

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ROAD SAFETY
A Report on the attitudes and activities
of South Australian Councillors

by

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1. Pre-amble

1.1 Australian local government, to a degree unprecedented elsewhere, has always been dominated by its roads function. Whilst the construction and maintenance of roads has been a significant function of other systems within the same tradition, they have also had major concerns in education, health, welfare, water supply and police, giving them a more diversified base and a strong element of human services as well as property services.

1.2 Of the Australian states, South Australia has shown this concentration on roads to the highest degree, local government here traditionally spending the highest proportion of revenue on roadworks. While the first attempt to establish local government, in 1849, was in the form of District Roads Boards, and this failed because of the resistance of local ratepayers, the subsequent District and Municipal Councils were in fact little more than highways authorities, any temporary extension into wider services soon being taken over by the State.

1.3 The degree of State involvement in the roads function varied according to the times and the political administration but there was a gradual tendency for the State to take on greater financial responsibility for roads and to exercise greater central control over them. Ultimately the State Office of Local Government became a minor section of the Highways department, emphasising the continuing domination of local government by its roads responsibilities but indicating that it was now the junior and inferior partner, even its most central operation.

1.4 The reasons for the transfer of responsibility from the locality to the State were readily apparent. As road construction became more expensive, local councils became increasingly resistant to bearing the cost, particularly of the major highways, as long

distance road transport increased the traffic from outside the district. There was also central concern for uniformity of standards, and while this was partly covered by inserting detailed specifications in the Local Government Act, there was an urge to take over direct control.

1.5 While standardisation was mainly motivated by the desire for an efficient highways system, there was an element of concern for road safety, since it was recognised that a satisfactory level of construction and maintenance, and uniform road-use regulation would give a sounder base for accident prevention.

1.6 Though this was a valid assumption, it had its negative side. Once general standards are achieved, an improvement in either road efficiency or safety measures becomes a matter of identifying particular problem points. It is in this respect that local knowledge becomes of prime importance. Road crews and regional administrators have a local presence and will obviously bring this to bear on their decisions, but their perspective on road problems is a specific one bound up with their professional, principally engineering, concerns. The public at large will have a diversity of perspectives, depending on their use of the roads, but it is this diversity, frequently involving a conflict of priority and preference, that is at the root of many accidents.

1.7 The existence of local government rests on several foundations, but prime among them is the belief that the administration of affairs will be improved if those who are its recipients have the means to influence directly those making the decisions. Local government has the advantage that it recruits its decision-makers from a wider spectrum of the population and those decision-makers are more accessible to citizens than is feasible at the higher levels of government.

1.8 In the context of road safety, this has valuable possibilities, bringing both a wider range of perspectives to the problem and making available a conduit for the expression of public concern. This report will consider to what extent these

diversified the councillor body is and how far it can be expected to represent the full range of public perspectives; and secondly by looking at the public's contact with councillors, both in volume and in its concern for road safety. Finally, the report will consider the success with which this process is converted into administrative action and how it might be improved.

2 Councillors as Communicators

2.1 The South Australian councillor has traditionally been male, middle-class, middle-aged and Australian-born. In recent years there have been legislative changes to facilitate the entry of more diverse elements to councils and there have been deliberate campaigns to encourage a wider spread of candidates. This has had only a minor influence on the composition of councils which tend to be dominated still by the traditional sources.

2.2 There have been some changes. Comparing results from a 1973 survey with those of 1987, there has been a considerable increase in the percentage of women councillors, from 3.1% to 14.5%. There has also been some increase in the percentage of non-Australian born, from 7.6% to 14.4% but a large proportion of this increase has come from United Kingdom sources, which produced 5.8% in 1973 and 8.9% in 1987. The 5.5% from other countries is a considerable increase on the 1.8% recorded in 1973, but it is still a marked under-representation when compared with their presence in the community at large.

2.3 The other deficiencies are in manual workers and young people. The great majority of councillors are employers or self-employed. Employees as a group make up only 23.3% of the councillor body and of these the majority are in the professional/managerial /technical category which makes up 78.7%. Skilled workers and tradesman contribute only 8.9% of employee councillors and the lower white collar category of clerical and sales workers only 9.5% i.e. between them they comprise only 4.3% of the councillor body. Unskilled manual workers barely register at all, producing two

individuals out of 710 respondents.

