

Local Government Road Safety Summit - 9 April 2018

Report on outcomes

The Associate Minister of Transport, Hon Julie Anne Genter held the Local Government Road Safety Summit in Wellington on 9 April 2018. Over 100 senior Local Government representatives, including 18 Mayors or Deputy Mayors, from all over New Zealand, registered to attend. Around 20 senior representatives from central government, including the Minister herself, also took part in the all-day event.

This high level of engagement enabled a very active and worthwhile discussion about how to improve road safety in New Zealand and showed the high level of interest in the topic.

The Minister called the Summit in response to the rising number of deaths and serious injuries on New Zealand roads. Its focus on local government reflects the key role that local government has in reducing the harm that is occurring on local roads. The day allowed all parties to present their views on what the opportunities were available to make meaningful changes, with a focus on what could be changed in the next 18 months. This focus on the short term reflected that there are already government actions, including the Government Policy Statement on Land Transport¹ and the new road safety strategy from 2020², that provide an opportunity to address the longer term issues.

As well as providing an opportunity for discussions and to hear from road safety figures, a key part of the Summit was a workshop session. In this session groups of people at different tables looked at what actions local government could take to improve road safety and what the barriers were, if any, to these occurring. Discussions varied from how to improve safety of pedestrians through to how the uptake of autonomous vehicles may improve safety. Summaries of these discussions were recorded by table facilitators at the time and were reported back to the participants.

This report sets out the key issues that were recorded by the groups. It also sets out how the Government, and its road safety partners, intends to respond to the issues that were raised.

As well as the workshop sessions, participants were asked at the end of the Summit to write down what they thought the single most important road safety initiative was. This ensured that if people had ideas they felt they could not convey during the discussions they could still be recorded. The full list of these suggestions has been attached separately³. It provides a very useful summary of the participants views about improving road safety.

Leadership and vision

The most consistent message from the Summit was the desire for strong leadership from central government to promote safety. Many groups spoke of their excitement at the increased priority road safety had already been given by the new administration and most groups included leadership as a key action.

¹ <https://www.transport.govt.nz/multi-modal/keystrategiesandplans/gpsonlandtransportfunding/>

² <https://www.transport.govt.nz/multi-modal/keystrategiesandplans/road-safety-strategy/>

³ <https://transport.cwp.govt.nz/assets/Uploads/180910-Local-Governments-key-concerns-around-road-safety.pdf>

One of the ways that the groups wanted leadership to be expressed was by the adoption of measurable and meaningful road safety targets. This included potentially adopting a target of zero deaths. There was near universal support for consideration of adoption of the 'Vision Zero' approach to road safety. Although Vision Zero has a target of zero deaths it is as much about ensuring that safety has the highest priority in all aspects of transport decision making.

Attendees discussed the need for leadership, both from central and local government, to change community attitudes and create support for specific projects. Road safety initiatives are often opposed by those immediately affected, even if they are supported more broadly by users. Some groups suggested that for some road safety projects, such as installation of median barriers or cycleways, it might be easier to remove, or at least reduce consultation requirements. Some groups suggested going so far as to use legislation to compel the installation, to overcome opposition from those directly affected (not-in-my-back-yard-ism).

If there are to be targets, groups expressed interest in including agencies other than central government in the targets. Some suggested that local government should also be held accountable for meeting local road safety targets. Many added that if there were to be local road safety targets, they should be associated with the provision of funding, rather than being just a standalone target.

Increased funding for road safety was also seen as a way that leadership can be expressed. There was frequent mention of the opportunities to promote increased road safety investment through the new Government Policy Statement on Land Transport (the GPS). There was also mention of a desire to see Funding Assistance Rates (FAR) increased. Increased assistance was seen as especially important for smaller councils, for road safety-specific projects and for walking and cycling projects.

Speed management

There was widespread recognition that speed was a key road safety issue, however, there continued to be mixed views about whether and how to address it.

Many examples of successful local projects to address speeds were discussed such as reduced speeds, median barriers and development of separated walking and cycling infrastructure.

Accelerated deployment of the 2016 Speed Management Guide was a common theme, though not all participants were aware of it. Some suggested that increasing the awareness of this key new approach may be beneficial.

