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## **How is it travelling? Evaluating the TravelSmart Local Government Program**

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### **Abstract**

Since 2000 the Western Australian Department of Transport (DoT) has run a grant program that provides seed funding to local governments to employ a TravelSmart Officer (TSO). In 2011 the Department conducted a comprehensive review of the program. This presentation will present some of the key findings of that review and explore how the results are reshaping the program as the DoT offers a fourth grant round in 2012.

The TravelSmart Local Government Program assists local governments to support, enable and promote active, sustainable transport use through its TSO, who acts as a 'change agent' and seeks to change travel behaviour by influencing managers, senior executives and elected members of local governments to provide and maintain appropriate infrastructure, hold promotional events, and work with local schools and employers in their communities. Over the last 10 years, 19 local governments in Perth and Peel regions have employed TSOs, with the DoT providing a proportion of funding, in combination with local governments.

The evaluation of the TravelSmart Local Government Program assessed the effectiveness of the program, modelled the economic and financial benefits, gathered stakeholder perceptions and developed a monitoring, evaluation and reporting plan. The evaluation provides a clear snapshot of the past 10 years and will be influential in shaping the next 10.

## **Introduction**

DoT had been coordinating the TravelSmart Local Government Program for 11 years before engaging an external consultant (Marsden Jacob Associates) to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the program.<sup>1</sup> Over that time a lot had changed, for instance, as an agency, DoT had gone through three major restructures resulting in significant shifts in strategic direction. The evaluation aimed to provide a clear articulation of the TravelSmart Local Government program's outcomes and then assess their alignment with the agency's current strategic direction. The evaluation would also reveal the value delivered to local government. One of the fundamental tensions of the program is that it must deliver benefits not only to DoT but also to our local government partners. An external consultant could take a step back from the program and tease apart its worth to both major partners. They would be able to engage past and present local government participants in an open and frank discussion on the program's relevancy. They would also be able to model the economic and financial benefits of the program, which, if positive, could be used to justify the continuation of the program (a full copy of the evaluation can be found at [http://www.transport.wa.gov.au/mediaFiles/AT\\_TS\\_P\\_Evaluation\\_LocalGov\\_Workplace.pdf](http://www.transport.wa.gov.au/mediaFiles/AT_TS_P_Evaluation_LocalGov_Workplace.pdf)).

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<sup>1</sup> This was the third review of the program - previous reviews had recognised the value of continuing the program as it leverages local government resources in favour of State Government integrated land use and transport policy. However, they were not designed to assist with program development or the creation of a business case.

Another key task of the consultant was to help establish an ongoing monitoring and evaluation plan that helped assess if the program was achieving its goal to “Create communities where people choose to walk, cycle and use public transport more often.” Over the course of the Local Government TravelSmart Program data had been collected on what TravelSmart Officers do and achieve. These achievements had also been converted in to greenhouse gas savings providing an indication of the programs impact on vkt. However, there was not an ongoing monitoring and evaluation plan enabling an assessment on how each of the program elements was performing against the program's ultimate goal.

## **TravelSmart Local Government Program Background**

A brief history of the program illuminates how the tension between state government goals and local government relevancy is intrinsic to the success of the program but can create difficulties when it comes to evaluating its effectiveness.

The genesis of the TravelSmart Local Government Program can be found in the Metropolitan Transport Strategy (1995). In line with this strategy, the program was designed with the aim of reducing single occupancy car trips by encouraging people to use public transport, cycling and walking for more of their weekly trips and to help bring about a more balanced use of the transport system. Both DoT and our local government partners recognised that 50% of car trips are local, so there are many things local governments can do to take ownership of and address traffic generated by their own residents. Additionally, TSOs were to support the delivery of the TravelSmart Household program in their municipality and then leverage off the Household program to continue to deliver TravelSmart outcomes once the Household program had been completed. As such TSOs were helping deliver an innovative new program (TravelSmart Household) that was receiving a significant capital investment.

TravelSmart Officers were also charged with being agents of ‘cultural change.’ The 2005 internal review (Cressida Consulting) was positive, finding that the “program has resulted in a significant shift of Local Government policy and program focus towards the Metropolitan Land Transport targets, over the first two years of operation.”