2.4 The age structure is skewed heavily upwards. Only 4.4% are 30 or under with 20.5% in the 31-40 age-group. At the other end of the scale there are 19.6% over 60 years of age and 26.2% in the 51-60 age-group. The modal group is 41-50 with 29.3% of councillors. The reasons for this imbalance are fairly obvious. Apart from the fact that much recruitment to council is by invitation and thus tends to seek out people of similar characteristics to the incumbents, it is demanding on time and, in the case of a contested election, on finances. Younger people, particularly those with family commitments and a tight budget, and those from the lower socio-economic groups, will find these demands a considerable deterrent.

TABLE 1

CHARACTERISTICS OF SOUTH AUSTRALIAN COUNCILLORS

Sex

Male	85.5%	Female	14.5%
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Age

	30 & under	31-40	41-50	51-60	61-70	71+
%	4.4	20.5	29.3	26.2	16.5	3.1

National Origins

	Australian-born	UK-born	Other
%	85.6	8.9	5.5

Employment Status

	Self-Employed	Employs 1-10	Employs 11-100	Home Duties	Retired	Employee	Other
%	31.8	16.7	4.4	2.4	14.4	23.3	6.9

2.5 The typical councillor is there because he has an occupation which gives some degree of flexible control over work commitments and has domestic responsibilities which are light and catered for by his wife. When women enter councils they are drawn from much the same background and have reduced family commitments.

2.6 A likely consequence of this narrow recruitment base is that it will give councils a restricted perspective on many policy areas, including road safety matters. While it is not suggested that councillors have a collective amnesia or that they are unaware of the conditions faced by others, there is a natural tendency to generalise from one's own situation. The situation of most councillors would be as constant car-users, without young children and living in the quieter residential streets.

2.7 It might be expected that, on the basis of their own experience, councillors would view road safety matters principally from a motorist's viewpoint. The problems of pedestrians, and particularly of children, will not have an immediate saliency.

2.8 However, councillors are not in office merely to bring to bear their own expertise and experiences, they act as a conduit for their constituents.

3. Councillors as Conduits

3.1 There is a considerable variation in the individual experience of councillors, but most of them report numerous public contacts on council business and many of them actively cultivate their role as a conduit.

3.2 While it is by no means a determining factor, clearly the need to face electoral contests is an incentive to maintaining a high level of public contact. Again, in this respect as well as in the attempts to broaden the recruitment base, the campaign to encourage higher levels of contestation has had only limited success and a

high proportion of councillors achieve office without contestation. Fortunately, while those councillors with a very low level of public contact are from the ranks of the non-contested seats, the majority take this as a major element of their duties.

TABLE 2

NUMBER OF PUBLIC CONTACTS BY COUNCILLORS PER WEEK

Contacts	0	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-30	All
n	11	145	42	13	4	2	217
%	5.1	66.8	19.4	6.0	1.8	.9	100

3.3 Public contacts obviously cover the full range of council functions but road safety matters provide a substantial proportion. Undoubtedly these do not reflect the full level of concern about road safety, as many citizens are reluctant to make approaches to governmental authority. There is a further problem that citizens are often confused about the responsibilities of the different levels of government, and this is particularly understandable where, as in the case of roads, the responsibilities are divided. It would be useful to know to what extent state parliamentarians and the Highways Department are also approached with road safety complaints.

3.4 When a complaint is channeled through local government, there is a further division of routing. Some citizens make an approach directly to the permanent officers, others to the elected members. In the councils of smaller population, the latter tend to predominate, but in the larger councils it is the former. These considerations need to be kept in mind in analysing the survey responses since these will obviously give only a partial and generalised picture.

4. Concern for Road Safety

4.1 Councillors obviously regard road safety as a prime responsibility. Two-thirds of them thought it a major concern of council. Another 29% thought it a significant function, though secondary. Only 4% thought it best dealt with by another authority. This pattern was fairly constant across all levels of experience. Newcomers to council demonstrated much the same level of concern as those of long experience. There is a slight reduction among those of medium service.

