

The Darebin Safe Travel Strategy 2010-2015 - a new approach to road safety

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Abstract

Introduction: The *Darebin Safe Travel Strategy* is Darebin Council's five year plan to make the City of Darebin a safer place to live and travel around for all residents and visitors. The *Darebin Safe Travel Strategy* adopts an innovative approach to safe travel by seeking to protect the most vulnerable road users - pedestrians and cyclists.

The *Darebin Safe Travel Strategy* is based on a vulnerability/impact spectrum of travel modes which assigns responsibility for safe travel in a non-traditional fashion; ensuring behaviour of people using high-impact travel modes protects those people using vulnerable modes.

Methods: Steering group of key stakeholders, community consultation, analysis of local crash statistics, international best practice benchmarking.

Results: Darebin's *Safe Travel Strategy* was adopted by Darebin Council in November 2010, and praise by the community upon its launch. It leads the sector by example and commits Darebin City Council to a modern approach to protecting vulnerable road users. The strategy has engaged all key stakeholders to ensure successful delivery.

Conclusions: Reducing the volume and speed of vehicles is essential to lowering the number and severity of crashes and injuries caused to road users. The *Darebin Safe Travel Strategy* places the onus of road safety on those with the highest negative impact on safe travel to protect those most vulnerable in the transport system. This will be done through reducing vehicle trips, reducing vehicle speeds, and encouraging safer driving through a combination of encouragement, education, enforcement, and infrastructure.

Keywords

Behaviour Change, Vulnerable Road Users, Sustainable Transport, Pedestrian Priority, Safe Speeds

Introduction

The *Darebin Safe Travel Strategy* ('the *Strategy*') is Darebin Council's five year plan to make the City of Darebin a safer place to live and travel around for all residents and visitors.

The *Strategy* has moved beyond traditional road safety to a more inclusive concept of safe travel and adopts an innovative approach to safe travel by seeking to protect the most vulnerable road users - pedestrians and cyclists. The *Strategy* consists of actions that encourage residents to adopt these safer and more sustainable modes.

The approach of the *Strategy* of looking at high impact and vulnerable road users is new in Australia and is based on a model from the Dutch National Road Safety Research Institute - a world leading scientific research institute on road safety.

The *Strategy* utilises this new approach to road safety in Victoria and Australia while fitting in with Local, State, and National road safety policies and strategies.

The *Strategy* contains a vulnerability/impact spectrum of travel modes and assigns responsibility for safe travel in a non-traditional fashion; ensuring behaviour of people using high-impact travel modes does not endanger those people using vulnerable modes.

The *Strategy* puts the onus of road safety on those who have the highest impact on road safety to behave more safely, for the benefit of more vulnerable modes of travel as well and the drivers themselves. The *Strategy* also seeks to reduce vehicle trips and switch to lower impact, safer, and more sustainable modes of travel.

Residents using lower impact modes need to be safe from high impact road users. The many benefits of protecting and promoting low impact modes encompass social, environmental, and economic issues.

Reducing the speed and volume of vehicles on the road is outlined in the *Strategy* as the most effective way of improving safety on our roads as well as the liveability of the municipality. This will be accomplished through the four E's: encouragement, education, and enforcement to change road user behaviour, as well as engineering.

The development of the *Strategy* was a highly collaborative effort and was re-shaped to incorporate feedback resulting from consultation with the local community and key stakeholders. The final result is a concise, easy to read, and clear strategy that adopts a new approach to road safety in Australia.

The *Strategy* will lead to better outcomes for the safety and sustainability for all people who live, work, study and play in the City of Darebin.

Methods

The *Darebin Safe Travel Strategy* has been developed using a highly consultative process and provides many positive opportunities to increase safe travel initiatives across groups from early years, youth, the CALD community, schools, families, and aged & disability groups.

A steering group consisting of representatives from the key stakeholders was established to oversee the development of the *Strategy*. Road safety expertise was outsourced and informed the technical aspects of the *Strategy's* development.

A community road safety forum was held and feedback obtained through this process was fed back into the *Strategy* development.

During community consultation for the *Strategy*, many local community groups were consulted including the Darebin Local Safety Committee, East Reservoir Neighbourhood Renewal, the Darebin Ethnic Communities Council, Road Safe Inner Northern Community Road Safety Council, schools, and motorcycle groups.

Many individual residents and community groups also made submissions during the community consultation phase.

State agencies such as the Victoria Police, VicRoads, Bicycle Victoria, Victoria Walks, The Heart Foundation, neighbouring Councils, public transport providers, and local tertiary institutions were consulted and many provided submissions in support of the project.

The feedback from the community consultation was that the community wanted to see a *Strategy* that was much less technical, easier to read, and had a strong focus on pedestrians and vulnerable road users with a clear vision and practical approach.

After the community and stakeholder consultation, the *Strategy* was updated to accommodate the feedback that was provided.

Along with local crash statistics, police collision data, and journey to work data, international data including research was examined to determine road safety trends and gather information about perceptions of safety.

Local crash statistics, and the Department of Transport's VISTA (Victorian Integrated Survey of Travel and Activity) data for Darebin indicate that most crashes involve a motorised vehicle. Additionally, vulnerable road users suffer a disproportionately high rate of fatalities and casualties per kilometre travelled. This clearly demonstrates the need to prioritise the safety of pedestrians and cyclists.

The approach of the *Strategy* of looking at high impact and vulnerable road users is based on the best practise model from the Dutch National Road Safety Research Institute. According to this model, vulnerable road users have the following characteristics:

- A lack of external protection
- Limited task capabilities, especially in the case of the young and older people
- A lack of resilience in the event of a crash, and

- Are not themselves threatening to other road users.

