

# Road Safety Policy & Practice

## Community Engagement for Road Safety in Western Australia

Teresa Williams<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>*Main Roads Western Australia, Perth, Australia*

Corresponding Author: Teresa Williams, PO Box 6348, East Perth, Western Australia, 6892, Australia,  
Email: [teresa.williams@mainroads.wa.gov.au](mailto:teresa.williams@mainroads.wa.gov.au), Ph: (+61) 419048800

### Key Findings

- Western Australia's community supports the vision of zero deaths on roads and identifies this vision as admirable.
- However, the current vision of eliminating deaths on roads over a long period of time, such as by 2050, is not seen as achievable.
- Increased plausibility could be achieved if the vision of zero deaths is coupled with a timeframe and a context to which an individual can relate.
- One safe journey at a time is likely a plausible and relatable vision for the community.

### Abstract

As a result of a review of the Western Australian Road Safety Commission's (Commission) public participation and engagement activities carried out during 2019, broad interest in the Commission's community engagement, attitude and behaviour research was generated. The scope of this paper is to report and discuss the data collected on community engagement with an aim of zero road trauma and fostering road user cohesion. Qualitative research methods, focus groups and kitchen table discussions were used to identify what core narratives would be effective to generate confidence and motivation in a vision of eliminating road trauma by influencing how road safety is discussed amongst community members. The study identified that Western Australia needs to adjust the narrative used to engage the community with the objective of eliminating road trauma.

### Keywords

community perception, engagement, core narrative, road safety

### Introduction

The Road Safety Commission (Commission) in Western Australia (WA) conducts quantitative and qualitative research regarding road user attitudes, behaviours, perceptions, and beliefs. Primarily the research gathers evidence to inform community education and awareness raising activities and investment, ultimately to engage the community to improve road safety outcomes and reduce road trauma. Additionally, the community research results have been considered as part of policy and regulatory development processes (Williams, 2019).

Williams (2019) reported a review of the Commission's public participation and engagement activities. The review was carried out in response to a 2017 Western Australian

Service Priority Review *Working Together One Public Sector Delivering for WA*. The recommendations of the Service Priority Review signalled the development and introduction of a whole of government approach to citizen engagement and a citizen centric service model for WA (Western Australian Government, 2017). The review reported by Williams (2019) generated considerable interest regarding the actual results from the public participation and engagement activities.

The public participation and engagement activity data collected by social researchers for the Commission included:

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- Driver Segmentation;
- Community Attitude Monitor; and
- Community Engagement with road safety.

This paper focusses only on the community's engagement with road safety. This work was carried out to support the development of a core narrative expressing a vision for reducing or eliminating road trauma on WA's roads and fostering road user cohesion. The key objective of the community engagement research was to answer the questions, how do road safety practitioners in WA:

- get the community to connect with the vision of eliminating deaths and serious injuries resulting from road use; and
- instil a sense of unity or cohesion for the community to work together towards this vision and establish a road safety culture.

## Community Engagement with Road Safety

### Background

Citing multiple authors, Jones and McBeth (2010) state there is convincing empirical research to substantiate that narratives are a principal tool individuals use to transfer, process and arrange information. Further, whilst the authors identify that narratives '*can be proven wrong*', the ability for narratives to influence the public and craft unity is concluded. Similarly, Veselková (2017) states that how policy narratives are composed is essential for effective communication. A core narrative is a principle short statement. An effective core narrative must be believable, credible and foster support through collaboration and shared belief.

Quantitative and qualitative data were collected during early 2019 using a community engagement framework

developed by Kantar Public called the 10C Citizen Engagement Framework. The 10C Citizen Engagement Framework includes ten engagement dimensions grouped into three factors, as illustrated in Figure 1. Results were collected for all aspects of the framework.

The 10C Citizen Engagement Framework is a proprietary tool of Kantar Public. It includes ten engagement dimensions organised in three groups: 1) 'mobilising factors' of core narrative, common good and cohesion; 2) 'shaping factors' of complexity, coherence, communication ecosystem and cognitive system; 3) 'involvement' which consists of capacitation, contribution and consideration.

The 10C Citizen Engagement Framework is founded in social and political science research. It was selected as the framework for data collection to ascertain the state of community engagement with road safety in WA. Measurement of the influence of narratives on policy outcomes is identified as a challenge (Shanahan et al., 2011). However, as noted by Larsson et al. (2010) road safety is a shared responsibility, including road users, and the Commission aimed to extend the extent to which road users are engaged with their role in a safe road system.