TABLE 3

COUNCILLOR'S RATING OF ROAD SAFETY

(Number of cases in brackets)	Major Concern		Significant but Secondary		Best dealt with by others	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
All(212)	141	66.6	62	29.2	9	4.2
Adelaide(84)	56	66.7	25	29.8	4	4.8
Country (128)	85	66.4	37	28.9	5	3.9
1-3 yrs svce(96)	64	66.6	28	29.2	4	4.2
4-9 yrs svce(69)	44	63.8	21	30.4	4	5.8
10+ yrs svce(47)	33	70.2	13	27.7	1	2.1
0-1 contcts(141)	92	58.2	51	36.2	8	5.6
2+ contacts(71)	59	83.1	11	15.5	1	1.4

4.2 Neither is there a great deal of urban/rural variation . Councillors from the Adelaide metropolitan area record 66.7% who regard road safety as a major concern, while the country districts' level is 66.4%. It is highest in Eyre, where 88.2% record road safety as a major concern and lowest in Northern, where the level is 52.6%. This appears to be a reflection of community concern for road safety, or at least the level of reportage. Eyre councillors report the highest number of contacts on road safety matters while Northern has the lowest. The degree of public contact on road safety matters obviously has an impact on councillor perceptions. Among those reporting low numbers of approaches only 58.2% believe road safety to be a major concern compared with 83.1% of those with higher numbers of contacts

4.3 Local government officers show very similar ratings to the councillors. Overall 63.1% rate road safety as a major concern, 34.5% as significant but secondary, and only 2.4% think it is best dealt with elsewhere. Since officers have a crucial role, both in the formulation and execution of policies, this correspondence augurs well for positive decision-making on this issue.

4.4 The major disruption to the pattern comes in the regional distribution. Adelaide metropolitan officers record 79.2% regarding road safety as a major concern, while in the country districts the figure drops to 56.7%. This is despite the fact that roads are a more important component of council responsibilities in country areas than they are in the metropolitan area. The anomaly becomes even more apparent in the regional breakdown. The low numbers involved advise caution in interpretation but the discrepancy is sufficiently marked to suggest that there is a significant variation in attitudes being manifest here. Eyre showed the greatest level of concern among councillors but has the lowest level among officers. Northern also shows a low ranking, though this is more in keeping with the councillors' expression. In both these regions the Highways Department has a strong presence but there is no suggestion by either officers or councillors that road safety is not an appropriate council concern, it is merely

relegated to a secondary position.

4.5 What it may reflect is the level of professionalisation of local administrators, this being at its lowest in the more remote rural areas. Such a proposition is supported to some extent by the figures for the Adelaide metropolitan area where the officers are well ahead of their councillors in their rating of road safety. Another possible contribution to an explanation is the fact that public contact is much more likely to be through officers than councillors in the authorities of larger population and the majority of metropolitan councils come in this category.

TABLE 4

OFFICERS' AND COUNCILLORS' RATING OF ROAD SAFETY AS A MAJOR CONCERN

	Officers		Councillors	
	n	%	n	%
All state	53	63.1	141	66.6
Adelaide Metro.Area	19	79.2	56	66.7
Country	34	56.7	85	66.4
Outer Adelaide	4	57.1	14	63.6
Yorke P/Lower North	8	66.7	18	64.3
Murray Lands	8	61.5	14	60.9
South East	6	66.7	14	73.7
Eyre	2	25.6	15	88.2
Northern	6	50.0	10	52.6

4.6 As already indicated, public contacts on road safety matters are a factor influencing the concern of councillors about road safety issues. It is evident from this survey, as it is from others that there is a wide variation in the number of public contacts made by councillors and this has little to do with the size or character of the local authority. Individuals within the same authority may show great variation, so presumably the key determinant is the availability of councillors, possibly in terms of geographic or temporal availability, but more probably resulting from councillor's differing perceptions of their role.

