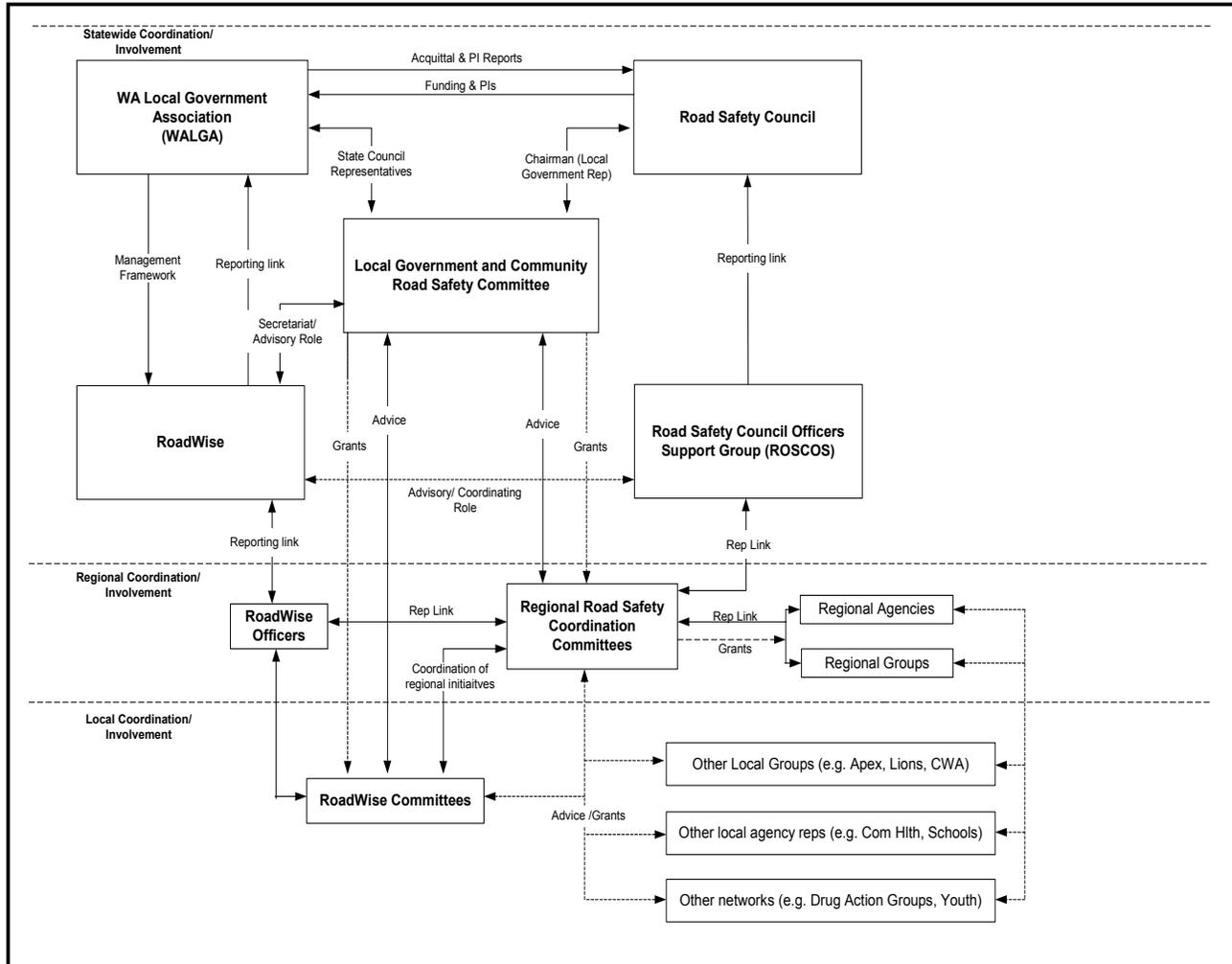
The Taskforce comprised a membership including representatives of the WA Local Government Association (elected members and officers), the Road Safety Council of WA, and staff of the RoadWise Program, and met throughout 2002 to progress and resolve the issues. In April 2003 the recommendations of the Taskforce were endorsed by the Association's State Council and have been adopted into practice since then (WA Local Government Association 2003).

