

**Police....Partners....Progress in Road Safety**  
The Central Coast Experience

**NAME OF AUTHORS**

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**ABSTRACT**

Road safety has always been a priority for Gosford City and Wyong Shire Councils and the local Police. Over the past few years, the partnership between local government and the local Police has grown, particularly in the field of road safety. Road Safety Officers (RSOs) have strengthened their partnership with the local Police, to form a road safety team, which addresses all road safety issues on the Central Coast.

Experience and research shows that education can enhance the credibility of enforcement activity, by improving the understanding of its need and purpose. Enforcement initiatives and local government road safety initiatives focus on similar issues. These similar issues being speed, alcohol, seatbelts, and helmet wearing.

The Central Coast RSOs have adopted a consultative approach when collaborating with the local Police. This paper will explore some of the challenges that we have experienced in implementing and maintaining the commitment, from both local government and the Police (Highway Patrol).

We believe that the Central Coast has developed a model for strengthening partnerships. The key factor in strengthening this partnership, has been the support from Local Area Commands - Commanders (Brisbane Water and Tuggerah Lakes) and the North Metro Police Region. This has greatly benefited the day to day relationship between the Police Officers and the RSOs. Regular communication is another key factor in maintaining a successful working team environment, along with having a healthy respect for the other party's work agenda and responsibilities, which may lie outside road safety.

This paper will demonstrate how effective communication between RSOs and the Police can produce a broad, well-rounded and successful road safety plan, with the plan then progressing to successful joint local road safety programs.

There is unlimited potential for a collaborative working team and this paper will report on the success that can be achieved when people with vision and initiative are empowered to do whatever it takes to make it happen.

**BACKGROUND**

The City of Gosford covers an area of 1,028sq.kms. In 1998 the City had a population of 155 144 (ABS), which is steadily increasing every year.

The Shire of Wyong covers an area of 827 sq.kms and forms the northern portion of the Central Coast Region of New South Wales (NSW). In 1998 the Shire had a population of 125 929 which is also steadily increasing.

The Central Coast has beaches, mountains, and waterways with a mixture of country and city impressions. The attractive physical environment of both the Gosford and Wyong Local Government Areas (LGA) and their close proximity to the major cities of Sydney and Newcastle, have resulted in the Central Coast area becoming an important business, residential and tourist centre.

More than 50 000 people commute daily from the Central Coast to Sydney and road and rail transport corridors are nearing capacity during peak travel times.

Both the Brisbane Water and Tuggerah Lakes Local Area Commands (LACs) are part of the North Metropolitan Sydney Police Region, yet both Central Coast Councils (Gosford & Wyong) make up part of the Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA), Hunter Region.

The Road Safety Officer (RSO) positions have been in place at Gosford and Wyong Councils since mid to late 1995. Communication networks were developed between the Highway Patrol Police and RSOs, at that time and

together have extended the involvement of the Highway Patrol in Council projects (Police were already involved with Council activities such as Traffic Committee and Traffic Management roles).

Our main road safety issues are:

- ☞☞ Speed
- ☞☞ Drink driving
- ☞☞ Driver fatigue
- ☞☞ Non-use of occupant restraints

The following table highlights the issues of speed, drink driving and fatigue for the Central Coast.

Table 1: Number of casualties from alcohol / speed / fatigue involved accidents in 1999

Casualties (Killed & injured)	Alcohol	Speed	Fatigue
GOSFORD LGA	46	176	59
WYONG LGA	41	91	37
CENTRAL COAST	87	267	96
<b>Killed</b>			
CENTRAL COAST	WLGA: 3 GLGA: unknown	13	2

**Source:** RS & RUM RTA NSW Provisional Road Safety Traffic Accident Database 1999 (Gosford and Wyong LGAs only).

Due to the Central Coast being a popular tourist destination we find that there are two (2) target groups in any road safety activity undertaken:

1. Locals
2. Non-locals (tourists/weekenders)

This paper highlights the need to provide an evolving model of effective and successful collaboration processes between Police and Road Safety Officers.

### **STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED TO CREATE EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION**

Three years ago the Police and the Road Safety Officers on the Central Coast decided to formalise and structure their communication pathways. As a result of this decision the following strategies have been developed:

- ☞☞ Regular meetings occur every six (6) weeks, under the name of 'Central Coast Road Safety Group'. This group also includes representatives from the RTA and the local Area Health Service.
- ☞☞ A Central Coast Road Safety Action Plan has been developed by the 'group'. This plan has proven to be very beneficial for all organisations.

These strategic processes have enabled the Road Safety Officers (RSOs) to maintain and implement the commitment, from both local government and the Police (Highway Patrol). As a result, State and local Police Operations are acknowledged in advance and RSOs are then able to plan their educational / promotional programs in line with the Police. This strategic planning has had many positive road safety benefits which gives credibility to joint initiatives.

## **CHALLENGES FACED IN MAINTAINING COMMITMENT – LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND POLICE**

Commitment is an integral component of the working partnership, however an important process is to recognise and respect each organisation's roles, responsibilities and demands.