4.7 Three councillors report up to 30 public contacts per week and identify 10 or more of these as concerning road safety matters. One of these comes from a larger authority, in the 30-50,000 population range, but the remaining two come from the 2-5,000 range. Low levels of reportage are recorded right across the range of sizes, and the general level is quite low, almost 15% reporting no contacts in the average week and just over half of the respondents reporting only one contact per week. However, a third of councillors report 2 or more and almost 10% report 5 or more.

4.8 This pattern tends to bear out the observation that council duties involve a variety of roles and individuals take up these roles differentially. There are obviously those who regard acting as a conduit for public complaint as a prime function.

4.9 There are also variations in the proportions of the total contacts which concern road safety, some councillors with high rates of public contact reporting low levels on road safety matters. Generally about a third of all contacts are on such matters, but the proportion may vary from below 10% to over 75%. Again, it would appear that there is further specialisation, with some councillors regarding this issue as a dominant one.

TABLE 5

AVERAGE NUMBER OF PUBLIC CONTACTS ON ROAD SAFETY MATTERS PER WEEK

Contacts	0	1	2	3	4	5-6	7-8	9-10	+10
No. of Councillors	32	112	33	15	4	10	2	6	3
%	14.7	51.6	15.2	6.9	1.8	4.6	.9	2.8	1.4

4.10 Considerable variation occurs in the reportage of road safety issues on a regional breakdown. 18.4% of councillors overall report 3 or more contacts per week on road safety matters, but regionally there is a variation between a low of 5.6% in Northern and 34.8% in Outer Adelaide. This, of course, could have much to do with road development and usage; the Outer Adelaide region has the greatest pressure of housing development and a great deal of traffic spills over from the metropolitan area. This would not account however for the almost equally high figure for the South-East.

4.11 A further quandary is produced by the relationship between these figures and the expressions of concern by councillors. The low level of contacts in Northern would adequately explain the lower level of concern expressed in that region (see Table 4). But there is no similar correspondence between the low level of contacts in Murraylands and their councillors' expression of concern which is, more or less, average. These discrepancies suggest the need for deeper investigation and the generation of a higher response rate.

TABLE 6

PROPORTION OF COUNCILLOR-PUBLIC CONTACTS PER WEEK ON ROAD SAFETY
3 OR MORE CONTACTS, BY REGION

Region	No.	%
All state	40	18.4
Adelaide Metro.	12	13.7
Outer Adelaide	8	34.8
Yorke/Lwr North	7	25.1
Murraylands	2	8.4
South-East	7	30.0
Eyre	3	17.7
Northern	1	5.6

4.12 A further consideration which needs to be taken into account is the seriousness of the complaint being made. Pot-holes are the staple of public complaints about roads, and while their presence may cause an accident, they are usually considered to be more a nuisance to drivers and a possible source of damage to vehicles than posing a threat to life or limb. In fact, councillors appeared to filter complaints and only a small number of reports concern poor maintenance of roads.

4.13 Respondents reported 349 cases where they had raised a road safety issue in council. The most frequent category of hazard was road junctions with almost a quarter of the cases. The next highest category was provided by dangerous road users, with excessive speed, heavy vehicles, or a combination of both being the focus of

concern. Next came a group of three, each with 46 cases or 13.2% of the total raised. These were road crossings, largely of pedestrians, but extending to stock crossings in the country; the poor condition of roads; and impaired visibility. Items with lesser levels of mention were problems of road access, poor signposting or marking, and roundabouts.

TABLE 7

TYPES OF TRAFFIC HAZARDS RAISED WITH COUNCIL

Type	No.	%
Dangerous junctions	84	24.1
Dangerous road use	68	19.5
Road crossings	46	13.2
Poor road maintenance	46	13.2
Impaired visibility	46	13.2
Road access	32	9.2
Road signs/markings	20	5.7
Roundabouts	7	2.0
Total	349	100

4.14 The major variation in these categories is in respect of dangerous road users. This is a much greater concern in the metropolitan area, rising to a third of the cases, with a corresponding decrease in the rate of reportage for country areas. In the latter there is, in compensation, an added concern for dangerous junctions, impaired visibility, poor road-signs and marking.