Participants agreed that speed can be addressed by improving the roads to make the roads safer to travel on, and by setting a more appropriate speed limit that reflects the actual level of safety provided by road infrastructure.

Some groups proposed that central government could set blanket lower limits, though there were divergent views about the merits of such an approach. Some groups wanted speed reductions on all roads, while others only wanted reductions on those already identified as less safe especially under the Speed Management Guide.

Groups that suggested limits could be lowered nationwide, suggested that councils would be allowed to raise them where it was appropriate. Default limits were suggested by the different groups of 40km/h for urban and 80km/h for rural roads, though other figures were mentioned (eg 70km/h and 90km/h for open roads). Other groups said that decisions about speed limits for local roads were best made by local councils and did not support a national approach.

Most participants felt that the existing process requiring RCAs to set speed limits through a bylaw making process is unduly onerous and there was a strong call for the government to review these processes. One suggestion was to amend the legislation to allow for temporary 'trial' reductions to allow councils to gauge local opinions before proceeding to the formal amendment process.

Central Government's role

As noted earlier, the need for strong leadership was seen as a key role for central government, especially where new legislation or funding was required or where national communication campaigns were needed.

Many participants reported that they felt current processes to access National Land Transport Programme (NLTP) investment for interventions to improve road safety were too onerous, especially for smaller councils without specialist staff and for relatively low value road safety improvements. On the other hand, participants spoke positively about recent changes that enabled simplified applications for projects less than \$1 million.

Some groups also reported that the process of amending bylaws that set speed limits is too cumbersome and calls were made for the process to be 'simplified and streamlined'.

Participants welcomed the opportunity to engage more directly between central and local government transport agencies. Many mentioned that other government organisations needed to be engaged in improving road safety such as Ministry of Education, on safety around schools, as well as more traditional road safety partners such as NZ Police and ACC. Several groups mentioned that they wanted all government agencies to 'speak with one voice' on safety as some thought agencies had quite different priorities at present.

Several groups said that central government should provide better options for freight delivery (including rail/coastal shipping) to reduce the number of heavy vehicles on roads.

Local Government role

Participants provided examples of a wide range of local and regional road safety campaigns including the 'Any number is too many' campaign. Many of these would benefit from increased resources or funding, including, according to some groups, funding for local road safety roles.

Increased community engagement and education campaigns led by local government about the need for 'better mobility' or 'liveable communities' was also suggested.

An increased focus on road safety meant that councils would need to invest more in staff/contractors and raising awareness and understanding of councillors on the safe system approach, and provide more resources for road safety specifically.

Walking and cycling

Improving the safety of children and other vulnerable users walking and cycling, including noting an increased use of e-bikes, was a common theme.

Many groups mentioned support for improved safety around schools to promote walking and cycling. There was also discussion about adoption of lower limits (30km/h was suggested) around schools, especially during school hours.

A wide range of specific practical safety approaches were put forward for consideration by the groups. These included changes to rules around cycleway design, and requests for easier and quicker access to, and cheaper leases for, railway corridors for cycleways. There was strong support for the creation of separated cycleways as a way to improve safety of cyclists and to increase the uptake of cycling overall.

An emerging issue of needing to enable (or regulate) use of the footpath by increasing numbers of mobility devices, as a result of an aging population and changes in technology was mentioned by some groups. Providing increased accessibility for those who can no longer drive was also identified as a concern.

Groups discussed driver awareness and the driver versus cyclist mentality, which needed to shift in order to create a safer culture for all users. Changing this culture could include a greater role for councils.

There was support for the Government's proposal to include footpath maintenance as an area for funding under the GPS.

Safe road use

Many groups talked of the need for increased use of road safety education campaigns. Many also made a specific mention of the need to focus on increasing the levels of seatbelt wearing.

Other also talked about wanting an increased level of on-road enforcement by NZ Police. There was a widespread impression that enforcement activities had declined in recent years and there were calls to increase this again. Discussion also focused on the enforcement tolerance for speed and the way this works against improving road safety outcomes.