The initial data identified that WA's scores for a core narrative and community cohesion needed to improve. The data illustrated that the majority of Western Australians did not believe zero fatalities on WA roads was achievable and that there was a lack of unity amongst road users. Consequently, additional qualitative data were required to understand what core narratives would positively engage the community and what would increase road user cohesion.

### Method

The data were collected for social and market insights. As social or market research, it was conducted in accordance with the International Organization for Standardization

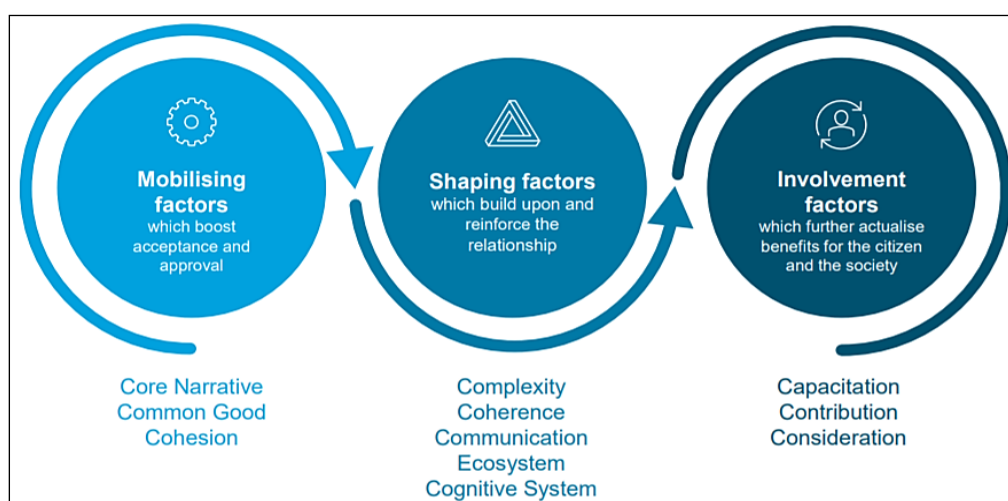


Figure 1. 10C Citizen Engagement Framework (Source: Kantar Public (n.d.))

(ISO) 20252:2019, including insights and data analytics – Vocabulary and service requirements, and in accordance with the Australian Market and Social Research Society Code of Conduct (Code).

Participants for focus groups were recruited from opt-in registers of individuals based on attributes to suit the specific target cohort. At the time of registering, individuals were provided with study participant terms of agreement, comprising use of information, including any personal information if relevant, ownership of intellectual property, and disclosure.

Participants for the Kitchen Table discussion method required a host to invite men and women from their community, a personal network or peer group. The host was a volunteer recruited through community networks. The host was prepared by the researcher regarding gaining consent and how to facilitate the discussion. The objective was a comfortable and conversational environment. Time was not assigned for building rapport as the participants were known to each other. Discussion was less structured than a focus group, with the group leader posing questions, moderating and probing the participants.

To maintain ISO accreditation, the market researchers designed, carried out, reported and documented accurately, transparently and objectively. As subscribers to the Code, work is conducted in accord with the ‘General Rules of Professional Behaviour’, including but not limited to compliance with legislation such as the Privacy Act 1988 and the Australian Privacy Principles.

Four Kitchen Table conversations, six blended focus groups and four specific focus groups were undertaken. The Kitchen Table discussions were informal focussed conversations held at a person’s home with approximately six to eight participants known to the host. Focus groups were professionally facilitated with eight to ten participants in purpose-built and meeting facilities.

The Kitchen Table discussions and focus groups were conducted in nine metropolitan and five regional locations during December 2019 and January 2020. The specific focus groups were for motorists (only), motorcyclists (only) and cyclists (serious and commuter only). The blended groups included a mix of road users including heavy vehicle and truck drivers. All sessions took between 90 and 120 minutes.

The data collection process for a core narrative included promoting discussions regarding:

- perceptions towards road safety efforts, including barriers and challenges;
- how credible, believable and achievable zero road fatalities are;
- who is responsible for road safety;

- how the existing narrative needs to change; and
- what propositions participants have for an acceptable narrative.

The data collection process for cohesion included promoting discussions regarding:

- the tolerance and extent of courtesy of road users;
- aspects of unification for road users; and
- what the common goals and aspirations of all road users are.

The specific user groups enabled deeper insights into those user types. The segregation of road user types was to explore differences that may exist in points of view and the extent to which groups and the general road user population may be unified or not. Blended groups allowed examination of possible commonalities and potential common goals.

