

## **Picture this – You're In A Traffic Jam. The use of imagery to influence road user behaviour**

Sonia Roberts

<sup>a</sup> Supervisor, Media Unit, Public Affairs Branch, NSW Police Force

### **Abstract**

Picture this, you are in a traffic jam and the queues are long – what would make you feel like you had more understanding of the situation? Would seeing livestreaming video or an image from the crash site increase your empathy for the first responders trying to do their job? In 2015, it was identified that one of greatest challenges facing road policing in Australia was the delays caused as an incident is resolved and the roadway is returned. Research examines if the use of imagery would improve road user understanding and attitude and how this may help first responders.

### **Setting the scene**

Picture this, you are in a traffic jam and the queues are long – what would make you feel like you had more understanding of the situation? Would seeing a video or image from the crash site increase your empathy for the first responders?

In 2015, it was identified that one of greatest challenges facing road policing in Australia was the delays caused as an incident is resolved and the roadway is returned. Through mainstream and social media it was identified that not knowing the reason for the delay as the greatest frustration of the public.

### **How are we getting there?:**

The survey was conducted via Survey Monkey and case studies of crashes where long delays occurred were also made.

### **Looks like we've all been there**

Approximately 96% of respondents had been caught in a traffic jam that was the result of an earlier crash. Thirty six per cent thought about the welfare of those involved before thoughts turned to how long they would be delayed.

Those who thought of delays casually or emotively counted for a combined 57% of respondents.

Eighty five percent relied on radio news and 32% on social media to find out the length of any delay. One third of first responders said they were verbally abused by motorists while trying to process a crash site.

### **Conclusions:**

Provided victim care has been addressed and suitable steps have been taken to protect the identity of the deceased or next of kin are notified, two thirds of survey respondents said they would be receptive to being shown a photo/video of the crash site.

Data shows the majority of respondents turned to radio bulletins before social media to determine the length of any delay. It is suggested social media posts need to target those who are yet to make their journey while commercial radio is to be used for those already on the road or caught in any delay.

Some mainstream commercial media outlets have prefaced updates of crashes by confirming the fatality and offering context to motorists.

For emergency services this would place a moderate demand on field personnel to ensure appropriate imagery was provided to organisational media teams. This would require supplementary training or over the phone briefing from media advisors. Effectiveness of any posts would be based on monitoring of mainstream and social media.

## **References**

S Roberts, 2015, Proceedings of the Australasian Road Safety Conference, "Road Policing – Telling It and Selling It. The use of social media in road policing."