4.15 Most of the cases arose in anticipation of accidents rather than as a consequence. Only 54 or 15.5% of the cases involved incidents in which there was injury to persons or property. 20 of them involved deaths, 6 some lesser injury, 12 a vehicle collision and 16 produced some other form of property damage.

TABLE 8

PROPOSALS FOR REMOVING ROAD HAZARDS

	n	%
Roadworks	133	40.4
Speed limits	46	14.0
Improved signs	83	25.2
Working Party	44	13.4
Clear vegetation	23	7.0
Total	329	100

(there were 16 cases where proposals were not reported)

4.16 The next, and probably the most important consideration, is what was done about the hazard in question. Naturally, the

solutions are as varied as the problems. The most frequent proposal involved roadworks of some degree of significance, including re-alignments, special turning lanes, the installation of pedestrian crossings and road repairs. Speed limits are an obvious solution to concerns about dangerous road users, as are appropriate signs for complaints about their inadequacy. The fact that an obvious answer is not available, or perhaps a reflection of the nature of much council work, is the quite popular suggestion that a working party be formed.

TABLE 9

REPORTED OUTCOME OF ROAD SAFETY ISSUES

	COUNCILLORS		OFFICERS	
	n	%	n	%
Successfully accomplished	164	50.7	104	66.7
Pending completion	53	16.4	24	15.4
In abeyance	40	12.4	13	8.4
Rejected by Council	7	2.2	4	2.6
Rejected by other body	35	10.8	3	1.9
No action	24	7.4	8	5.1
Total	323	100	156	100

4.17 The success rate of the reported cases is reasonably high, half of them being recorded as accomplished and a further 16.4% as in the process of being realised, producing a tentative success rate of two-thirds. 12.4% are in abeyance pending application to other authorities or the availability of funds. Only 2.2% of the

proposals were rejected by councils, but 10.8% were rejected by other bodies, principally the Highways Department, which is accordingly heavily criticised by many councillors, possibly beyond the extent of its culpability. There is a further indeterminate category in which no action has been taken, but without an attribution of the cause. Probably these are cases which have passed through council but have then been lost to view.

4.18 Officers reported 156 cases with a rather different pattern in the completion rate. They claimed a successful completion rate of two-thirds with a further 15% pending. The proportion reported as in abeyance and resulting in 'no action' is somewhat less than in the case of councillors. These variations are readily explained in terms of the differing perspectives. The reportage depends on recall and officers will be much more likely to record the cases which they have brought to a successful end. Councillors, on the other hand, will remember the frustrations of a case that has stalled or been rejected.

4.19 The most notable difference however is in the category "rejected by another body", amounting to 10% of councillors' outcomes but hardly rating a mention from officers. Presumably officers could attribute a failure of outcome to an outside source without reflecting adversely on their own performance. It might, indeed, be anticipated that this would provide a useful 'escape hatch'. It may be that officers feel a professional bond with their counterparts in the Highways Department, with whom they must maintain a cordial working relationship. This anomaly is a further area that requires closer investigation to explain it adequately, but even without that explanation it underlines the necessity of dealing with council members on rather different terms to officers.

4.20 Without a further, extensive survey of the public, it is impossible to investigate further how effective councils are as a conduit for public concern and complaint. Studies of Australian policial culture have revealed that there is a good deal of scepticism, and even cynicism, about the Australian political system, which is somewhat alleviated in the case of local

government and particularly so in the country areas. This is a reflection of the much more frequent contacts that are possible in a rural situation with a small population. Overall, citizens are more likely to contact local authorities and to have a belief that they can influence the outcome of the issue in question. Table 10 is reproduced from a survey by the author conducted in 1974. There is no reason to anticipate any major variation from the general tenor of these findings.