The focus for data collection was the aspects of ‘*core narrative*’ and ‘*cohesion*’. Core narratives are the statement/s that could be used to engage the community. A core narrative needs to be perceived as possible and an ideal that all stakeholders accept. Cohesion is the level of unity between road users: to what extent road users support a common goal or aspiration for all road users.

The focus group discussion method required a centrally located venue with viewing facilities when available. Participants were recruited based on the nature of the group. Blended group recruitment included a mix of gender, age and road user type. Specific group recruitment included a mix of gender and age but stipulated road user types. Participants were encouraged to share their opinions within the group and provided with some activities for the development of a core narrative.

The data collection was conducted in accord with ISO 20252:2019 (ISO, 2019), Market, opinion and social research, including insights and data analytics.

## Results

Based on the majority of comments at each qualitative research session, it was found that the community supported the vision of “*zero deaths as admirable and from a moral perspective*”. Participants described the vision as what should be aimed for; but also unrealistic. There was an expectation that zero deaths was the only acceptable goal for the government. Many participants did not believe zero fatalities on WA roads was achievable.

In all the qualitative research sessions, the greatest threat identified was serious injury. Most participants expressed that the inclusion of serious injury in the vision made achieving zero less feasible. However, this threat motivates road users to want to use the road safely.

In response to ‘*who is responsible for and what responsibility members of the public have in relation to road safety*’, most participants initially attempted to deflect responsibility to other parts of the road safety system, such as other drivers, roads and roadsides or poor education. Most participants blamed others, including the government, for inadequate action to improve road safety. Participants in all sessions minimised their role and possible contribution to overall road safety outcomes.

The majority of participants had little awareness of the safe system approach for road safety, yet many spontaneously raised and recognised the underlying concepts of the safe system. Participant comments included “*recognising that safety features of vehicles are improving*”, the role of road and roadsides, safe travel speeds and safe use of roads. When introduced, participants expressed they felt reassured that the government is using a safe system approach to enable all parts of the system to work together to improve road safety.

The results indicate that with respect to understanding the role of road users in relation to road safety, the most common statements made by participants were to:

- “*be attentive and alert*”;
- “*know and obey road rules and drive safely*”;
- “*be respectful and courteous*”; and
- “*be skilful*”, including “*indicating and merging appropriately*”.

The role of government for road safety was most often identified as:

- “*education*” and “*persuasion regarding how to drive safely*”;
- “*enforcement*” and “*correction of unsafe driving*”; and
- “*infrastructure*” and “*road maintenance*”.

In all sessions, more specific functions of government were discussed amongst participants with respect to agencies’ core roles, such as vehicle registration, driver licensing, building roads and planning for infrastructure. Enforcement and deterrence, including speed cameras were identified as a core role. Provision of public transport, education and training were also noted.

Overall the results illustrate that if the vision of zero fatalities on roads is coupled with understanding how multiple factors work together, the safe system approach, and with a timeframe that is considered feasible by the community, it could be considered plausible. Based on the input of participants, plausibility may require shorter term goals, for example, what the individual community member could achieve on a daily basis. Participants increased their connection with narratives that were perceived to be within their control, such as ‘*one safe journey at a time*’.

With respect to creating engagement and motivating road users to support road safety strategies in WA, the results reveal that participants wanted the government to have a goal of zero deaths on WA roads as it fostered a belief that the government cares, and in turn community members care. Further, as participants recognised serious injury as a greater threat to themselves, or causing harm or injury to others, this factor could be used to motivate road users.

Based on the participants’ feedback, there was a clear consensus that road users are not united. There is discord amongst drivers, and drivers regarding cyclists. However, drivers had some understanding of cyclists in relation to a lack of cycling lanes and paths. Of all groups, cyclists were the least cohesive group and were considered to behave in the least safe manner on roads by car drivers, truck drivers, motorcyclists, and pedestrians.

To ‘*arrive safely*’ was found to be the one factor that united all road users. To arrive safely at the road user’s destination was the single common goal shared by all road user types, irrespective of known demographics. However, it was recognised that this goal did not always translate into safe road user behaviour. Most participant groups commented on the importance of the need to understand another road user’s perspective, such as that of a truck driver, a motorcyclist, or a cyclist. Empathy was considered a means to increase understanding of how to share roads safely.

## Discussion

Beliefs expressed by participants about road trauma and components of the safe system for road safety illustrate there is potential for the community to engage with and support a safe system approach to achieve zero fatalities on WA’s roads. The results indicate that knowledge and understanding need to be fostered. Work is required to establish an appropriate and acceptable core narrative to engage the community, and to cultivate cohesion.

