

10 Years to Change our World - Road Policing to 2020

Changing what we do to change what we get

Deputy Commissioner Rob Pope

Trafinz 2010

Wellington

Date and time: Tuesday 7th September 2010, 9.40 - 10.10 am

Audience: A range of national and local representatives and academics from transport, Police, engineering and education organisations.

Location: Duxton Hotel Ballroom - Wellington

Abstract:

The next 10 years will see a fundamental shift in our approach to road safety in New Zealand. As safer journeys become a reality and we move towards a roading network increasingly free of death and serious injury, the way we enforce road safety will also change.

The part that New Zealand Police will play in the delivery of Road Policing as an integral part of Safer Journeys will be discussed by Rob Pope, Deputy Commissioner, New Zealand Police. His address will consider the future of Road Policing and how new strategies, perspectives and technology will provide a way forward for all New Zealand road users.

Introduction

Good morning everyone - it gives me great pleasure to be here with you again at the Trafinz Conference. I think the last time I spoke to you was in Queenstown, I guess that would have been in 2006 - it seems a lifetime ago and perhaps in this context it is - a lot can happen in four years - a lot can change.

I am mindful of the fact that this morning I am addressing some of the most experienced road safety minds in the country and that many of you operate with a passion and drive that is rare in the best of circumstances but under the type of pressure that you are currently under, is something we must be very careful to preserve. I am not here this morning to tell you what we are doing wrong, I am not here to tell you how we can solve all our problems, all I would like to do, is raise some questions for discussion. To flag some ideas with you and give you something to think about when you leave here.

I will cover

I know my time talking with you this morning is very brief but despite that what I would like to do is take a few minutes to look back, to look back on what we have already done, how far we have come, to acknowledge our successes.

Then I would like to provide you with a thumbnail on Police delivery of road policing services to New Zealanders, an overview of the past and our plans for the future. In particular, how we identify and target road safety risk, allocate resources, evaluate effectiveness and the technological advances that we are looking towards.

I will conclude by having a brief look at NZ Police pursuit policy and how we implement it. While we do have a significant Police presence at this conference, I am very conscious of the lack of real understanding around the issue of pursuits even amongst such a well-informed and well educated group as this. This is a subject that has been consuming the media, providing the fuel for sometimes unwise and inflammatory comment and so I thought I would step briefly "off brief" to raise this

issue with you. After all, this is a rare opportunity with you all in one place.

If there is any time remaining, I will be happy to answer any questions you may have and I know Superintendent Rose and her team will also be available throughout the conference should you have any other matters that you are keen to talk about that we don't cover.

Looking back on road safety achievements from a police perspective

So - where were we? Where were you when things started to change?

Actually, our road safety record in New Zealand is well documented. Tremendous progress has been made in road safety over the last ten or so years and New Zealand Police is justifiably proud of its record in developing and delivering a dynamic and robust enforcement programme (despite some vociferous and vitriolic resistance from some quarters at times). We have become thick skinned and our success does make the resistance seem rather shrill and self-serving at times. However, I digress and --- so soon??? - a bad sign!

We are currently looking down the barrel of another lowish road toll but it is still hovering around the same place as it has been for the last few years. We do not seem to be able to effect any really significant shifts. As they say, *road safety is no accident*, but our efforts at Queen's Birthday weekend this year represent the only real road toll movement downward that we have seen for a number of years.

Queen's Birthday 2010

Most certainly, achieving the lowest Queen's Birthday road toll in 54 years and the huge reduction in death and injury cannot be a mere fluke - but even if it were - there are still nine more people alive today than there were after Queen's Birthday weekend last year. However it is achieved, it is real from where I am standing.

And - although I probably don't need to, I would like to remind you that these are fathers, brothers, mothers, and sisters - real lives that have been saved - more than numbers.

Over Queen's Birthday weekend, Police managed to bring together all the elements of a successful campaign and the results demonstrate just how effective this can be. So what did we actually do? - it was very simple really.

We signalled our intentions to provide comprehensive and uncompromising enforcement over the weekend with a strongly worded letter from the Commissioner of Police in all major newspapers. This was an unusual step for Police, we don't usually go in for these types of "stunts", but this time we made an exception and the tenor of the letter we published left little doubt about our intentions.

We followed this up by doing what we said we would do - highly visible, comprehensive enforcement, the lowering of the speed tolerance, leadership from the highest levels of Police. The Commissioner and I were out on the streets around the country along with senior road policing staff. This is more important than you may imagine as this provides not only public leadership, but within Police the enthusiasm and commitment ratchets up a level.

