Safer Road Design for Older Pedestrians
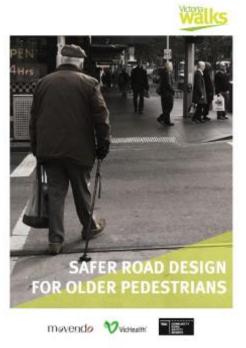
A case study on the impact of Victoria Walks work

Victoria Walks' research

Despite the fact that health and mobility becomes increasingly important to people as they age, older people are the most physically inactive population age group. At a time of life when many people are unwilling or unable to participate in high intensity exercise or organised sport, walking is critically important to the health of older people.

Safer Road Design for Older Pedestrians identifies ways for road managers to provide safer street environments for older pedestrians – people 65 years or older. The report includes:

- A review of the literature on safety for older pedestrians and effectiveness of street design for pedestrians

- Assessment of 1,149 older pedestrian crashes between 1 July 2008 and 30 June 2013

- Recommendations to make the road environment safer for older pedestrians to walk.

The report was prepared by transport consultants movendo (lead author Jose Mantilla) and Victoria Walks (Duane Burtt), in collaboration with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV). Funding was provided by a Community Road Safety Grant from the Transport Accident Commission (TAC), along with VicHealth's ongoing support of Victoria Walks.

Through the process of developing the report there was significant engagement with practitioners in relation to the CrashStats analysis and preliminary findings. Most notably:

- A local government workshop was attended by around 40 council representatives on 17 November 2014

- A meeting was held with VicRoads staff on 11 December 2014

- TAC researchers reviewed and provided feedback on the report in July 2016.

Key findings from the report include:

- Older pedestrians experience an average of 17 fatalities, 147 serious injuries and 114 other injuries in Victoria each year, with an estimated economic cost of $110 million per annum (in 2012 dollar values)

- People aged 65+ represent 14.6% of the population yet account for 39% of pedestrian fatalities

- Motorists should have given way in at least 42% of crashes involving older pedestrians at unsignalised intersections, and 72% of crashes at signalised intersections

- Vehicles colliding with pedestrians on footpaths, footpath driveways or at entrances to car parks comprise at least 16% of all older pedestrian crashes, and 23% for those aged 85 and older.

The report recommends various infrastructure treatments to provide safer streets for older pedestrians. For ease of reference for busy traffic engineers, a series of factsheets were produced on traffic signals, unsignalised intersections, roundabouts, mid-block locations and footpath management.

Media coverage and communications

Before the report was released the project provided background for media coverage of older pedestrian safety issues in June 2015. This included television and radio coverage and a feature story in The Age.

Release of the research in September 2016 received an exceptionally high level of media coverage:

- It was the front page story in the Herald Sun (leading to 15 mostly supportive letters to the editor on the following day). The Age also ran a substantial article, and there were stories in the Geelong Advertiser and three regional papers.
- Our Executive Officer Ben Rossiter was interviewed on prime time radio 774ABC and 3AW (twice). Other radio news coverage included Gold104.3, SEN, Triple M, ABC Central Victoria, Bay FM (Geelong), Fox and related radio stations around the country, and 12 stations in regional Victoria.
- Television coverage involved stories on Seven News Vic and eight related stations in Victoria and Southern Cross Darwin; TEN Eyewitness News and six related stations in Victoria and Tasmania; National Nine News and eight regional stations; and WIN News across regional Victoria.
- There was extensive social media, notably The Project's Facebook post attracting 700 likes and 300 comments.

A letter to the editor encouraging drivers to watch for walkers was subsequently published in The Age, the Bendigo Advertiser, Ballarat Courier, Border Mail and 16 local newspapers.

Victoria Walks wrote to all Victorian councils advising them of the research and providing them with a copy of the report.

Influencing practise

Findings of the research have been incorporated into Victoria Walks advocacy. Examples include our submission on the Infrastructure Victoria options document *All Things Considered* and *Draft 30 Year Infrastructure Strategy*.

In addition to the engagement with practitioners in developing the report, the research has been presented to a range of audiences, including:

- Smart Urban Futures Conference, March 2017
- Hobart City Council West Hobart workshop, November 2016
- Walk21 Conference, Hong Kong, October 2016
- MAV Positive Ageing Network, August 2016
- Institute of Transport Engineers Australia and NZ, Age Friendly Transport Forum, June 2016
- Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources walking for transport workshop, March 2016
- Monash University forum, August 2015
- Smart Urban Futures Conference, March 2015.

The research has also been utilised or promoted by other groups and media including Safer Streets for Walking - Hobart; Living Streets NZ, Transportation Research Board (USA), Scoop (NZ).

The report was discussed within RACV, who expressed interest in considering how older pedestrians could be better provided for. Safe System Solutions have advised that they use the report in their work on road safety.

As of 18 May 2017, the Victoria Walks webpage on the project has been visited more than 500 times, for an average 3.08 minutes. The main report has been downloaded 123 times and approximately 190 hard copies have been distributed.

Victoria Walks will continue to encourage relevant agencies to utilise this resource.