

Trafinz Conference 2009
act now for tomorrow - turning vision into reality

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The Future of Road Policing in New Zealand

Deputy Commissioner Rob Pope
NZ Police

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Acknowledgements

- **Dr Jan White**
- International Speakers
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E nga mana
E nga reo
E rau rangatira ma. Tena koutou katoa

Introduction

It gives me a lot of pleasure to have this opportunity to talk to you today. It is not often that I am able to access a group with as much knowledge and influence around road safety matters and it is for this reason that I am especially pleased that I was able to be here with you.

I always appreciate the chance to 'talk traffic' with the experts and this conference also provides a rare gathering of such a wide range of interested and interesting individuals and groups that I could not pass it up.

What I would like to do this morning is take you on a brief journey into the future from a police perspective. Although we are here to "talk traffic" the issues cannot be separated out from the issues that face the rest of NZ Police nor indeed the rest of the community both nationally and internationally.

The "Future of Road Policing in New Zealand" is a topic that appears to be quite specific but in fact, Road Policing is inexorably tied to all other parts policing (despite muttering to the contrary in some quarters). The direction and future of Road Policing in New Zealand is the direction and future of New Zealand Police.

With this in mind, I plan to talk with you about how Police is looking towards the future and the planning that we are working our way through to ensure that NZ Police is as well - equipped as it can possibly be to face down the future squarely.

But first, a little recap - I would like to spend a few minutes giving some background around the thinking and internal planning in New Zealand Police and how it is evolving.

The last big philosophical shake - up we had was in 1992, when we initiated our Community Policing model. The vision set out in that first Strategic Plan was 'Safer Communities Together'. The vision encompassed the philosophy around community-centred policing and it has been a cornerstone of policing in New Zealand ever since.

It is important for you to understand that nothing has changed regarding this focus either. I think there is a tendency to operate in silos in large modern organisations and I am well aware that the road policing side of our business has suffered somewhat from this perception.

However, road policing remains firmly rooted within our community policing operations - after all as we know - for large sections of the community, the only contact they will ever have with Police is through Road Policing and the eyes and ears of the organisation are in our road policing operations. But our focus on community policing acknowledges that police can't do it all - our ability to prevent crime and road trauma relies on good partnerships with citizens and communities.

We have an international reputation for community policing. New Zealanders are known for finding innovative solutions, for thinking outside the box and for getting along with a wide range of people.

That focus continues, with renewed support from the Government and the promise of extra 600 police by the end of 2011. The Police Minister's expressed ambition is to enable police to become more fully immersed in their communities without compromising frontline services.

So far so good. The operational side of our business has evolved very well under that philosophy. But for some time, the business side of our operation has needed a rethink. The economic shocks of the last 12 months brought that to the fore. I'm sure many of you will empathise when I say that recession is the mother of innovation.

So the Police Executive had been looking at the need to develop a new business model for some time. Then economic circumstances and a new Government combined to give our discussion legs - pretty fast-moving legs too.

At that time, we were asked by Government to look at how we would make ourselves fit for the future. It was a privilege, under the circumstances, to be invited to outline *our* fixes to *our* challenges. It was a rare opportunity to apply our expertise and vision to secure substantial improvement in our culture, value and performance.

The process has been very informative. We've run workshops and had input from people at all levels of Police, and we now have a clear direction. We envisage a future-fit, victim-centred, information-enabled, responsive police service. That's a fair old wish list - so let me go over some of those in more detail.

Future fit: The Police has evolved over the last 120 years. The need to be effective is a given but it's apparent now, more than ever, that we must also be sustainable.

Crime and criminals don't stand still - we have to provide better services for the same money. Technology and smart, modern thinking are key. We are a large organisation and sometimes it takes a while for the cogs to turn but these economic times grant us a productive sense of urgency.

Victim centred: Traditionally, our focus has been on catching crooks. We will always do that, but we want to move the victim towards centre-stage, especially in terms of customer service. For example, we need to give victims the choice to be more involved as we deal with crimes against them, from recording, to the investigation and the final outcome. People want to know what's going on whether they are individuals or business owners. The bottom line should be public and victim safety.