Larson et al. (2010) discuss the ‘*road-user*’ and the ‘*Vision Zero*’ approaches to road safety. In conclusion, Larson et al. (2010) state that Vision Zero, also known as the safe system approach to road safety, is “*preferred*” for current road safety efforts. This position reinforces the need for WA to engage and create unity within the community for road safety with the vision for zero road trauma.

Government action, such as delivering safe road and path infrastructure, is identified as important not only to demonstrate a commitment to a shared responsibility, but also to show that it cares. To support a vision of zero fatalities on roads, the community needs to believe there is a verifiable commitment to road safety by the government. Larson et al. (2010) adds to this concept by suggesting the status of the safe system approach as revising an “*open system*”; rethinking the system as one organisation with “*parliament and/or government ... responsible*”, including the ability to control some of the variability in the system.

This would better facilitate believability, credibility and connection as required for an effective core narrative.

There is an appetite within the community for a unified approach based on an achievable-shared responsibility, such as one safe journey at a time. Whilst current results indicate little cohesion, a common goal of every road user having a safe journey has been established. This could improve the basis of the core narrative which can build unity among road users.

There is a need to stimulate community engagement and cohesion with an effective core narrative that citizens connect with; one that community members believe and perceived as credible. As expressed by Larkins et al. (2019) *“a single, strategic story that establishes where your government or organisation is heading and what it wants to achieve”* is required to create confidence and connection for the community.

The Community engagement results emphasised the community’s disconnection with ‘zero’. However, supporting the WA community’s common belief in *‘one safe journey at a time’*, Larson et al. (2010) describe the safe system as *“road traffic consists of a great number of individual journeys. When all individual journeys are safe, they will add together to safe road traffic”*.

Whilst further research is required to test other language that would be acceptable and resonate with the community, it is noted that similar research has commenced in Queensland.

Further research is required to determine how to:

- effectively and efficiently bring about cultural change within the community regarding understanding the risks associated with road use; and
- unify the community with a single core narrative to build cohesion and foster belief in a vision of zero deaths and life changing road trauma.

## Study Limitations

Detailed demographic data regarding the various cohorts were not collected. The qualitative results reported are based on the researcher’s analysis of verbatim transcriptions and recordings.

## Conclusions

The WA community supports the vision of zero deaths on roads and identifies this vision as admirable. However, community support needs to be encouraged as the current vision of zero deaths on roads is not seen as achievable. An approach using relatable language needs to be developed to engage WA’s citizens in road safety and the aim to reduce road trauma to zero serious harm. Such language should communicate a narrower and more immediate goal in order to nurture support for the vision.

Whilst the vision of zero fatalities may be initially dismissed, increased plausibility could be achieved if this aim is coupled with a timeframe and a context an individual relates to, such as one day or one journey. A plausible and relatable vision provides a common goal which could be shared and foster unity. Greater consideration is required for road users identifying serious injury as a greater threat.

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## Author Contributions

Teresa Williams contributed to the interpretation of the reported study; wrote the article, has read, and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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## Human Research Ethics Review

The study was conducted in accordance with the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) 20252:2019, Market, opinion and social research, including insights and data analytics – Vocabulary and service requirements, and in accordance with the Australian Market and Social Research Society Code of Conduct (Code). Work was conducted in accord with the ‘General Rules of Professional Behaviour’, including but not limited to compliance with legislation such as the Privacy Act 1988 and the Australian Privacy Principles, and taking all “reasonable precautions to ensure that participants are in no way harmed or adversely affected as a direct result of their participation in a project” (Research Society, 2020).

Participants for focus groups were recruited from opt-in registers of individuals based on attributes to suit the specific target cohort. At the time of registering, individuals were provided with study participant terms of agreement, comprising use of information, including any personal information if relevant, ownership of intellectual property, and disclosure. When recruited from the register, all participants were informed about the nature and style of the research, freely giving their clear and affirmative consent before participating. When agreement to

participate was being obtained suitable and no misleading information about the general purpose and nature of the project was provided. Cooperation was voluntary. However, focus group participants were compensated for expenses such as travel and parking.

Participants for the Kitchen Table discussion method required a host to invite men and women from their community, a personal network or peer group. The host was prepared by the researcher regarding gaining consent and how to facilitate the discussion, including that all individuals are encouraged to have their say and all participants are to respect the views of others. Prior to consent to participate, individuals were briefed by the host regarding the nature and style of the research and use of information. Participation was voluntary.

## Data Availability Statement

The author confirms that the data supporting the findings of this study are generally available within the article. However, more detailed source data are not publicly available because they may contain information that could compromise the privacy of research participants.

## Conflicts of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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