

INQUIRY INTO SCHOOL ZONE SAFETY

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Submission by the City of Sydney

Staysafe Committee

Inquiry into NSW School Zones

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Introduction

The City of Sydney welcomes the opportunity to have input into this Inquiry into NSW School Zones and supports all initiatives that bring about a reduction in road trauma.

The Roads and Traffic Authority (RTA) manages the School Zone program and any issues that arise are generally dealt with directly between schools and the RTA. It is usual for the RTA to react promptly to any issues that are brought to the attention of the City and referred on to the RTA.

The key solutions to road trauma in the City of Sydney are seen as reducing vehicle volumes when pedestrian movements are greatest, reducing vehicle speeds and improving pedestrian movement through improved crossing opportunities at traffic lights, including the length of the green walk time.

There are many different speed limits around the City of Sydney, from 10km/h in Shared Zones to 40km/h in residential areas, a 50km/h Urban Speed Limit, with a number of State Roads zoned at 60km/h. Clearly this can be confusing, particularly where there are some streets with 50km/h signs and others without signs that are zoned 50km/h. In addition there are 35 School Zones covering primary and secondary schools in the local government area (LGA).

With around one million walking trips per day creating high levels of pedestrian activity in central Sydney, a speed limit of 50km/h is considered too high. There are 20,000 students in the city per day, with a number of primary facilities in very high-volume traffic areas.

Elsewhere in the City of Sydney local government area lower speed limits should apply to the inner-city residential areas to improve safety and amenity for pedestrians, including children travelling to and from school.

Reducing speed limits to 40km/h in central Sydney is in process through a cooperative program with the RTA. The City believes 40km/h speed limits should be universal in highly pedestrianised and high residential concentration areas throughout the LGA, regardless of the presence of schools. A consistent speed limit is more legible, easier to educate for and has reduced communications costs to maintain public understanding.

Sustainable Sydney 2030

The *Sustainable Sydney 2030* vision proposes key directions for the City and a series of progressive actions for the next 20 years.

The key objectives in *Sustainable Sydney 2030* that relate to road safety issues include giving greater priority to pedestrian and cycle movements and amenity in the City of Sydney by:

- integrating pedestrian movement and cycling into transport planning;
- reducing the use of private vehicles;
- managing the road space to encourage walking, cycling and increasing public transport;
- giving pedestrians priority at traffic signals;
- reducing speed limits in central Sydney to improve safety and amenity; and

- developing a Liveable Green Network between activity hubs – a safe and attractive walking and cycling network across the City's streets, parks and open spaces.

Each of these objectives will contribute to reducing road trauma involving children.

Recommendations

In summary the City of Sydney recommends:

1. That a consistent regime of 40km/h speed limits is introduced throughout central Sydney and residential areas of the City of Sydney. This will contribute to a reduction in road trauma for all road users, including children outside School Zones during school travel times.
2. The RTA work with the City of Sydney to develop an alternative system to indicate School Zones where they are situated within a full-time local speed limit of 40km/h, to reduce confusion and signage clutter.
3. Investigating legislative changes that put more responsibility on drivers to be aware of vulnerable road users in urban areas.

Submission addressing the Terms of Reference

The City of Sydney has reviewed the Terms of Reference for the Inquiry. The following are the City's comments on the specific items identified in the Terms of Reference. Each relevant area is presented in the order of priority that the City believes must be addressed.

The deployment of alternative facilities to reduce reliance on School Zones, such as grade separation, traffic lights and fencing

Grade separation is not applicable in many School Zone locations in urban areas due to space limitations.

Traffic lights, especially when safety cameras are implemented, should provide a solution to School Zone locations where there is a history of high vehicle speeds.

The City does not consider pedestrian barriers or fences are needed for pedestrian safety in urban areas. Fencing can corral people into concentrated masses. Where fencing restricts desired movements, there may be a temptation for young, fit pedestrians to attempt to jump the fences and be trapped closer to fast-moving traffic.

Speed cameras operate at the School Zones on Cleveland Street, at Sydney Boys' and Girls' High Schools and on Botany Road in the vicinity of Gardeners Road Public School. The use of modern measurement and recording technology for speed management is supported.