Information-enabled: Technology has transformed the way we all do business. New opportunities pop up every day, and we can all see ways technology could help us work better.

None of us can do it all - there will always be a gap between what you could do and what you can do. If you struggle to keep up with technology, you can imagine what it's like for a national police agency where information security is a priority.

We can certainly see the potential of new and emerging technology and see how it could relieve our highly-trained staff of much tedious, low-level work.

The visions are enticing:

- the public, able to self-report basic complaints;
- victims assigned a unique number so they can check progress of their case online;
- court appearances made by video link where possible, saving the cost and risk of transport
- a state of the art patrol car, where constables can record fingerprints, issue summonses and process arrestees by the roadside.

The fourth item on the wish list - **responsive**. Everyone who contacts the police wants a satisfactory response. That's the point. Unfortunately, that's also the issue that seems most likely to cause the breakdown of successful partnerships between the public and police.

You have all heard stories of people feeling let down on many levels, from the taxi driver assaulted at 2am on a Saturday morning when police are too stretched to respond promptly, to the private investigators whose suspicions of organised crime are never investigated. These stories are also the ones that gain much traction in the media and public discussion options and of course, road policing has a really significant role to play here given as I said earlier, for many people, this is their only contact with Police.

If I may I digress a little here to mention also that while we are working to improve and enhance our responsiveness on all levels from the way we answer the phone, right up to the way the Commissioner communicates with the public, we ARE a very large organisation and we are also an organisation that by its very nature operates in crisis situations most of the time. This means we can never mitigate entirely against things going wrong, people not doing as they should or what we thought they would do. When you consider the number of contacts we have every day, and the types of contacts they usually are. But we are certainly on to it in terms of acting to ensure these incidents are minimised.

So those are four areas addressed in our Fit for Future project. This is not pie in the sky stuff, by the way - the time for that has passed. This is nuts and bolts.

We presented our initial plan at the end of July. That done, the Police Minister asked for more detailed work to be presented to Cabinet's Strategy Committee in October. This signals that like us, Government is serious about putting police on a sustainable footing.

But while this is all going along swimmingly, the world has changed around us. The shockwaves to the global economy have reverberated through all of New Zealand and Police cannot help but be affected. New Zealand fits pretty solidly into world trends and of course, this would be no different as we are all aware. This has significant implications for future planning and especially in the relation to our discussions here regarding Road Policing.

Given the pressure we are all under, we are doing better than many countries but still are far from the best. So - looking forward, how do we see the future for Road Policing? How does our planning fit within the wider community and policing planning.

A number of extremely successful European countries put their post-war energy and road safety money into engineering, whereas in New Zealand, we have put our emphasis on enforcement and modifying driver behaviour. We have tended to legislate for safety and this puts considerable pressure on Police to manage the issue. There is an

argument that suggests we may have taken this as far as we can and we should now consider engineering options more carefully as we consider whether we could sustain this policy in the light of the current situation.

As Police enforcement becomes increasingly specific and road policing becomes increasingly targeted, decisions must be made about where our efforts are concentrated. Are there new areas that we can concentrate on? Can we find new ways to be more effective?

In most developed countries, the road toll is now plateauing or increasing slightly and New Zealand is no different. While our road toll is decreasing in the long term, in the short term we are facing a rise in deaths and injuries. We also need to start looking more closely at hospitalizations as these are increasing alarmingly and the truth is, we have not introduced any significant new initiatives to warrant any real change in the rate at which people are dying on New Zealand roads.

Road Policing and crime

Road Policing staff are on New Zealand roads 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. Every year they contribute towards the almost two million police-issued notices for traffic offences and infringements. While on duty they carry out any number of traffic stops and cover thousands of kilometres in their travels.

The delivery of road policing therefore presents a perfect opportunity to assist in policing types of crime that are not traffic specific, particularly given the near universal use of motor vehicles as a mode of transport. As I mentioned earlier, our opportunity to link with the community while simultaneously keeping a weather eye out for the criminal fraternity - as they say - "*Police can't be everywhere but they can be anywhere!*"

There is an opportunity to influence what goes on in the community. We are there, and we have the resources. Road policing officers can make the community feel safer but we can also actually make communities safer and this effect is two-fold. We can reduce the risk of being killed or injured on the roads but at the same time, our very presence makes the community as a whole a safer place to be.

