Road Safety 2.0:
A Case of Transforming Government's Approach to Road Safety by Engaging Citizens Through Web 2.0

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this case study is first, to determine the extent to which web 2.0 can be the technology that would enable a strong relationship between government and its citizens to develop in managing road safety and second, to examine the endeavours of the WA Office of Road Safety (ORS) in fostering the relationship. It shows that in ORS' road safety strategy for 2008-2020, community engagement is strongly advocated for the successful development and execution of its road safety plan but the potential of web 2.0 approaches in achieving it is not recognised. This would involve the use of blogs and RSS as suitable push strategies to get road safety information to the public. Online civic engagement would harness collective intelligence ('the wisdom of crowds') and, by enabling the public to annotate information on wikis, layers of value could be added so that the public become co-developers of road safety strategy and policy. The case identifies three major challenges confronting the ORS to become Road Safety 2.0 ready: how to gain the publics' attention in competition with other government agencies, how to respond internally to online citizen engagement, and how to manage governmental politics.

Keywords: *Blogs, Citizen Engagement, E-Government, Road Safety, Web 2.0*

BACKGROUND

Government's responsibility for road safety is widely accepted since the public expects government to provide the infrastructure and regulatory environment in which the road user can have confidence that his or her safety is protected. It is now commonly expected that roads are well constructed and road behaviour is controlled by effective legislation. However, as the volume of traffic increases so have road deaths and injury, thereby focusing the publics' attention on the role that government is performing in ensuring road safety. In Western Australia (WA), where this case is situated, the publicity given to the road toll is reflected in prominent newspaper headlines. The following are two such examples.

On July 17, 2009, the daily "The West Australian" newspaper contained an article with the headline "Road deaths, injuries costing State billions" in which the social cost of deaths and injuries was estimated at $Australian 2.4 billion. A possible remedy was identified in the same newspaper on July 24, 2009 under the title "Money can halve road toll in WA, says expert". The expert quoted in the article advocated safety measures such as big roundabouts to slow vehicles, incorporating electronic stability controls into cars, fixed speed cameras at known blackspots and reducing speed limits. However, the expert quoted in the article speculated that motorists would "laugh at" any moves that would drop regional speed limits below the current 110 km/hr. This shows the need to better understand the attitudes of the public towards road safety.

The WA government has long recognised the concern of the public for safer roads and regards safety as an important governmental responsibility. This and the unique characteristics of the state of WA are succinctly stated on the Office of Road Safety website (ORS, 2010).

Western Australia (WA) is the largest State in Australia. It covers 2,525,500 square kilometres (i.e., over four times the area of France). However its population is only approximately 10 per cent (2.1 million) of the country's total population, with the majority of people living in the state capital city of Perth. With over 50,000 kilometres of sealed and 127,000 kilometres of unsealed roads, WA relies extensively on its road network for transporting both people and freight.

Since the 1970s as Western Australia developed as a State and population increased, road safety issues emerged as a major concern. In 1970, 351 people were killed on Western Australian roads - about 35 deaths per 100,000 people. By 1996, we experienced 14 deaths per 100,000 after major changes such as random breath-testing and compulsory seatbelts were introduced. During this time the responsibility for road safety largely rested with the Police whose role was centred on enforcement and education.

In 1996 a parliamentary review of road safety recommended an independent body would provide the coordination required to work with multiple stakeholders and develop a state-wide strategy and response to road safety. The council would comprise members from government, local government and the community and would also include an independent chair drawn from the community.

The independent body referred to above is the Council of Road Safety (CRS) which is supported by the Office of Road Safety (ORS), a WA government department.

SETTING THE STAGE

During the late 2000, the CRS formulated a strategic plan for road safety, based on the work carried out by the ORS, which was adopted by the WA government in 2009. "Towards Zero: Getting there together 2008-2020" contains strategies that aim to reduce road deaths and serious injuries on WA roads. The road map to achieving community participation (i.e., getting there together) is provided by another body within the WA government, namely the Office of e-Government (OEG). This body requires each agency to transform its approach to one that is citizen centric. It laid out a staged-approach which guides the agency to move from a mere static web presence to one that offers online access of services and transactions and then to reach a transformation stage in which strong relationships are developed between itself and the public.

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