Further and most significantly, we harnessed the media to really drive the story home. Superintendent Rose did almost 100 media interviews around that weekend, and surely there cannot have been a single driver in New Zealand who could say they didn't know about it, hand on heart.

We had tremendous outpourings of support for the campaign, the website was swamped, the media editorials were fulsome in their backing and we had only one nay saying blogger swimming against the tide of good will.

This demonstrates quite clearly to me just how ready and willing the public is to accept changes that they can believe in. They could

understand this, it wasn't technical, they felt part of it, they were "doing their bit" and they felt safe on the roads.

The results of the weekend operation speak for themselves. The lowest road toll since records began is an outstanding result. The intention to save lives was very clearly realised, but the results show that this was not at the expense of any other measurement. The number of crashes overall was reduced and driver behaviour was also significantly improved including a 48% reduction in pursuits.

Speed camera data also shows a clear reduction in mean speeds nationally with a 4.9% reduction in 50km/h zones and a 2.4% reduction in 100 km/h zones. And we think it was so good, we are going to do it again at Labour Weekend!!

But what else is there to point to? What else have we been doing that has really made a difference?

Our improved performance in road safety terms over the past decade or so has been very easy to track. The gains we've made are the direct result of outcome-focussed programmes and the deliberate interventions introduced over the past fifteen years.

Contributors to road safety gains and our partnerships

It's true that some of the credit has to go to basic advances in vehicle safety like seatbelts, airbags and crumple zones to protect occupants in a crash. And we'll continue to enjoy the benefits of improved safety standards and emergency service performance; but we've also made significant gains in recent years, and it hasn't happened by accident or as the result of ad-hoc campaigns.

- We've had National Road Safety Plans in place since 1990, which set firm targets and outlined ways of reaching them.

- Our joint advertising campaign with NZTA launched in 1995 which backed up targeted police activity with hard-hitting and well targeted advertisements focusing on speed, drink-driving, intersections and safety belts has also played its part.
- Community road safety programmes and our crash blackspot treatment programme have also made a big contribution.
- Photo driver licences and roadside vehicle impoundments have led to a 50% drop in fatal crashes involving unlicensed and disqualified drivers.
- anywhere-anytime speed cameras, introduced a few years ago have reduced "*the slow down in the camera zone only and speed up when you have passed it*" mentality that was prevalent. The recent purchase of new digital speed cameras which are gradually phasing out the old wet-film cameras provides an opportunity to increase the efficiency of the speed camera programme. Speed cameras are an efficient and cost-effective way of reducing speed over the whole network all of the time. They are the silent speed controllers - 24/7.
- increased drink-drive enforcement hours and the purchase of new booze buses have all contributed to the enhanced safety and lowering of the numbers of deaths on New Zealand roads.

But - we didn't do it alone - underlying all of these strategies are the partnerships between Police and a range of operators and organisations. Over the years, while the names and parameters of a number of these partners have changed, the primary focus of making the roads safer has not. And this, I believe is of paramount significance.

We have changed with the times but our critical successes are based around the fact that we have not taken our eye (or is that eyes?) off the ball, we have maintained the full court press that we started with.

Our integrated approach is one that addresses drivers, roads, and vehicles and is benchmarked against international best practice. This is reflected in our new ten year strategy - Safer Journeys which redefines, reorientates and rejuvenates our efforts around specific targets.

Community devolution

Our road safety efforts and initiatives are also uniquely identified and will continue to be characterised by a high degree of devolution of initiatives to local partners and stakeholders, and intensive community consultation and involvement in road safety activities. The benefits of this approach are wide-ranging and in many cases not immediately obvious, but they are unique in the reflection of an intensely selfless community involvement in road safety at a local level.

As I said earlier, the enthusiasm with which the community as a whole embraced the Queen's Birthday campaign was in many cases driven by this local commitment and involvement.

We also have secure funding sources through the New Zealand Road Safety Programme with its highly rigorous cost/benefit based investment screening. This is based on the social cost of death and injury model derived from research into the community's willingness to pay to reduce their exposure to road trauma. Even in these times when funding is under constant scrutiny and the Government requirements around funding are exacting to say the least, community commitment and support for road safety creates room for some innovative cutting edge programmes in some areas.

Crash Data Analysis

These programmes are well supported by our efficient and effective crash data analysis system that works to our advantage but relies on the close cooperation between the Police and NZTA. Further analysis of the data also allows Police to identify accident "black spots" and to target our resources accordingly. Our results from the crash reduction programme which measures the impact of engineering treatments to fix black spots

has shown a 50% reduction in fatal crashes and a one-third drop in injury crashes at over 2,400 treated sites.

