

May 2016

Coffs Harbour Bellingen Nambucca Community Transport

CASE STUDY

*Safe driving at work: Taking care of
those who care for others*

Employees: 100

Fleet: 33



NRSP
NATIONAL ROAD SAFETY PROGRAM

**PARTNERSHIP
PROGRAM**

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Organisation: Coffs Harbour Bellingen Nambucca Community Transport
No. of Staff: 100
Fleet: 33



Case Study:

Taking care of our own - work driving the most significant safety issue

Key Outcomes:

- Senior management buy-in and fleet safety being identified as the most significant WHS risk in the organisation are critical factors in maximising work driving safety
- Managing motor vehicle safety using safety management system principles and procedures, including identifying and addressing hazards, is effective
- Adopt a safety management systems approach that is appropriate to the size, extent and unique driving safety risk management environment
- Engaging all key stakeholders in the safety risk management process and in creating opportunities for input promotes engagement with and support for initiatives
- Create an effective safety risk culture that involves all participants in the operation and maintenance of the fleet in identifying solutions
- Continuously review driving safety risk management systems and embrace opportunities to address issues as they arise.

Synopsis:

Like many organisations, work driving safety is the most significant safety issue for a community transport provider in northern NSW. A focus on ensuring safe drivers operating in safe vehicles has improved service and the bottom line while helping take care of those who care for others in our community.

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Introduction

The key strategy that underpins a strong safety culture and performance for Coffs Harbour Bellingen Nambucca Community Transport is adopting a workplace health and safety (WHS) approach to work driving safety.

Work driving safety is addressed as the most significant safety risk facing the organisation and is therefore at the forefront of senior management focus,

with the Board, CEO, Managers and staff all strongly committed to ensuring the organisation achieves high standards of work driving safety.

While the organisation did have driving safety measures in place, there was no real system-wide approach that identified key safety risks and implemented a holistic safe system to effectively manage driving safety hazards. It has now given work driving the highest WHS priority, focussing on the safe and efficient operation of the motor vehicle fleet in a manner that satisfies the duty of care required by WHS legislation.

The organisation's WHS Committee meets bimonthly to address all work health and safety issues. The Fleet Manager is also the WHS Manager and has full operational responsibility for work driving operations and maintenance as well as driving safety outcomes.

Organisation overview

Based on the NSW mid-north coast, Coffs Harbour, Bellingen and Nambucca Community Transport (CBNCT) is a not-for-profit organisation that provides community transport assistance for people who are frail, aged, disabled or have difficulty accessing ordinary public transport.

CBNCT employs 80 volunteer and 8 paid drivers and operates 33 vehicles ranging from mini buses and sedans to personal vehicles as well as contracted services for buses and taxis. A mix of sedans and buses, the vehicles are mostly for "door to door" transport for health related appointments as well as social and shopping activities.

Clients are often elderly and may have a disability sometimes requiring wheelchair access. Clients live in suburban as well as rural settings including dirt road access in steep terrains.

Another 15 personnel provide management, administration and technical services. Funding is provided under the Commonwealth Home Support Program, Community Care Support Program, Community Transport Program along with passenger contributions and other community grants.



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Making road safety everyone's concern

The starting point for CBNCT's increased focus on work driving safety was the Fleet Manager initiating a whole of system WHS approach to improving driving safety, involving all stakeholders including clients, drivers, technical support, admin staff and senior management. Road safety was made a constant safety issue at the forefront for all staff involved in delivering community transport related activities, including staff who didn't drive vehicles.

Vehicle driving safety was previously left to drivers to manage whereas now

the organisation as a whole "owns" fleet safety as a key issue requiring everybody's constant attention.



For example, drivers were encouraged to raise issues such as upcoming roadworks and provide input into developing communication systems to ensure all drivers were aware of hazards; administration staff were invited to contribute ideas where there was a safety related issue; and a newsletter was created to share information on different aspects of fleet operation, including safety related matters.

CBNCT has developed effective solutions to road safety issues as they arose. The starting point was strong CEO and Board support and appreciation of fleet safety significance as a major issue for WHS. This has led to comprehensive policies and procedures directed at driving operations.

The Safety program outlines in some detail the many operational components and the relevant mandated safety elements to optimise safety in all aspects of fleet operations.

The Fleet Manager also coordinates the WHS Committee and the WHS meetings include representatives of drivers and staff, meetings are rotated around each of the offices in Coffs Harbour, Bellingen and Nambucca

Along with making driver safety a company-wide goal, a safe systems approach, with a particular emphasis on safe drivers and safe vehicles, underpins CBNCT's focus on work driver safety.

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Safe drivers

CBNCT has increased its focus on ensuring high and consistent driving standards across its volunteer and professional driving group.