But - what does that really mean- a safer place to be? On the roads, it means a place where you can go about your lawful business without the fear that you will be killed. Where you can set off on a journey with a degree of certainty about arriving safely at the other end. We have made a commitment to a road toll of 200 - is that possible and then the big question is of course, is it enough?

Over the last few years, we have been saying that without significant new initiatives, we will not be able to make any significant change in the road toll. If we still believe this, how do we propose reaching these targets?

The Fatal Five

So – what will it be?? Do we change our focus from working to drive a change in behaviour to changing the environment. If we were to put all our energy (and money) into engineering, into ensuring that we had the safest roads, would that work? The safer systems approach to road safety has some compelling attractions and we need to consider this a part of our future planning but what else is there?

Another option could be to re-focus our efforts and concentrate them. In that context, what I would like to have a look at the "fatal five". Police policy to 2010 has been planned to focus on five categories of offending. We call these the "fatal five" and we consider that by putting our efforts into these offences, we will be able to get the best results.

They are:

- Speeding,
- Alcohol and Drugs,
- Failure to Wear Restraints,
- Dangerous and Careless Drivers (particularly intersections, failing to keep left, fatigue and distraction),
- High Risk Drivers (particularly DWD/unlicensed, young drivers, illegal street racing and recidivists).

We know that this is where the most deaths occur and this is where we can make the most significant difference. But, what if we were to concentrate on one group? For instance, put all our efforts in to policing high-risk drivers (as many people seem to want us to do) and put the minimum of effort into the rest ? We may save the lives of more young people, but will it be at the expense of another whole group in society?

Speeding

We put a huge proportion of our resources into both enforcement and advertising around controlling speed and there is some evidence to suggest that we are making headway. Average speeds have dropped significantly over the past few years and in fact 80 percent of open road drivers are now travelling at 96kmph.

Recent results in some Police Districts demonstrate some very encouraging results. They have reported that the numbers of motorists caught driving over the speed limit in the past year is well down on the past two years.

So – do we keep on working on reducing speed through enforcement and advertising – would that be enough?

Drink/drugged driving

But, while speed may be reducing and we are catching fewer speeding drivers, drink driving is increasing alarmingly. The reasons for this are complex and may well reflect the complexity of the society we now live in.

However what we do know is that the majority, in fact, 80% of drunk drivers are first offenders. This means that whilst recidivists are high risk, they are low in number. The biggest crash risk is from "the average" drunk Kiwi.

Recidivists will always form part of the population, and should be dealt with firmly, but focusing on them alone will not reduce overall crash numbers to any extent. There will always be those who simply are not deterred by penalties. Police are catching an extra 1,000 drunk drivers a year and the message is still not getting through to enough of the population. It is not enough to RARELY drive drunk, once is one time too many.

We also need to factor in the influence of drugged driving. The facts around drug driving are not particularly clear at the moment but the new legislation which will provide Police with better options to test for drugs, will be introduced on 1st November and will provide us with further options in making the roads safer for everyone.

Restraints

We have been very successful in encouraging the whole population to wear restraints but there are probably some people here who can still remember the bad old days. It has been suggested that the safety belt has saved more lives than any other road safety invention and we have seen that in the road safety gains we have made.

Police used to routinely see people who had been thrown from vehicles, and also people with horrific injuries from crashing through windscreens. It is not so much hitting the windscreen that does the damage; it is coming back through it as the vehicle slams to a stop. We don't get so many these days, thank goodness. Many drivers have also been killed or horrifically injured by their unrestrained passengers who are thrown around the inside of the vehicle.

The use of restraints in the rear seats has made a big difference also, and minimised the number of people being thrown right into the driver from behind. But – we are still getting people who die unnecessarily because they do not heed the message - can we save more here?