Wide footpaths around schools give a 'buffer zone' for children playing and other pedestrian activity including adults collecting children. An example of this is at the International Grammar School in Ultimo. If an issue within a School Zone is identified, increasing footpath width could be considered as a solution. Another solution could be kerb extensions that give pedestrians more room when waiting to cross a road and shorter distances to cross.

The major contributing factors to pedestrian casualties in School Zones

Crashlink data provided by the NSW Centre for Road Safety indicates that between 2005 and 2009 there were 42 crashes involving school-age pedestrians during school travel times* within the City of Sydney. This data does not report any of these crashes occurring within 40 km/h School Zones.

Therefore on a local basis no comment can be made.

**Crashlink defines school travel times as 07:30 to 09:30 and 14:30 to 17:00 on weekdays outside school holidays.*

The effectiveness of School Zones in reducing pedestrian casualties during School Zone times

The low incidence of crashes in School Zones during school travel times may indicate that School Zones are effective in their current form in the City of Sydney.

Apart from speed, School Zones are subject to specific laws relating to stopping and parking. In the City's current Business Plan, City Rangers are committed to spending more than 50 hours per month in targeted operations at School Zones.

All schools are visited by Rangers, but with emphasis on those which statistics and feedback suggest have a greater incidence of motorists stopping dangerously – often to pick up or drop off their children.

Continued enforcement and subsidising schools to provide safer, better-designed pick-up and drop-off zones in local streets so that parents are not tempted to do so illegally where they block vision, requiring drivers to pass where children cross, are needed to back up speed controls. With a uniform 40km/h local road speed limit funds might be better diverted into local school traffic management plans and works.

This is a key element in road safety around schools in the City of Sydney.

Other related matters

The City of Sydney considers that the current variations in speed limits throughout the local government area do not clearly indicate to drivers the risk level prevalent in the area.

The RTA has adopted the *Safe System* approach to road safety. The *Safe System* philosophy recognises that, even with the best preventative programs in place, people will continue to make mistakes and crashes will continue to occur. *Safe System* seeks to not penalise road users with death or serious injury when they make mistakes.

Appropriate speed limits are an integral part of *Safe System*. Even a marginal reduction in speed can result in a drop in casualty crashes.

Pedestrian and driver behaviour

The major underlying safety risk in the City of Sydney is that drivers do not adequately adjust their speed for the narrow city streets and congested inner-city conditions.

When analysing crashes there is a tendency to identify who was at fault and not how crashes can be avoided by addressing both the prime cause and other contributory factors. Many pedestrians are injured as a result of their 'incorrect' actions. As a

result they are seen as being 'at fault'. This often leads to the assumption that the driver did not contribute to the crash, irrespective of the fact that had they been moving at a speed from which they could stop in time the crash would not have occurred. Pedestrian behaviour is often cited as a major cause of crashes resulting in pedestrian trauma.

There is concern that some drivers may show inadequate respect for vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists. The current RTA Learner Driver Log Book places city driving in the "*City and motorway driving*" category and pedestrians and cyclists are not specifically mentioned at all.

Drivers in urban areas should be expected to be ready to deal with unexpected and even illegal behaviour by vulnerable road users.

The appropriateness of a single-approach School Zone regime as opposed to modifying zones based on existing infrastructure and other current safety measures employed around schools

In an urban environment speed management is considered an appropriate means of providing safety around schools and all other areas where people walk.

Where there is an advantage in utilising existing infrastructure and other measures this should be considered in addition to speed management.

A common complaint about speed zones is that there are often many changes in speed limit along some sections of roads. This can be addressed in many urban areas by posting a full-time speed limit of 40km/h and developing an improved method of indicating that a School Zone is subject to different penalties for some offences.

It is the City's belief that State Roads such as Anzac Parade should not be home to fluctuating School Zone speed limits. These State Roads already have effective pedestrian facilities in place which allow for safe pedestrian crossings. Instead the creation of a uniform local speed environment in the local streets and appropriate drop-off and pick-up facilities would contribute to more effective School Zones.

Conclusion

Crash data indicates that the current use of special speed limits around schools is effective. Any changes made to the guidelines for School Zones should not compromise the current situation.

Pedestrian safety for all ages can be enhanced through consistently applied lower speed limits. Speed limits must also reflect the risk within any area, not only in respect to safety but amenity as well.

The cooperation between the City of Sydney and the NSW State Government is designed to make improvements to the City's transport network and will also contribute to enhanced road safety in the City.