Introducing a more formal and structured training and education program was the first step in raising driving safety standards. As well as theory and practical training, the organisation developed a training DVD that outlined key issues and included practices required for safe and competent driving.

Regular driver safety assessments support the training program and the organisation also implemented wheelchair safety awareness training for all drivers transporting wheelchair bound passengers.



Training and education

Previously, informal and unstructured induction and training of drivers resulted in inadequate standards and inconsistent competency across the volunteer driver group. In conjunction with drivers, the management team established a more rigorous program structured to address consistency and standards of driving safety. The first step is a briefing for the new driver and explanation of the induction manual, which contains policy, procedures, performance standards and documentation to be completed before volunteers are allowed to drive.

Following this is a practical session where the driver accompanies an experienced and competent driver to observe first-hand driving and customer relations tasks. Subject to completion of the required documentation, the driver then transports a small number of clients on a transport operation. Once confident, the driver commences transport and associated duties with regular follow up during the induction process.

Another safe driver training initiative was a professionally developed 15-minute training DVD to give a clear presentation of the key issues contained in the induction manual, including practices required for safe and competent driving and customer service operations. The video has been uploaded to [YouTube](#) to benefit other organisations undertaking similar activities.

CBNCT also established an online WHS initiative aimed at enhancing the culture of safety in the workplace. The program is delivered online to all drivers and technical support personnel. This training program incorporates fatigue, drug and alcohol awareness and defensive driving segments along with any other relevant training packages.

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Driver safety checks

CBNCT management identified its process to ensure safe driving standards for drivers and recruits was not rigorous nor properly documented, leading to inconsistency in competency levels.

As a key tool to ensure safe driving outcomes, a driving safety check was developed with application to all drivers, staff and managers, including the CEO. Bus drivers are assessed every 2 years and drivers of sedans every 3 years. The 60-minute assessment is undertaken by an accredited regional driver training organisation.

The assessor takes drivers over a standard route and assesses the driver for knowledge of road rules, speed management and safe driving style. Each driver is advised if they are "competent" or "not competent" and the report is held by the Fleet Manager. Drivers judged "not competent" are offered 3 hours driver training at company expense. If the driver does not then pass the test they are deemed unsuitable for driving duties. Drivers who refuse the test are released from driving duties.

This initiative increases drivers' credibility as they have been assessed as competent; passengers can be confident in their driver's skills; and it also provides a record of the driver's ability in the event of an accident investigation. As an additional regulatory measure, CBNCT requires bus drivers to be registered under the NSW Government Bus Driver Authority scheme.

Wheelchair safety awareness

Previously passengers experienced safety and comfort concerns when seated in a wheelchair on the bus as the vehicle manoeuvred in traffic. To address this issue, the Fleet Manager arranged wheelchair safety awareness training for all drivers transporting wheelchair bound passengers.

Firstly, drivers were transported as wheelchair passengers so that they understood the impact of their driving styles. Drivers were required to utilise a wheelchair as would a client to embark and disembark the bus by the wheelchair lift. Additionally, drivers were positioned in wheelchairs and anchored to the bus floor (as per normal for wheelchair passengers) and then instructed to place their hands palms up on their lap to simulate a passenger with limited use of limbs. Within speed limits and road rules, the vehicle was then driven harshly – taking roundabouts at higher than usual speed and driving on the edge of the road surfaces, for example – so drivers could experience the impacts of erratic driving on passenger comfort and stability.

The drivers were then transported in the same wheelchairs over the same route, this time with a smooth driving style to feel the difference in comfort and safety. All drivers and the Fleet Manager, coordinators and the CEO undertook this experiential learning course. After the training, all drivers modified their driving to a smooth gentle style when transporting wheelchair passengers, with drivers saying they were not aware of how the passenger felt.

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Safe vehicles

The safety integrity of vehicles has been a key focus with proven safety technologies, including ABS brakes and skid control, installed in vehicles. The fleet is kept relatively young with regular turnover of vehicles.

The Fleet Manager is responsible for work driving operations and maintenance as well as driving safety outcomes. Vehicle service providers are aware of CBNCT's important role in the community and a culture of best practice has been established with these providers.

They ensure vehicles are serviced competently and attend to repairs before there is ever a safety issue. Tyres are continually monitored by drivers, service providers and the Fleet Manager and are replaced whenever there are signs of reaching tyre wear limits.

CBNCT's focus on safe vehicles also saw the cleaning of bus roofs arise as a safety issue. Drivers were trying to wash the roof of buses and raised concerns about stretching and reaching as a WHS issue, requesting scaffolding as a solution. However, this meant drivers would be working at heights with potential for serious injury if a driver fell. After a thorough analysis showed roof cleaning could not be made safe, approval was granted to wash bus sides only and not the bus roof.