The *Strategy* categorises pedestrians and cyclists as vulnerable road users as they are unprotected and travel at much slower speeds than other road users. They also have the lowest impact on the road safety of others.

Motorcyclists and drivers of powered two wheelers (PTWs) are in the mid range of vulnerability as they have a lack of external protection, but can impact the road safety of others due to the weight and speed of their vehicles.

Drivers and passengers in cars and trucks are the highest impact as they have external protection and have the highest impact on road safety due to their vehicle weight and the speed they can travel, making them a greater threat to other road users.

Contemporary road safety strategies are based on an application of the Safe System approach. This approach has the four elements; safer roads and road sides, safer vehicles, safer speeds, and safer users.

Darebin City Council considers it important that in the application of a Safe Systems approach, a proactive and responsible road safety strategy will increase the focus on road 'use' (speed and people) and not rely so heavily on road and vehicle 'design' (technology and infrastructure).

A focus on increasing the safety of 'roads' and 'vehicles,' will reduce the onus of road safety of high impact road users. Focussing on technological and infrastructural approaches fails to achieve external benefits of improving road safety – including liveability, environmental and health benefits. It is also an expensive and inequitable approach to road safety.

Results

The result of the *Darebin Safe Travel Strategy* development process was a concise and clear strategy with a succinct action plan and a clear impact and vulnerability spectrum. The *Strategy* clearly directs the efforts of Darebin City Councils' safe travel efforts for the next five years.

The *Strategy* identifies a vision:

To reduce the risk of injury on our roads and paths to a level where there are no fatalities, so that people of all ages and abilities are free to travel on the road and path network to their chosen destinations safely and with confidence.

The following four objectives are identified in the *Strategy*:

- Prioritise the safety of vulnerable road users
- Reduce the negative effect of high impact road users on safe travel
- Encourage more people to adopt sustainable modes of travel by improving infrastructure and amenity
- Engage key partners and stakeholders through effective communication

The *Strategy* was also identified existing opportunities and value for money actions: sixty percent of the actions focus on improving or augmenting existing Council operational and capital programs.

The *Strategy* benefits some of Darebin's most disadvantaged residents such as the young, elderly, unemployed, low income, disabled, and newly arrived populations who may not own or drive a car. The *Strategy* contains actions to prioritise their safety and improve infrastructure and amenity to provide a safe and high quality walking and cycling environment in the City of Darebin.

Darebin's *Safe Travel Strategy* was lauded by the community and adopted by Darebin Council in November 2010. It leads the sector by example and commits Darebin City Council to a modern approach to protecting vulnerable road users. The strategy has engaged all key stakeholders to ensure successful delivery.

Discussion

The development of the *Strategy* created our anticipation, that by innovating beyond traditional road safety approaches, the expectations of community and stakeholders may be challenged and possibly go unmet. Largely, however, our approach was met with praise and understanding.

A high level of partnering and community consultation ensured that community and other stakeholders understood and were comfortable with the concept of prioritising action around a spectrum of high impact and vulnerable road users.

Because almost everyone is a pedestrian at some point in their journey, the concept of protecting vulnerable road users from high impact road users came across as a very common sense approach and the *Strategy* has been taken on board by the entire community.

The *Darebin Safe Travel Strategy* addresses road safety issues for car drivers and contains many actions directed at protecting car drivers such as Council strengthening its focus on black spots and high crash sites.

Darebin will share findings and experience with Federal, State, and other Local government bodies to adopt a similar model that prioritises limiting the speed and volume of vehicles on the road as the simplest way to reduce the number and severity of crashes on Australian roads.

Almost everyone is a pedestrian at some point of their journey, with most vehicle and public transport trips beginning and ending with a walk. A high percentage of Darebin residents walk and take public transport and are three times more likely to cycle to work than the Melbourne average. These residents who are using lower impact modes and impacting positively on road safety need to be protected from high impact road users, so they can travel safely.

Conclusion

The *Darebin Safe Travel Strategy* places the onus of responsibility on those with the highest negative impact on safe travel to protect those most vulnerable in the transport system. This will

be done through reducing vehicle trips, reducing vehicle speeds, and encouraging safer driving through a combination of encouragement, education, enforcement, and infrastructure.

Encouraging people to walk and cycle through improving safety, convenience and amenity will reduce the number of cars on the road, reducing the potential for crashes and giving safety in numbers to the vulnerable road users.

Darebin's *Strategy* also benefits some of our most disadvantaged residents such as our young, elderly, unemployed, low income, disabled, and newly arrived populations who may not own or drive a car. The *Strategy* contains actions to prioritise their safety and improve infrastructure and amenity to provide a safe and high quality walking and cycling environment in the City of Darebin.

Recommendations

The recommendation from Darebin's *Safe Travel Strategy* is for a new approach in Australia, and for similar strategies to be adopted which are serious about protecting vulnerable road users by prioritising their needs above those of high impact road users (vehicle drivers).

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References

1. Victorian Government, VicRoads CrashStats Online, www.vicroads.vic.gov.au/crashstats [accessed 2010].
2. Department of Transport, 2007 Victorian Integrated Survey of Travel and Activity, www.transport.vic.gov.au/vista [accessed 2010].

Appendices

- A) The Darebin Safe Travel Strategy 2010-2015



B) Going Places- Darebin Transport Strategy 2007-2027



C) SWOV Fact Sheet- Vulnerable Road Users