TABLE 10

CITIZEN PERCEPTIONS OF ABILITY TO INFLUENCE GOVERNMENT OUTCOMES

		Local	State	Federal	None of them	No Response	Total
All	n	117	28	8	115	18	286
	%	40.9	9.8	2.8	40.2	6.2	100
Adelaide							
	n	63	22	7	87	13	192
	%	32.8	11.5	3.6	45.3	3.1	100
Rest of State							
	n	54	6	1	28	5	94
	%	56.4	6.4	1.1	29.8	6.3	100

4.21 In the absence of a further survey, the only other indicator of public concern is the local newspaper. Again there is a marked difference between the metropolitan area and the country. In the

former, the major local newspapers are the "give-aways" which are largely advertising sheets with minimal news content. In the country the newspapers are of more conventional form with a higher proportion of local copy. However, in both cases, and more prevalently in the "give-aways", items will only appear when they are 'newsworthy' and, in local terms, reasonably spectacular. Thus, major confrontations over road safety matters or a death or serious injury caused by a road hazard will attract coverage, but the routine passage of a decision to improve road safety will be less likely to obtain a mention. This in its turn will colour the public's perceptions of what road safety is about and what the role of councils is in dealing with it.

4.22 Patterns of newspaper reportage will also have an impact on councillors, who are customarily avid readers of local newspapers. Impressions gained by first-hand public contacts will be amplified by the treatment given to issues by the newspapers, since councillors will be concerned, not only to satisfy the relative few who contact them, but to obtain favourable coverage which is read by a much greater number.

4.23 An examination of a sample of local newspapers* over the first half of 1988 verified these assumptions to a large extent, in so far as the more prominent items were those involving serious injury, and where there was some contention with Council about appropriate remedies.

* Metropolitan Area

City News, Eastern Messenger, Portside Messenger, Payneham Messenger, Westside Messenger, Southern Times Messenger.

Country

Barossa & Light Herald (Tanunda), Border Times (Pinnaroo), Border Watch (Mt. Gambier), Bunyip (Gawler), Courier (Mt. Barker) Hills Messenger, The Recorder (Pt. Pirie), Country Times (Yorke Peninsula), Whyalla News, The Times (Victor Harbor).

4.24 A typical case is that reported by the 'Barossa and Light Herald'. The death of a cyclist in April 1988 revived the campaign for a cycle track which had first been mounted in 1986 following the death of a student cyclist. Tanunda Council was called upon to contribute two-thirds of the cost, Angaston the remainder, with assistance from State Government funds. Angaston Council was prepared to pay its proportion, but the majority of Tanunda councillors were against it. A pro-track councillor exhorted the concerned public to lobby council.

4.25 A metropolitan case which did not involve deaths but demonstrates the persistence of many road safety issues is reported in the Payneham Messenger of February 18th. 1988. A roundabout was to be installed in Marion Street after an 8-year campaign by residents for traffic control. The residents claimed that the prolongation of the issue was caused by 'bucksharing' between the Council and the Highways Department. Frequent space had been given to the issue during its long travail. A frequent theme of the long-running disputes reported in newspapers is a Council's insistence that the matter needs assistance and possibly full attention from the Highways Department

4.26 Among minor items and particularly in readers' letters what emerges is a high level of concern for pedestrian safety. Excessive speed on residential roads, poor traffic control in areas of intensive pedestrian access, particularly around schools, and poor road maintenance are the major issues raised. The outcomes are rarely systematically reported unless a particular issue becomes contentious. Road closures and road engineering to reduce speed are commonly suggested and frequently implemented, but tend to generate a substantial, if not equal, body of opposition.

4.27 Obviously the local press provides a useful adjunct to the representative function of councillors in providing an airing for public complaint, particularly in so far as it tends to rectify the imbalance in council concerns.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Local government clearly acts as a significant contributor to the maintenance of road safety standards, and what is probably just as important, it provides people with a ready channel of communication to voice their concerns about road safety. Councillors, despite individual variations, collectively act as a conduit for public concern, and without them there would undoubtedly be high degree of frustration. State and federal bureaucracies are not geared to provide for public responsiveness and parliamentarians cannot provide the same level of contact as councillors, given their much greater numbers and closer geographical locations.

5.2 It is difficult to assess the contribution of local government in real terms to road safety, particularly when it is only one of the bodies concerned, but the success rate of around two-thirds or more, indicated by the responses to this survey, is evidence of a substantial contribution. This does not appear to be in the high profile areas of road safety, such as reducing the road mortality rate. Presumably such matters generate automatic attention at all levels and there is little need for local government prompting, except in rare cases.