The first round of local government TSOs were employed in 2000 on a jointly funded basis with Transport WA (the then Department of Transport). The original five TSOs worked across eight local governments as some of the positions were shared. The majority of these local governments were, or would soon be, receiving the TravelSmart Household program and the TravelSmart Officer would help liaise between the local government and DoT. In addition, they needed to implement other TravelSmart initiatives using a community development approach. To do this they used local reference groups to put together a Local Action Plan that formed the basis of their work plan. This process ensured that the TravelSmart Officer job description had local relevancy and that the focus was on tasks valued by the local government and its community. It also meant that the work of TravelSmart Officers was not perceived solely as a state government directive and consequently it increased the likelihood that the local government would continue to employ the officer once the grant agreement expired. The Local Action Plans have bequeathed a dual legacy on the TravelSmart Officer Program; firstly, they delivered TravelSmart Officers that are relevant to local government and deliver outcomes that they value, and secondly this local specificity has resulted in a lot of variation in what TravelSmart Officers actually do. You could argue that each TSO has their own local ‘flavour.’ However, the creation of the Local Action Plan was a time and resource intensive process sometimes taking in excess of a year to develop. As the program has matured, Local Action Plans have been replaced by TravelSmart work plans that are developed internally by the TSO in consultation with relevant stakeholders

and then approved by DoT. This is indicative of the fact that there is now a better understanding of the types of initiatives that TSOs can successfully implement.

The Evaluation found that broadly speaking there are four main strategies employed by TSOs:

1. events and programs to raise community awareness of the program, rally support and make TravelSmart fun;
2. development of plans (such as bike plan, integrated transport plan) and incorporation of TravelSmart into each local government's standard operating practice;
3. development of on-ground infrastructure to enable behaviour change; and
4. intensive focus on mentoring a small group through behaviour change.

However, participating local governments tend to emphasise some areas at the expense of others. For instance, one TravelSmart Officer might work extensively with schools while in another local government area schools are barely engaged or one local government may run an annual suite of community events with a TravelSmart focus while another municipality deems these to be of little value.

In addition to providing successful local governments with seed funding to employ a TSO DoT provides ongoing assistance to TravelSmart local governments. DoT runs the monthly TravelSmart Officer Network meeting which provide officers with an opportunity to learn from one another, hear from other relevant practitioners and meet significant stakeholders. Each year a number of these meetings are devoted to professional development as DoT procures trainers to come in and deliver sessions on such topics as cycling infrastructure, behaviour change theory and influencing decision makers. New TSOs are invited to attend a TravelSmart induction session at DoT and are provided with supporting resources (induction file, posters, pamphlets and fact sheets). DoT has also organised two TravelSmart Local Government Award Events to recognise the achievements of local government in promoting and providing for active and sustainable transport.

## **The Evaluation's Findings**

Overall, the review concluded that the TravelSmart Local Government Program is a valuable initiative, which is cost-effective from the WA Government's point of view, as it leverages off resources from other organizations to achieve TravelSmart objectives and involves only a small outlay from DoT. The program is estimated to have saved 4.8 million VKT in 2010-11, and 1,440 tonnes of GHG emissions. This has increased from earlier years as the program has rolled out to an increased number of local governments.

The evaluation produced 11 recommendations regarding the TravelSmart Local Government program. The implementation of the recommendations has commenced, impacting on the current grant round and the content of the TSO network meetings and the professional development opportunities offered. The recommendations are also shaping the developing monitoring and evaluation framework.

A major outcome of the evaluation was securing support from the agency to offer a fourth round of seed grant funding. When preparing for this round of funding a number of changes were made to the application process in line with the recommendations. The changes were made with the aim of providing more clarity to local government and to increase the probability of employing an effective TSO. In the past, the TSO has been located in a variety of branches or divisions including:

- Engineering and field services;
- Development services;
- Strategic planning; and
- Sustainability/environment health.