Some groups thought that there should be increased use of 'safety cameras' to reduce speed and a desire for the introduction of point-to-point cameras (which measure average speed over a fixed distance, rather than at a single point) was also mentioned. A few groups also went on to suggest that councils should be able to deploy their own cameras. In some cases, groups thought that councils could get a share of revenue from safety cameras (including red-light cameras) so that they could pay for road safety activities in their communities (hypothecation).

Several groups wanted greater deployment of speed feedback devices that advise drivers of their speeds and flash at them to slow down if necessary.

Data and technology

A lack of skills needed to carry out a range of road safety tasks, from preparing funding applications to analysing data, especially in smaller councils, was a common concern discussed. As at least a partial solution it was suggested there should be improved access to national data especially for smaller councils which may lack specialist data analysis skills. Others mentioned ensuring that all data sources such as ACC, hospital and potentially insurance company data was included in analysis along with existing crash data from Police to give a broader picture.

A few groups mentioned the need to consider the future uptake of automated vehicles in planning for urban development.

Other matters

Ensuring consistent national standards for road markings, signage, and road designs was mentioned, at least partly to assist tourists to travel safely.

Actions

The key purpose of the Summit was to develop concrete actions that could lead to improvements in road safety, especially in the short term. Copies of this report, and of the more detailed list of key actions to improve road safety that were identified by individuals on the day, have been shared with staff at the Ministry of Transport and the NZ Transport Agency who are involved in developing the road safety strategy from 2020. Copies have also been provided to the team helping to develop the GPS and will inform the decision making around Government funding for road safety. Other specific outcomes include:

- The Government acknowledges that strong leadership will be essential to improve road safety. It has already made it clear, including by holding the Summit, that road safety is a priority. It is now reviewing its funding priorities through the GPS consultation process.
- The Government has already said it will investigate whether to adopt the vision zero approach to road safety, which gives the highest priority to road safety in decision making. This will be considered as part of developing the new road safety strategy from 2020 that was announced at the event. The strategy development will explicitly consider whether there should be targets, including interim targets. The development process will include consultation with local government as to whether it is appropriate to set targets for local government, as well as central government.
- The draft GPS, which was made available for consultation just prior to the Local Government Road Safety Summit, includes proposals to increase funding for walking and cycling initiatives. It also gives a clear priority for road safety projects and increased funding for local roads. [It also signalled an expectation that Government will review the incentives, processes and funding arrangement for investing in safety initiatives by local government to ensure that safety on local roads is being improved]
- The Associate Minister of Transport has written to the Board of the NZ Transport Agency and asked that it review the Agency's processes around local government access to NLTP investment for interventions that will improve road safety. This included capacity building and project delivery. The letter also asked the Board to consider how NZ Transport Agency staff can work with councils to provide additional

support, including with applications for funding and with the deployment of the Speed Management Guide

- The Ministry of Transport has several packages of work underway to look at how to improve the setting of safe and appropriate speed limits in New Zealand, as part of developing a new road safety strategy. This work includes looking at barriers to accelerating the implementation of the new Speed Management Guide approach. In particular, the current requirements to set speed limits by making a bylaw, and whether trials of temporary speed limits should be allowed while consultation on changes are occurring. As well as considering speed limits outside of schools and the use of technology to support speed enforcement. The insights from the summit have been fed into this work.
- Road policing is a critical part of the road safety system. The Government recognises that the number of road police has declined in recent years. The NZ Police, NZ Transport Agency and the Ministry are currently undertaking a funding review for road policing. It is important that we have in place the right level of funding and the right model that enables police to make the greatest impact on improving road safety
- A programme of work that is already underway is looking at how to improve safe access to footpaths, including for mobility devices, pedestrians, and cyclists.
- The Ministry of Transport with support from NZ Transport Agency is in the process of developing a set of actions to improve the way the transport sector collects, manages, shares and uses safety data and information. The 'Transport Domain Plan Stocktake of Information and Data Sources' was released in March 2017 and includes an inventory of safety and health data and information held by public agencies (<https://www.transport.govt.nz/resources/transport-domain-plan/>). In addition, as part of development of the new road safety strategy the Ministry will also work with organisations including LGNZ, NZ Police and ACC and where possible, private insurance companies, to collect and distribute relevant and targeted road safety information for councils and other partners.