

## **Barriers to road safety investment for Rural Local Governments**

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### **Abstract**

State and federal funded road safety programs enable local governments to address road safety deficiencies on local roads. The framing of these programs is crucial to their successful take-up and implementation, as the criteria for project selection, nomination process and co-funding arrangements can unintentionally create institutional barriers that discourage rural Local Governments from submitting projects for consideration.

Investigation of the above has concluded that these unintended barriers can be addressed through performance, as opposed to crash-history based criteria, supported by targets and predictive models, and addressing the issue of proportionally higher costs faced by smaller local governments.

### **Background**

In Western Australia, Local Governments can apply for funding to address road safety deficiencies on local roads through the State Black Spot Program (Main Roads WA, 2016). Fifty Percent of the total program funding is dedicated to local roads. There are two ways to nominate a project for funding through this program. The first is based on crash history where a location is considered if it meets a certain criteria based on number of crashes occurring during a five year period. The second – which is unique to Western Australia - is based on the results of a Road Safety Audit.

This work considers whether the structure of the program limits the ability of rural Local Governments to submit and implement projects and, if it does, what improvements could be made.

### **Method**

The Program has been reviewed relation to the application of other similar programs. The location, cost and types of projects previously approved have been reviewed. Interviews have been held with key staff in selected rural local governments.

### **Results**

The selection criteria ('x' number of crashes over a 5 year period) can leave smaller rural authorities with very few, if any, eligible sites. Whilst it is possible to submit projects based upon Road Safety Audits, local governments have to assess whether the expense is justified as the cost is only recovered if the submission is successful. Once approved, the State contributes two-thirds of the funds for the project while the local government applicant is required to make a one-third contribution.

The above costs are a challenge for rural local governments (especially those with a diminishing population) but can be addressed by linking the proportion of the cost contributed by the Local Government to their revenue base. Predictive models should also be developed to alleviate the need to commission road safety audits.

Changing the selection criteria to reflect the likely impact of the project on road trauma risk (i.e. a performance-based criteria) and the setting of an overall trauma reduction target should also be considered as this could lead to more effective projects.

The ability to prepare funding submissions is also limited by the availability of skilled practitioners. Support could be provided through the development of decision-making tools guiding practitioners to the most appropriate solutions for high risk locations on rural roads.

### **Conclusion**

The existing funding mechanism in Western Australia structurally disadvantages rural local governments seeking to improve safety on their roads. Requirement for crash history (even though relative volumes are low), the high cost and resourcing challenges of Road Safety Audits, and program requirements for co-contributions from local governments with a limited revenue base is constraining efforts to reduce road trauma on high risk rural roads.

The above issues can be addressed through practical measures, which if implemented should encourage, rather than discourage rural Local Governments from submitting and implementing projects under the program.

### **References**

Main Roads Western Australia, 2016. State Black Spot Program Development and Management Guidelines. Perth: Main Roads Western Australia and Western Australian Local Government Association.