Dangerous/careless driving

And what about this group? Are they one group or a whole lot of different issues that we have conveniently lumped together and do we see them clearly? Pedestrians for instance – the popular view is that there are increasing pedestrian fatalities – is this the result of i-pods, mp3 players, cell phones and general distraction on the part of both driver and pedestrian? The statistics do not actually support this, in fact, in 2007 there were 45 pedestrian fatalities but in 2006, there were 44.

High -risk drivers

And then there are the "boy racers", the recidivists and all the other anti-social offenders that we love to blame. The rise in the size and activity of the "boy racer" community has been causing significant problems for Police in recent times. And while this group accounts for roughly 2% of the driving population, and 2% of the road toll, they take up roughly 20% of Road Police time in some areas.

"Boy racers" seem to be able to enrage a good half of the population and some of the rage is the age-old - "it must be those young people"- "in my day " - "it's them - not me" and all the other age-old denials. However, we cannot deny that we have significant issues here and ones that are taking up an enormous amount of our time. Legislation will be introduced later in the year which will assist Police in tackling the problem. Much of our advertising targets these young drivers and similarly our education programme- they are difficult to reach and difficult to influence but the fact remains that traffic crashes are the number one cause of death for under 35 year olds and this is a fact that we can neither ignore or view with complacency. Our efforts to reach and influence this group need to be innovative and consistent - not always easy.

Technology

So, these are our areas of focus - we want to keep our focus clear and retain the gains and strengths we have achieved but need to keep moving fast to absorb the changes that are happening around us. Technology will also be a significant factor in the way we consider policing in the future and will drive enormous change (and for some of us - keep us continually challenged - *twitter???*) .

I have already alluded to the increasing reliance on technology and of course, there are so many new options to consider that we need to remain extremely grounded when looking at future options. There are a number of technological options that will make a significant difference to the way road policing operates and also the way the driving public operates. What we want really want of course, is to minimise our intervention, to encourage personal responsibility from all drivers - our byline- *road safety is everyone's responsibly* is not just hollow rhetoric - it is what we are working towards. Technology will make this goal more attainable on a number of fronts and in turn make staff safer, make our operations more efficient and provide desirable cost efficiencies.

There are a number of examples but a couple that stand out are Intelligent Speed Assistance Systems which puts the onus on the individual and each specific journey, ANPR which provides recognition of individual vehicles and factory fitted interlocks which provide protection from drunk drivers.

We are also considering SMART - Secure Mobile Access Reporting Technology, which provides an electronic connection between the officer on the road and other police electronic systems allowing for huge efficiencies in

the way offenders are processed and their offences recorded. We are working our way through the issues in introducing a trial of this next year.

As you will appreciate, the requirement for these innovations to be secure presents an extra layer of pressure on us and as I said earlier, what we would like to do is not always what we can do life's like that.....

Conclusion

These are unprecedented times for Police, for Government, and the global economy. The Government's Safer Journeys Strategy. launched only two weeks ago is giving us pause and providing some real opportunities to consider changes that take the community with us.

As I said at the outset, community policing is our bag - we are good at it and it we want to keep on being good at it and I mean community policing in the widest sense. In Road Policing we have always had issues with keeping the community alongside what we are doing, and understanding why we do it. The Safer Journeys strategy provides a real chance to get this right.

I am sure some of you are much more familiar with it than I am actually, but the issues that are up for discussion are the real nub of some of the issues that the community really does worry about - blood alcohol levels, the driving age, compulsory third party insurance (something that has been raised many times in the past and here is an opportunity to really consider this), speed zones, speed cameras, the penalties for drink driving. There are others of course, as you know but these are really meaty issues, things people want to have some input into.

So, what do we know? What can we be certain about? - well - when it comes to the future, not too much really but forward planning, by a forward looking organisation is the reality we are living - and after the last few years of solid, foundational development, we have been swiftly kicked into crisis mode.

We can handle it. In fact, I think we can thrive on it. Our organisation is well positioned for change. Our people are highly skilled and capable - we have a real foundation of positive professional road policing and innovation throughout the organisation as a whole to draw on and lead the change.

These are exciting times, Police is an action oriented-organisation and we are facing the challenge squarely.

Watch this space ---

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