

Speed management — 50km/h local street speed limit public education campaign

Campaign overview

In March 1999, a 50km/h local street speed limit was introduced in built-up areas of south-east Queensland, unless otherwise signed. The limit was extended to all areas of the state from 1 February 2003.

The 50km/h local street speed limit was one of the most important road safety developments in Queensland in recent years and the single most significant change of state traffic law since the introduction of drink driving laws. Queensland was the first state or territory in Australia to implement the 50km/h local limit on such a broad scale.

The 50km/h limit was introduced to save lives, reduce local street crashes and make residential areas more liveable.

Campaign background

Local street crashes had been identified as a major cause of road trauma in Queensland. While the human cost was high, crashes on local streets was costing up to \$150 million in south east Queensland each year in hospital and health care costs, lost productivity in the workplace and the use of emergency services, around the time of the first phase of the campaign.

The introduction of the 50km/h limit in Queensland was part of the State Government's Speed Management Strategy, introduced in 1993.

The 50km/h local limit hierarchy operates on the basis that the reduced limit applies to 'local' streets only. Local streets are used mainly to access homes and private property and carry neighbourhood traffic. All other roads (arterials, major suburban routes) retain a speed limit of 60km/h or, in limited cases, a higher speed limit is applied.

Community attitudes and awareness

Queensland Transport conducted a broad program of consultation, market research and evaluation prior to the 50km/h speed limit introduction. In south east Queensland results found 73.5% of respondents supported a lower speed limit and four-out-of-five respondents indicated they understood how the 50km/h local street speed limit would be applied. In regional Queensland, support for the lower speed limit rose from 67% support before the introduction to 87% support after implementation.

Campaign Objectives

- More than 75% awareness of new rule and reasons for introduction
- More than 75% driver compliance with new rule
- More than 65% appeal level.

Target Audience

- primary audience: licensed drivers
- secondary audience: potential non-compliant drivers identified as 17–24 year males

Campaign Strategies

Advertising

Two television commercials were produced – one advising viewers of the brochure distribution and the other introducing the new limit and informing viewers of stopping distances (rationale for the limit) and the benefit of the new limit.

Radio commercials addressed the sign policy of the new limit and the definition of 50km/h local streets.

Outdoor and transport advertising in south east Queensland and newspaper advertising in regional Queensland reinforced the introduction of the new limit and its benefit.

Brochure

A brochure about the new limit was distributed to all households. In south-east Queensland the brochure featured a map of Brisbane, the Sunshine Coast, and Gold Coast main connecting roads which would remain at 60km/hr or higher.

Publicity

Extensive and comprehensive publicity was undertaken for the introduction of the limit, including numerous media releases, letters to the editor, tailored feature articles and internal government publications.

Other promotion and publicity included stakeholder presentations, display at various events throughout south-east Queensland, FAQ sheets and video for use in Queensland Transport Call Centres, and information on the Road Safety and Queensland Transport websites.

Campaign outcomes and evaluation

Research commissioned by Queensland Transport found an average of 87% of motorists cite speed as a major contributor to crashes. Support for the 50km/h local limit was strong, averaging 66% support, peaking to 72% in November 1999.

In March 1999, 88% of the driving population affected were aware of the campaign with 97% able to provide understanding the campaign's key messages. Also, 84% agreed they were complying with the limit. The level of appeal of the limit was 78%.

In May 2001, 86% of south-east Queensland motorists state they obey the 50km/h limit while 84% of regional motorists state they would obey the 50km/h limit if it was introduced in their area.

In March 2003, support for the lower speed limit in regional Queensland rose from 67% support before the introduction to 87% support after implementation.

The main reasons given by respondents for continuing to, or now choosing to, support the change in speed from 60km/h to 50km/h on local streets are:

- it protects children (52%)
- it increases road safety (32%)
- it reduces crashes/accidents (19%)
- it protects pedestrians (17%).

Almost all (91%) respondents agree with the statement "I think speeding is a major contributor to crashes", with seven in ten (73%) regional Queenslanders showing strong support.

Further information

Dennis Walsh and Michelle Smith, *Effective speed management. The next step forward: Saving lives by decreasing speeds in local streets.*