Our co-ordinated approach is also extended to our Road Safety Action Plans which provide a framework for Police, NZTA, and local authorities to work together in road safety planning.

Risk targeting and Intel

These high level regional plans are then used as a basis for Police to develop risk targeted planning which ensures that we deploy police resources at the right place and at the right time to maximise their effectiveness.

This is of course, very familiar to many of you but I mention it here as one of the pillars of our co-operative efforts and as a further example of the way that we have used our combined resources to ensure that we have local solutions to local issues implemented by those with local interests at heart.

Obviously a key part in risk-targeting is effective Intelligence, and we have significantly increased our capacity in this area. The development of road policing Intel has had the benefit of providing an unprecedented degree of quantitative and qualitative information. This in turn has provided us with the opportunity to ensure that our operational practices are increasingly well informed. We are now a long way from the bad old days with a relatively ad hoc approach to having dedicated staff at the local and national level, along with specialist analysts

The rationale behind this ensures that resources are allocated against risk and while this operational reality is well understood and accepted within Police, we still have some ill-informed commentators talking about "fishing holes" and other pejorative terms that in no way reflect the reality of the way Police are deployed these days.

We also recognise that in order to improve road safety outcomes within existing funding levels, we must continually act smarter, utilise developing technology to increase the identification of risk, demonstrate value for money and effectively deploy resources. Intelligence is the key underpinning this.

Intelligence shapes our understanding of the criminal and transport environment, it supports our critical decisions, and it informs the proper exercise of discretion – whether we are dealing with the parents of a murder victim, assessing the risks associated with youth crime, or helping communities take ownership of road policing in their area.

In 2009 Police radically reviewed two major aspects of policing. Firstly the use of intelligence within policing including the collection, collation, analysis and use of intelligence at national, district and area level as well as cross agency, national and international agencies.

The second aspect of the review was around tasking and coordination of Police resources using intelligence-based decision making. This has been an important factor in our forward planning across all Police services but drops down directly into the way we deliver road policing. These innovations are continuously being redefined from within Police and will continue to impact on our services from both a National and a District level.

Safer Journeys

So - that was the past- now I would like to turn to the future. Can we sustain this programme? Are there are more gains to be made or have we done all we can reasonably be expected to do? Do we need to look at new ways of operating to ensure that we continue to ratchet that road toll down? Are we matching our efforts with the changes in society?

One of the essential pivots driving change around road safety into the future is Safer Journeys - New Zealand's road safety strategy to 2020. It is an injury prevention approach which recognises human error and

focuses on improving all the parts of the road system that impact on safety (the road, the vehicle, travel speed and the road user).

In Police we have talked about it in terms of the three 'p's priorities, partnerships and people and we are across all three.

Safer Journeys taps very effectively into what we do well in New Zealand - work together- look out for each other and apply common sense to our problems. Safer Journeys recognises our unique character and capitalises on it. I am confident that it will serve us well. But Safer Journeys has been the subject of much discussion at this conference already and will continue to exercise you all so I intend to limit my discussion to application of the technological innovations which Police are considering in relation to safer journeys. Some of them are already in place, or are being put in place and some are on the 'wish list".

ANPR

Automatic Number Plate Recognition systems are currently being trialled in Counties-Manukau District and Wellington. This represents the first step in evaluating this technology for use within the New Zealand Police environment.

The trial will be evaluated and these outcomes and their impact on Police services will inform any decision on adoption of the technology which has been used in a number of other countries successfully for many years.

ANPR uses optical character recognition on images to read the licence plates on vehicles. The systems can scan number plates at around one per second on cars traveling up to 160 km/h

It would have no impact on the vast majority of motorists who are law-abiding, use their vehicles lawfully on the roads, and pay their vehicle taxes and insurance but ANPR would allow police to focus on those who engage in unlawful activity.

Digital speed cameras

I have already referred to our purchase of digital speed cameras and these also represent a further investment in technologically sound equipment enabling us to increase efficiency and to target our efforts more closely around those who represent a road safety risk.

SMART

SMART is an acronym for Secure Mobile Access and Reporting Technology and it allows staff to send and receive information on a PDA device. This is currently being trialled and will be fully evaluated but use of this type of technology is commonplace overseas and in other organisations within New Zealand. In the future, SMART could provide the platform for a range of efficiencies and streamlining of Police activities. These may include such things as bail checks, custody management and licence suspensions. Once again, to the majority a law abiding drivers, this is not particularly important or interesting but can will provide Police with the opportunity to ensure that our service is as efficient as possible and minimise the potential for error.