5.3 Local government's main provision, as in most aspects of its work, is therefore in low level, supplementary concerns. However, low key as it may be, it is significant in the establishment of a general climate of road safety. No problem can be tackled adequately by dealing only with the peak expressions of its existence. It is the broader base manifestations which provide the groundswell from which these peaks arise. If they are abated, the peaks will diminish.

5.4 There are obvious limitations to the ability of local government to make a substantial contribution to road safety programmes, even in this supplementary role. Local authorities are multi-purpose authorities, and though roads are the most

significant component of their activities in terms of expenditure, they have other functions which generate a great deal of work, including public contact. Such matters as planning and building approvals require immediate and necessary attention and other items may readily be shelved.

5.5 Another consequence of the diversity of functions is that there is no great body of expertise, even in the larger councils, on any one subject. Regional groupings of councils have been created to widen the basis of expertise by collaboration, but they have varying degrees of success. Particularly in the smaller councils there are no specialist officers but rather individual officers with several specialist functions. There are limits therefore on the availability of specialist advice.

5.6 In these circumstances, there is little point in attempting to create, at local level, a major road safety programme. The resources are not present and neither is the ultimate responsibility for all roads. What can be done is to build on those aspects of local government which are its major distinguishing feature - its closeness and accessibility to the public and its knowledge of local conditions.

5.7 There are impediments to the full realisation of these features. Not all councillors are equally dedicated to the fostering of public contact, and, while most believe road safety to be of prime importance and almost all believe it to be very significant, there are variations in the level of commitment to this particular concern. Further, as we have seen, the characteristics of the typical councillor are such that they do not directly represent the full range of community groups.

5.8 There are ways of reducing these impediments without simultaneously removing the advantages of the local context. Particularly in the area of community development, where a wider voice is essential to the policy process, community development committees have been established which recruit a range of people from the locality with the deliberate intent of obtaining an input from otherwise untapped sources, and particularly from those whose

co-operation is essential to the operation of the policy. This is effectively a form of co-option, but for specific purposes rather than to the council at large. Such a committee is a committee of council; some members of council will be its members; it is serviced by council staff; and it reports to council.

5.9 This model can be applied to road safety by setting up a road safety committee which is not a normal sub-committee of council, but one which sets out to enlist members from the wider community - parents from school councils, from kindergartens and playgroups; worker representatives from factories and other workplaces; old peoples' club representatives, people from residents' associations, ethnic groups and recreational clubs. There can be no prescription for appropriate membership since this will depend on the character and complexity of the area's population. The main aim is to secure a voice for the major components of the local scene, and particularly those which are under-represented on the council itself.

5.10 Such a committee could be used as a referrant for all road works proposals, not merely those of the council, but of the state roads authority as well. It should not merely be a generator of paper-work but should be demonstrably effective. Where any recommendation of the road safety committee is not accepted by the roads authority, local or state, it should be required to give a fully justified reason for its decision and this explanation should be made public.

5.11 The committee should also be used for a flow of information in the opposite direction. Cases brought to councillors or officers should be referred to it and it should be open to direct approach by the public. Each case should be deliberated and, where appropriate, further action recommended. If no action is thought necessary, a written statement justifying this response should be made to the complainant and publicly released.

5.12 The impact of such a process would be to ensure that there was the fullest possible local and public input into the safety aspects of all road works, and that all current and incipient

hazards would be brought to the attention of the appropriate authorities. There are frequently technical matters not accessible to the layman; there are always questions of priority between competing claims for finance and attention. It helps in the acceptance of a negative response if these reasons are clearly annunciated. It may even produce a counter-opinion which has not been initially obvious to the authority concerned and which might lead to a reversal of the earlier decision.

5.13 A further impact, which is less tangible, but of equal importance, is the cultivation of a public climate of effectiveness in an important aspect of their existence. While enhanced participation carries the burden of both responsibility and frequent disappointment, it ultimately gives greater legitimacy and acceptance to the process to which it is attached.