In summary the recommendations of the Taskforce were as follows:

- That the Local Government Road Safety Council become the Local Government and Community Road Safety Committee (to better reflect the goal of engaging the community in road safety); revised membership (for contemporary relevance); redefined role (to oversee the Community Road Safety Grants Program and to act as a conduit for providing advice on community involvement in road safety);
- The RoadWise Program to be managed within the framework of the Association through the Transport and Roads Unit of the Policy Division;
- Interrelationships - clarifying representational, advisory and reporting linkages to be recognized as depicted in the Framework (see Figure 1) and described in the explanatory notes.

Figure 1 represents the Associations reporting and advisory links and relationships and forms the structural framework for consultation, coordination and collaborative efforts.

Figure 1. Reporting, Advisory and Funding Framework of the Local Government and Community Road Safety Program WA



Explanatory Notes:

- RoadWise Committees and Regional Road Safety Coordination Committees can submit funding applications for the Community Road Safety Grants Program to the Local Government and Community Road Safety Committee.
- The Local Government and Community Road Safety Committee has a two-way advisory relationship with the RoadWise Committees and the Regional Road Safety Coordination Committees.
- Regional Road Safety Coordination Committees, RoadWise Officers and local RoadWise Committees have a two-way relationship focused on coordination of local and regional initiatives.
- Local Groups, agencies and networks can utilize either a RoadWise Committee, RoadWise Officer or the Regional Road Safety Coordination Committee to make applications for funding through the Local Government and Community Road Safety Committee.

3. THE STRATEGY – CHANGING DIRECTION

The development of this structural framework by the Association's Taskforce coincided with a revision of the State's road safety strategies. The Road Safety Council undertook this review in response to the plateau in Western Australia's road toll, experienced since the mid nineties. As a result the draft WA Road Safety Strategy 2003-2007 (Road Safety Council 2002) was formulated in recognition of the need to refocus, and provide clear direction for a targeted and collaborative approach to achieve reductions in road crashes equivalent to the best in Australia.

The implication for practitioners meant a departure from the myriad of regional and local road safety strategies based on community expectations; to the implementation of a single, focused strategy, based on evidence of where the greatest gains in road safety could be achieved.

As a consequence of the diminished relevance of individual regional and local road safety strategies, RoadWise assumed a new functional identity as The Local Government and Community Road Safety Program, to more appropriately reflect the changes involved with operational objectives in combination with the revised framework as determined by the Roles and Relationships Taskforce. The Association, in its aim to work in partnership with the Road Safety Council, sought to realign the strategic and operational focus of the RoadWise Program to encourage and support greater community involvement at local and regional levels, in road safety activities which compliment and enhance the priorities agreed by the Road Safety Council.

Community involvement or participation is regarded as an important element in influencing and reinforcing social beliefs and norms, in turn impacting on behaviour patterns within a community (in this case – road user behaviour) (McKenzie-Mohr, 1999). To motivate, involve and engage the community in road safety requires the ability to recognize and select an appropriate (most likely to succeed) model, which is most relevant to the dynamics and nature of a particular community. (O'Connor-Fleming and Parker, 1995)

Consideration of these factors has necessitated a fundamental shift from the traditional community development approach to that of a community organization model which is more guided or directed (in terms of identifying road safety priorities). This is where, according to Egger, Spark and Lawson (1990, p. 87), community development approaches involve relatively more local control and decision making, thus, potentially presenting some challenges within the well established RoadWise network.

However this approach also offers opportunities and has been adopted by the RoadWise Program to re-orientate and rationalize efforts, providing clear objectives and boundaries for the development of action plans to guide the implementation of specific relevant strategies within the broad framework of the draft WA Road Safety Strategy. The emphasis will be to build capacity within communities at a pace suitable (and sustainable) to local conditions.

4. A FOCUSED APPROACH – PICKING UP THE PACE

With the realignment of strategic and operational plans to focus on priority areas, the RoadWise Program aims to contribute to the long-term vision of the Road Safety Council in eliminating road crashes as a major cause of premature death and injury

in Western Australia, by increasing community support and participation in the implementation of the draft WA Road Safety Strategy.

The following program goals and targets are designed to guide and focus RoadWise operations in contributing to achievement of the Strategy goal – to reduce the number of fatalities per 100,000 population to a level equivalent to the best in Australia (Road Safety Council 2002, p 1).

- To facilitate the establishment and support the ongoing function of local road safety committees and network of individuals and groups involved in road safety – 62% (90) of Local Government Areas by 2007.
- To increase community awareness of the road safety priorities of the State Road Safety Strategy – by 40% by 2007.
- To facilitate the development, endorsement and implementation of local road safety action plans which compliment draft WA Road Safety Strategy priorities – 80% of RoadWise Committees by 2007.
- To increase community involvement in road safety (number of people involved, number of projects implemented, level of community support) - by 10% by 2007.
- To promote and support the role and responsibility of Local Government, in partnership with State Government Agencies, in the implementation of the draft WA Road Safety Strategy 2003-2007.