Alcohol Interlocks

There has been quite a bit of public discussion around alcohol interlocks for recidivist drink drivers and these devices are also commonly used overseas. The thorny issue of how to get recidivist drink drivers off the roads is complex and requires a degree of lateral thinking - the discussion around interlock systems is a useful thread to that discussion.

There are, of course, many minds, many of *your* minds in fact, being hugely exercised around these matters and a wide range of other issues and as a Police service we are often at the sharp end of delivering that thinking. We all need to keep abreast of international best practice and ensure that the innovations we make have been well tested and evaluated as well as ensuring that they are relevant in the New Zealand environment.

So far, we have done pretty well in making sure we do exactly that but there are some issues around road safety that are worrying - some uniquely related to New Zealand such as the issues around tourists arriving here after very long flights with a very poor understanding of the difference between our highways and the motorways in their countries.

I heard recently of an overseas businessman who missed his plane to Wellington for a meeting, so thought he would drive instead, anticipating a couple of hours. He never made the meeting and turned back at Palmerston North when the full impact of his miscalculation finally dawned on him.

Many tourists from Asia have never driven on roads that are not heavily congested, our wide open spaces confuse them and the speeds terrify them. It is no wonder some errors are made and in some cases, those errors have horrific consequences.

Another issue that we are grappling with is the management of drivers who fail to stop for Police. In the last couple of weeks this has been much in the news, and the tragic and senseless death of two blameless Christchurch people, ironically driving home from the gym, has provided a lightning rod to focus public discussion around this issue.

Pursuits

At the outset I signalled my intention to cover the issue of pursuits with you and even though I am aware that time is fast running out here, I would still like to put some ideas to you around this issue.

You may not all be aware that the New Zealand Police pursuit policy is one of our most heavily reviewed policies. In July we released our fourth review in six years and each time we make changes to tighten the policy to enhance the safety regulations around it.

New Zealand Police operate a policy that is in line with international best practice and as I said, we are always looking for ways to make it safer but

the reality is, at high speeds, there is a very real and very high risk to all involved, including as we were reminded in Christchurch, innocent bystanders.

We know from experience and from our own statistics, that there is a reasonable likelihood that people who fail to stop often have good reason to avoid contact with Police but the difficulty for us lies in trying to strike a balance between our responsibility to protect innocent lives and our duty to enforce the law.

Police make over 5 million contacts with the public each year but it is a very tiny proportion of drivers who fail to stop- and it is not rocket science to comprehend why?

These offenders tend to be male and young and to have criminal histories. A recent study found that 55% of all fleeing offenders were aged between 15 and 24 years and large proportion of offenders were driving stolen vehicles.

Criminals use the roads as they go about their unlawful business, after all you do not walk home from a burglary (*do you?*) So, it is easy to understand that but what I would like you to think about is why there is an increase in this behaviour.

Is it an increase in sociopathic behaviour across the board? Is it an increase in the power of the vehicles young people can purchase? Is it related to popular culture which trivialises and glorifies such behaviour? Is it related to the prevalence of games and videos which promote outcomes that show the driver walking away from high speed crashes?

I suspect the answer lies in all of these issues and probably some I haven't covered. I heard a very courageous young woman speaking recently about her experiences when she did the unthinkable and instead of stopping for Police, she drove off at speed and subsequently crashed, killing someone else. She is speaking publicly about this in an effort to demonstrate the horror that can result from that one split-second

decision. When she was asked what was going through her mind she said -" nothing - I didn't think at all - I just did it".

I found her comments very revealing in that she highlighted for me, something that is often forgotten - these people who flee from Police are not thinking - and by the time they do - it is all too often far too late.

What I would like to see is a reframing of the way we talk and think about these people - they are not folk heroes, they are not racing drivers, they are criminals - failure to stop for Police is in itself an offence - plain and simple.

I want this term "Police chases" removed from the discussion completely- and the labelling placed fairly and squarely where it belongs- on the offender. I prefer "fleeing offenders" but and if the lexicon is changed, perhaps it may help to limit the tolerance for this behaviour from all parts of our society. This is "illegal driver action" - it is not a Police chase.

The responsibility for these tragedies such as the death of the Christchurch couple last month needs to be laid at the door of the "fleeing offender" not those who are enforcing our laws.

I hope you will give this some thought and I hope that during the conference you will have time to discuss some of the issues I have raised. However, I am aware that time now runs very short and I am standing between you and morning tea - never a good idea and especially in a room with so many Police staff in it.

The planning, development and implementation of road safety in New Zealand will benefit from opportunities like this and I trust that I managed to make a contribution to your thinking. I wish you well with the rest of the conference.