5.14 Finally, it needs to be recognised that any complex problem such as road safety has no ready, single and easy solution. Like many other problems, it arises from the interactions of an increasingly complex society. What is fundamental to all such problems is that a major component of any approach should be a broad-based attempt at involving the public. Local government is constructed to serve such a purpose and should be a key part of any programme.

RESEARCH NOTE

It was originally intended that the survey on which this report is based should be attached to a more extensive one on councillor characteristics and experiences, funded by the Local Government Development Fund and conducted in 1987. This would have had the advantage of reducing the costs of administration and providing a wider range of variables which might have illuminated councillors' attitudes to and experiences of road safety. Unfortunately, approval for the current research was not received until 1988 and was attached to a survey on financial management which provided no variables of relevance. It was also distributed by a different means. The 1987 survey was mailed directly to individual councillors. While more expensive, the greater immediacy of the contact tends to generate a higher response rate, and non-response is easily identified and followed up with a repeat request. This produced a response rate of almost 70%. The survey to which the current research was attached was despatched collectively to Chief Executive Officers with a request that it should be distributed to councillors, and included a questionnaire for the officers themselves. A reminder was sent out, but again, to C.E.O.s rather than individual councillors. The response rate from C.E.O.s was reasonable with a 66% return, but that from councillors was poor, at just under 20%. This might mean that those with a greater concern for the subject matter completed the questionnaire and thus the expression of concern may well be skewed upwards. However, since the cases reported are presumably objective events, with a minimum of interpretation, the conclusions drawn from that part of the response should be valid. Responses concerning contact with the public tally with the results of the 1987 survey and may be presumed an accurate depiction of the general situation.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND ROAD SAFETY

1. NAME OF COUNCIL.....
2. YEAR FIRST ENTERED COUNCIL.....
3. TOTAL YEARS OF SERVICE(excluding any breaks).....
4. CURRENT STATUS: Mayor/ Alderman/ Councillor (Underline as appropriate)
5. COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

(give name of committee and circle if Chairman or Deputy)

.....	Ch./Dep.
.....	Ch./Dep.
.....	Ch./Dep.

6. MEMBERSHIP OF COMMUNITY ORGANISATIONS

(give name and indicate any office held)

Name	Office
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

7. IMPORTANCE OF ROAD SAFETY

(a) How many approaches from members of the public on council matters would you experience in an average week?

(b) How many of these would be on road safety matters? (include complaints about state of road repair if these are considered dangerous)

(c) As a council member, how do you regard road safety matters?

A major concern for council	<input type="checkbox"/>	tick as
A significant, but secondary concern	<input type="checkbox"/>	appropriate
A matter best dealt with by other bodies	<input type="checkbox"/>	

8. ROAD SAFETY PROPOSALS

- (a) Have you ever proposed that Council should undertake road safety education programmes? YES/NO

If YES, give details of proposal and outcome below

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

- (b) Have you ever proposed road safety measures in Council? YES/NO

If YES, give details of each proposal and outcome below

- (i) Location.....

Type of hazard.....

Any accidents caused by hazard

.....

Date of report to Council.....

Action proposed.....

.....

Action taken.....

.....

- (ii) Location.....

Type of hazard.....

Any accidents caused by hazard

.....

Date of report to Council.....

Action proposed.....

.....

Action taken.....

.....

(iii) Location.....

Type of hazard.....

Any accidents caused by hazard

.....

Date of report to Council.....

Action proposed.....

.....

Action taken.....

.....

(iv) Location.....

Type of hazard.....

Any accidents caused by hazard

.....

Date of report to Council.....

Action proposed.....

.....

Action taken.....

.....

PLEASE CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEETS IF NECESSARY. ANY ADDITIONAL
COMMENTS ON THE ROLE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN ROAD SAFETY WOULD
BE WELCOME.

Name.....

Telephone No. if prepared to give further
information.....

Confidentiality requested ☐

Report requested ☐

Please return to: Dr. John R. Robbins, Department of Politics,
University of Adelaide, North Terrace,
Adelaide, 5001.