

Telecommunications Blackspots in Bass Coast Shire

Submitted by Bass Coast Shire Council

February 2014

Background:

Bass Coast Shire Council is a regional Victorian municipality with around 30,000 residents, one and half hours drive from Melbourne. It extends from Grantville to Inverloch and includes Phillip Island, San Remo and the commercial hub of the region, Wonthaggi.

Key industries include tourism/events, agriculture, construction, retail and the health and education sectors. Peak visitation during major events on Phillip Island such as the Moto GP and during summer holidays places considerable stress on local infrastructure, especially telecommunications. For example more than 100,000 people attend over the three days of the Moto GP weekend.

Purpose:

This paper identifies communities which have poor telecommunications services and blackspots within Bass Coast Shire and outlines problems arising as a result of these blackspots.

The West Gippsland Library Service has provided data about areas in which their mobile library service has difficulty operating as a result of poor telecommunications service, which is included as an attachment to this report. (please note their data covers the municipalities of Baw Baw, Bass Coast and South Gippsland)

Map of Bass Coast:



Cowes/Phillip Island:

Whilst Phillip Island has a residential population of around 10,000, during peak holiday times and events this can swell to 10 times that many. At such times mobile communications and internet access in general grinds to a halt as available capacity is overloaded. This creates a high level of frustration and inconvenience for holiday makers and residents, and impacts upon Phillip Island's capacity to compete in competitive domestic and international tourism markets.

As the Phillip Island bridge provides the only vehicular access on and off Phillip Island, it is vital that mobile communications are available particularly in the advent of an accident which closes access to the Island. Emergency services messaging and access is hampered by diminished communications capacity, and as a result the personal safety of locals and travellers caught up in the log jam is reduced.

San Remo:

San Remo, at the mainland end of the bridge to Phillip Island experiences many of the same problems that afflict Phillip Island in terms of mobile coverage.

Wonthaggi:

In and around Wonthaggi there are intermittent blackspots. Examples of these are Miners Drive and parts of South Wonthaggi where some residents have to go outside their homes to get reception.

Inverloch:

Inverloch suffers from the same sort of 'overload' issues that face Phillip Island at peak visitation times. Inverloch relies on mobile data availability as the exchange is at capacity and no new services are available.

Problems experienced by Council staff as a result of poor or inconsistent mobile coverage:

The inconsistency of mobile coverage outlined above and indicated on the attached maps creates numerous problems for Council staff delivering services, apart from those noted above impacting upon residents and visitors and makes it difficult for Council to meet its statutory emergency management obligation. These include:

- Community Safety/Local Laws – Council's community safety staff are at risk when they are required to attend a venue which has no or unreliable mobile coverage to undertake enforcement action or other Council business.
- Maintenance – Council's maintenance staff are at risk if out in the field they have no mobile access to report incidents or accidents.

- Home care – The safety of home care staff and their clients may be at risk if they attend a property in an area where there is no or intermittent mobile coverage. If a client is found to be ill or some other incident occurs it places them in a very difficult or potentially life threatening situation. Home carers have excellent first hand knowledge of blackspots and regularly report them back to the organisation, such as this recent report
 - Acacia Road GRANTVILLE
 - Grantville-Glen Alvie Road GRANTVILLE
 - Dwyer Road BASS

South Gippsland Hwy and Bass Hwy:

With massive vehicular traffic flows along the highway during peak holiday season such as summer holidays, during major events including the World Superbikes, Moto GP and the V8 Supercars and peak holiday weekends eg Easter, the lack of reliable mobile coverage makes it very dangerous for the public and Police/Emergency Services should an incident occur, which it frequently does.

Bass Coast's rural community is hampered by numerous blackspots, which are evident on Telstra's coverage map (attached). In many places where a mobile service is indicated, the strength of the service is such that residents or business operators have to search for a location where the signal is strong enough to operate. Many relate stories of having to go into the backyard or next door to find sufficient reception to make a call.

There are many small towns across the Shire and more than 1000 farms, many of which are in remote locations and experience either no or poor mobile coverage.

Telstra and Optus are the main carriers in the Shire, with limited Vodafone coverage.

Bass Coast Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to work with the Federal Government to identify and rectify the areas of greatest need within the Shire.

Attachments:

1. Bass Coast Shire Council Risk Assessment Form – 21/09/2012
Risk assessed: Inadequate communication and coverage – Operations and Emergencies
2. Map of mobile blackspots in Bass Coast – Telsta and Optus
3. West Gippsland Regional Library correspondence regarding blackspots impacting upon mobile library operations.

Organisational Contact:

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Risk Assessment Form



ID: BCOI34 Date recorded: 21/09/2012 Date reviewed: _____

Risk Name (5 word description) Inadequate communication coverage - Operations & Emergencies

Description of Risk (what can happen, leading to what event or consequence):

- Compromised effectiveness by council to respond during emergency and after hours (on call service).
- With 000 calls only available in all locations, it is not appropriate to use 000 for our response agency to communicate between council and onsite response teams.
- Limited response between teams can leads to OHS non conformance; delay in urgent public safety hazards being responded; inefficient delivery of service for maintenance tasks.
- lack of assistance in available during an personal injury & equipment malfunction/breakdown.

Source of risk (how can this happen, where does it come from?):

- Escalation of extreme weather events over the last 12 months has increased the importance for need real-time communication for a co-ordinated response during flood, fallen trees, landslips, road closures and detours..... and assisting other State Emergency Agencies.
- Current phone provider service coverage has reduced/diminished over a period of time since.
- Operational OHS issues, concerns and expressed in toolbox meeting.
- Staff unable to contact own team/staff members, Agencies &/or MECC (Municipal Emergency Coordination Centre) to provide assistance, support & equipment.
- Worksafe requirement for 'high risk work involving plant and traffic' for "Workers operating in remote locations or in isolation, effective communications should be in place."

Stakeholders (internal/external): SES, CFA, Police, VicRoads & Public (external)
Infrastructure & Community Safety. (internal)

Category (refer to list): Operational / Governance / Legal

Risk Owner (overall accountability): Infrastructure and Community Safety

Department: Infrastructure Maintenance

Current Controls in Place (What is Council now doing to manage this risk):

Control Description:	Control Type:
Provision of mobile phones to staff	Administrative
Provision of procedures, plant, equipment, training for staff attending on-call and emergencies	Administrative
Handheld CB devices – limited for localised comm's only	Engineering
Diversion of on-call phone to personal mobile/phone (if available)	Share

Analyse Risk with Current Controls:

Risk Assessment Form



Likelihood: Likely Consequence: Moderate Current Risk Rating: High

Effectiveness of Controls (please circle): Poor Moderate Good Excellent Not
Sure

Can additional controls be put in place to reduce this risk? (please circle) Yes No

Does the Risk require further treatment? (If YES, refer to Risk Treatment Plan) Yes No

Risk review date (maximum of twelve months): 30/09/2012

Risk Assessment completed by [REDACTED]
(name/s): _____

Maps of Telstra coverage in Bass Coast Shire 2014.