Whilst RoadWise relies on community organisation approaches to involve and engage the community in road safety (structural intervention), RoadWise activities focus on identifying appropriate countermeasures and where applicable combinations of strategies including: enforcement, engineering, education, encouragement and evaluation. Activities are planned in consideration of predisposing, enabling and reinforcing factors (behavioural and environmental interventions) (Green and Kreuter 1991).

RoadWise Committees – provide a structure which offers a regular forum for the ongoing consideration and discussion of road safety issues and a mechanism for planning, implementing and evaluating community-based social marketing activities. Together these structural and behavioural interventions are likely to contribute to the growth of social norms which will positively impact on community and individual attitudes to road safety behaviour, influence local decision-making and support the core business of local and regional road safety stakeholders.

The goals and targets identified are specific to the functions of the Local Government and Community Road Safety Program and are aligned to the role of the RoadWise Program in contributing to the following desired outcomes and priority areas/issues of the draft WA Road Safety Strategy at the regional and local levels:

Ensuring effective implementation:

- Strengthened community support
- Increased community participation
- Focused road safety efforts
- Improved inter-agency collaboration and coordination

Enhanced public education and increased promotion and advocacy:

- Reducing speeding
- Reducing travel speeds
- Improving the safety of roads

- Increasing restraint use
- Countering drink driving
- Improving the effectiveness of enforcement
- Protecting vehicle occupants
- Planning a safer system, and
- Safer modes of travel

5. THE IMPLEMENTATION – PUTTING IT INTO PRACTICE

Officers of the RoadWise Program have established an extensive network of local road safety committees, including representatives (local and regional) from member agencies of the Road Safety Council along with community groups and individuals with an interest in road safety. In addition to servicing these committees, RoadWise Officers based in the metropolitan and regional areas of WA have formed and continue to build relationships with many groups and individuals and regularly provide advice, support and assistance to Local Governments, other government and non-government agencies/organizations to facilitate effective working partnerships.

The RoadWise Program is primarily funded via the Road Trauma Trust Fund (one third of red light and speed camera fines) administered by the Road Safety Council. This funding supports the program's main aim of establishing and servicing the community road safety network. Additional resources have also been allocated to increase the pool of funds available to enable and support the implementation of community-based road safety projects through the Community Road Safety Grants Program. In recognition of local priorities, this program also makes funding available to Regional Road Safety Officers to support local communities developing small projects aimed at addressing local road safety issues, outside the scope of the draft WA Road Safety Strategy.

While both opportunities and challenges are envisaged for community road safety as a result of the new structural, functional and funding framework, the results of the first six months (see sample below) show positive trends in terms of realigning community-based road safety activities with the priorities of the draft WA Road Safety Strategy. With performance measured against priority areas, the Program is already exceeding targets on most indicators.

- The proportion of RoadWise Committees that are aware of the draft WA Road Safety Strategy – 91% (target 80%).
- The percentage of RoadWise Committees with Local Action Plans that are aligned to the draft WA Road Safety Strategy – 54% (target 40%).
- The proportion of RoadWise facilitated projects that identify and adopt the draft WA Road Safety Strategy – 64% (target 80%).
- The proportion of Community Road Safety Grant submissions received, that reflect the draft WA Road Safety Strategy – 83% (target 80%).
- The proportion of projects implemented in conjunction with State Campaigns for Speed, Drink Driving, Seatbelts and Fatigue – 52% (target 70%).

In all cases those indicators which are under-target are related to local and regional variation, needs and conditions, for example where Driver Reviver sites operate during school holiday periods which fall outside the State Campaign targeting driver fatigue.

6. CONCLUSION

As the result of a vision, exceptional leadership and innovation, an extraordinary team and a large number of dedicated volunteers the RoadWise concept has spread and been shared.

In light of the structural and functional changes that have occurred and the review of strategies, the time has come for RoadWise, as the Local Government and Community Road Safety Program to consolidate the achievements, strengthen the network and focus it's objectives. To accept the challenges and grasp the opportunities, in building capacity within the community to recognize evidence based priorities and develop skills in delivering effective measures.

Changing direction with a new strategy and picking up the pace with a focused approach to guide community-based efforts that contribute to improving road safety in Western Australia.

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Keywords

road safety, community, Local Government, community development