Safe roads

While CBNCT has little influence on the condition of roads its vehicles operate on, introduction of a 'no driveway' policy reflects its commitment to do everything within its power to improve road safety.

Following several property damage claims arising from vehicle and property damage incurred while manoeuvring in driveways at client premises, the policy was created to ensure safety for passengers and drivers as well as reducing the risk of property damage.

In cases where passenger mobility issues makes it necessary to enter driveways, the Assets and Safety Manager uses Google Earth and onsite inspections to assess the situation for risks. Typical issues include driveway construction, surface, obstacles, safe pickup/set down areas and road access. The passenger's level of mobility is also assessed as well as the type of vehicle which could access the site. Only when the driveway meets the safety criteria is it approved for use by CBNCT.



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Improved safety, reduced costs

The clearest measure of how effective CBNCT's increased focus on work driver safety has been the decline in the rate of driving related incidents and accidents. All motor vehicle safety related events are captured as part of the WHS incident dataset and this data is brought to the attention of staff, the CEO and Board.

CBNCT has maintained a low level of vehicle related safety incidents with a continued downward trend in incident rates despite the number of kilometres the fleet travels doubling in five years and total vehicle trips increasing by 15 per cent, as demonstrated in Table 1.

Results have been verified by the independent driver training provider who undertakes the annual assessment process. The trainer has advised that CBNCT maintains good levels of driving safety awareness and that safety awareness training outcomes for annual driver tests has improved significantly with virtually all results rated as of "good" standard; there are no "fails" and only one or two "satisfactory" results.

The significant focus on safety has also been a key factor in the organisation's positive reputation and strong credibility in the community and among clients. Drivers value the safe workplace provided and, as such, become a committed part of CBNCT with a significant number of drivers giving many years of service.

Table 1

Year	WHS events	Vehicle incident reports	Driver responsible*	Total vehicle trips	Total km driven
2009/2010	22	13	9	73,396	542,666
2010/2011	38	18	9	73,396	563,701
2011/2012	49	7	2	77,011	595,828
2012/2013	33	13	8	81,373	875,131
2013/2014	43	19	8	83,757	1,060,427

*all were minor damage manoeuvring non-injury events related to reversing.

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Culture overcomes barriers

Developing a strong road safety culture across the organisation has been the foundation of CBNCT's positive safety performance. This has been driven by creating a set of behaviours to communicate that driving safety is important to the organisation.

Ultimately the focus has been about creating a belief in the whole organisation,

and especially those involved directly with drivers, vehicles and driving-related activities,

that it places high value on safe driving outcomes.

Management practices and attitudes reflect the belief that road safety is a fundamental aspect of how CBNCT operates. Management has also elevated WHS to be the first item for discussion at all CBNCT meetings and this has been included in the organisation's strategic plan.



Engaging all staff to attend regular WHS meetings underscores the safety priority and increased training and education, plus annual driving safety competence testing, demonstrates that safety is valued.

A strong commitment to communication with all relevant staff, including those who communicate with drivers by phone, as well as those who provide contractual work to CBNCT such as mechanics and other technical support, also reinforces the focus on safety.

This strong culture of openness, reinforced by the ability of drivers and other stakeholders to be involved in developing solutions, promotes awareness of safe practices, increases motivation to participate in those practices and has helped overcome scepticism about particular interventions proposed.

All safety stakeholders are kept informed of intended changes to systems and practices, primarily through WHS toolbox meetings, and a complete report of all driving safety-related issues is presented at each Board meeting.

Ultimately, the driver team was provided with a genuine organisation-wide commitment to safety and that has served to motivate safe behaviours.

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Key outcomes

The major mechanism that has led to a mature safety approach to improving driving related work safety has been recognition that work driving is the major safety risk in the workplace. With this in mind, CBNCT has given work driving safety top priority in workplace safety. WHS is the first item on the agenda of all toolbox talks and is the major focus of safety in Board meetings.

Safety initiatives have provided driver volunteers a safe environment to serve their community as well as safer transport outcomes for passengers.

This is illustrated by the downward trend in frequency and severity of vehicle driving safety events.

CBNCT's driving service has also enabled elderly drivers whose driving skills may have been difficult to maintain to surrender their driving licence without losing their independence. It joined with other community service providers in a "life after licences" campaign, which informed elderly drivers of the options available to them when deciding to surrender their driver's licence.

Client response to safety initiatives has been positive, as they have improved driving safety outcomes, and service providers who service and repair CBNCT vehicles are aware of its commitment to safety and advise any upcoming issues that may need attention before the next service. These issues are dealt with as a matter of priority.

Involvement of all staff and volunteers in actively taking responsibility for work driving safety, has become a cultural norm.

CBNCT's key advice to organisations wanting to improve work driving safety is to establish work driving as the organisation's most significant safety hazard and manage the issue according to WHS driving safety good practice.