It has been solely at the discretion of the local government where the position best sits. The evaluation recommended a more structured approach to where in the organisational structure the TSO be located with consideration to be given to

where the greatest benefit could be gained. The consensus amongst former and longstanding TSOs was that TSOs should be located in the same division as the transport engineers as they are key internal stakeholder, this division is a core area for all local governments and that TSOs located in this section achieve higher levels of effectiveness over time. As a result the application paperwork recommended that TSOs be located within the council engineering portfolio. All applicants met this criteria.

Across the network TSOs have widely varying discretionary budgets from nothing to upwards of \$60,000. One TSO who is responsible for overseeing the implementation of TravelSmart related infrastructure programs is responsible for a budget in the hundreds of thousands. In the past it has not been unusual for new TSOs to have no discretionary budget which has limited the type of programs they can deliver. In response to the recommendation that we 'investigate whether councils and/or TSOs are able to agree on a minimal effective level of operational funds' we amended the selection criteria of the current funding round so that local governments were required to indicate a commitment to a minimum discretionary budget of \$5,000. Thus enabling new TSOs to implement a number of initiatives in their first year and freeing them from having to lobby internally for a project budget. This also enables DoT to offer informed advice on which programs to initiate in that first year.

The recommendations are reshaping the content of the TSO network meetings, the professional development opportunities offered by the DoT and the training materials that we provide. The evaluation recommended that DoT 'extends efforts to build the capacity of TSOs to exert influence in their organizations, particularly in their interactions with planners and engineers – eg. fund training in policy development and negotiation skills.' Consequently in 2012 when the annual training schedule was being put together it was decided to provide a full day session on "Developing Active Transport Policy." This session was held in July and was well attended by the network attesting to its relevancy. The

monitoring and evaluation plan will aid in assessing the workshops effectiveness as we aim to complete an annual audit to capture the production of relevant local government policies and strategies. However, it is worth noting that a first draft Active Transport Policy was produced by one local government a week after attending this training session.

The evaluation highlighted the need to capture and translate the lessons learnt over the last 12 years by the TravelSmart Local Government program. It was recommended that “the program build on current practice, to extend the capture and sharing of the knowledge and experience of TSOs and program staff.” The TSO network meetings provide a forum where this knowledge is shared verbally, previously this has been done rather informally in a ‘round robin format’ now TSOs are asked to put together 5-10 minute presentations on key initiatives. At the end of the presentation the TSO usually asks the group for input via a series of questions aimed at ‘mining’ the ‘brains trust’. In addition to these more formal presentations there is still a need to capture this corporate knowledge in ink. Currently, a suite of fact sheets on the different programs delivered by the TSOs are in development. Ideally, these will be live documents that will be updated biennially as we collect more data on the effectiveness or otherwise of these initiatives.

The evaluation indicated that the “profile of TravelSmart activities among senior executives in local governments may be lower than is desirable.” It was acknowledged that the TravelSmart Local Government Awards were effective in raising the profile of TravelSmart initiatives with this cohort and it was recommended that the Award and Recognition event continue. Consequently, the third TravelSmart Award event is being held in 2012. To increase the profile and prestige of the Awards the local government program has joined with the Workplace program to deliver the event. In addition, \$1000 in sponsorship for the TravelSmart Champion Award has been secured from RAC adding credibility and profile to the event. The winnings are to be spent on implementing

TravelSmart actions. The TravelSmart Awards aim to build support for TravelSmart initiatives amongst local government management, executive and elected members.

The recommendations put forward in the “Evaluation of the TravelSmart Local Government and Workplace Programs” have led to a number of changes to the local government program. The application and reporting processes for the fourth round of seed funding have been refined. The new TravelSmart Officers are situated in the same division as the traffic engineers and were able to commence with a guaranteed minimum budget. The content of the monthly TravelSmart Officer Network meetings and the professional development opportunities offered to the whole network incorporated the recommendations to provide training in policy development and to capture more effectively the corporate knowledge held by the network. The TravelSmart Awards have been expanded so as to increase the profile and prestige of the event. The monitoring and Evaluation Plan is still being established but it is envisioned that it will not only provide the Department of Transport with the data it needs but will also evaluate the effectiveness of the programs that TravelSmart Officers are delivering. This will enable DoT to provide clear evidence-based guidance to local government on the most effective TravelSmart strategies.

## References

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