Some of these include:

### **Highway Patrol (HWP)**

- ✂✂ HWP called out to other Police jobs / duties
- ✂✂ Understaffed and unable to attend scheduled meetings
- ✂✂ Shift work
- ✂✂ Change of staff / positions
- ✂✂ Paper work demands
- ✂✂ Budget constraints
- ✂✂ Timeframe allocations

### **Local Government – Road Safety Officer Program**

- ✂✂ Change of staff
- ✂✂ Juggling demands from Council and other agencies
- ✂✂ Paper work
- ✂✂ Gaining Authorisation for certain projects
- ✂✂ Budget constraints
- ✂✂ Timeframe allocations
- ✂✂ Funding approval delays

Both Gosford and Wyong Councils, along with the Highway Patrol Police from both LACs have always been 100% supportive of the role of the Road Safety Officer. In particular the HWP have made a commitment to assist and work in partnership with the RSOs.

## **SUCCESS CAN BE ACHIEVED THROUGH WORKING COLLABORATIVELY**

The most effective and enduring partnerships are between organisations that have common goals, shared interest and concerns and compatible structures.

Below are some steps, which have assisted and enhanced our partnership:

- ✂✂ Establish a relationship which is suitable to achieve the desired goals in road safety at the 'grass roots level'
- ✂✂ Recognise each others core business and respect their need to attend to this
- ✂✂ Develop a shared understanding of the road safety problems being addressed
- ✂✂ Delineate roles, responsibilities and commitment of resources
- ✂✂ Agree upon the rules of operating together (meeting times, minutes etc)

### **Features of our successful and effective partnership**

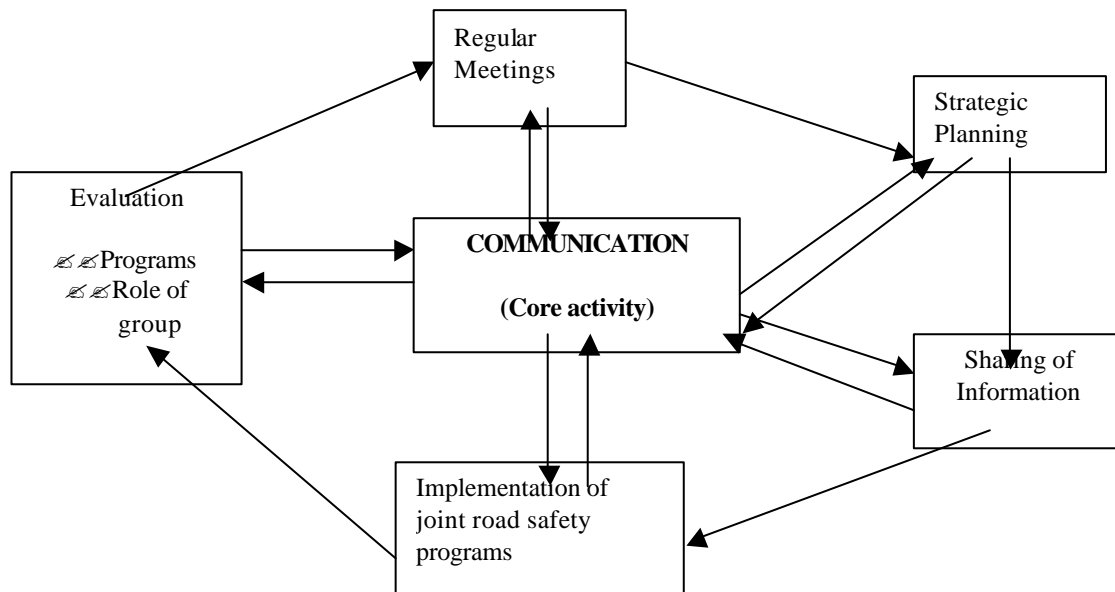
- ✂✂ Joint shared vision
- ✂✂ Collective responsibility for managing problems
- ✂✂ Negotiation of actions
- ✂✂ Joint ownership of decisions
- ✂✂ Information sharing
- ✂✂ Effective resource management
- ✂✂ Time frame agreement
- ✂✂ Ability to mediate between bureaucratic interests and community concerns
- ✂✂ Initiatives are assessed against the joint action plan
- ✂✂ Development of strategic links
- ✂✂ Implementation of strategies collaboratively

## EXAMPLES OF JOINT ROAD SAFETY PROJECTS UNDERTAKEN ON THE CENTRAL COAST

Building and strengthening this partnership was integral to the success of the following joint local road safety programs:

- ☞☞ ‘Drinks Without Dramas’ – A designated driver program
- ☞☞ RBT Operations – Coast line / Shoreline
- ☞☞ Courtesy Speed Checks – a local residential speed awareness program
- ☞☞ Back to School initiatives
- ☞☞ Stay Safe over the Christmas Break – holiday road safety program
- ☞☞ Night Owl Bus (Gosford LGA only) – alternative transport program
- ☞☞ Joint media opportunities / activities

## CENTRAL COAST MODEL FOR STRENGTHENING OUR PARTNERSHIP



## CONCLUSION

Benefits of a partnership provide the framework to enable road safety best practice to be sustained within the local community.

It is vital to continue to plan, to make and maintain valuable working partnerships with the Police, in order to maximise the joint actions, which can be undertaken to promote road safety. Through a partnership approach any barriers between Police and RSOs can be dissolved.

Achieving a sustainable partnership can prove to be a difficult task, however an important collaborative partnership between the Police and RSOs on the Central Coast had been established and maintained, in working towards reducing injury and fatalities on our roads.

**Although Police... Partners...Progress in road safety on the Central Coast has occurred - “One Size Does Not Fit All”  
*but it’s a starting point***