

November 2017

Gippsland Safe Freight Network

Local collaborative approach to road safety goes national

Members: 40 companies

Drivers: 2,000+

CASE STUDY



NRSPP
NATIONAL ROAD SAFETY

PARTNERSHIP
PROGRAM

Organisation: Gippsland Safe Freight Network

Members: 40 companies

Drivers: 2,000+



*South Gippsland
Shire Council*

Case Study:

Drivers, operators and government: the network approach to road safety

Key Outcomes:

- Creating regional networks that involve drivers, owners and government authorities can successfully address specific transport safety issues within those regions
- Actions need to be informed by crash data and other relevant research to ensure responses are effective in addressing what is actually happening on the ground
- Often drivers and operators are not involved in discussions about safety; involving those at the frontline increases engagement and the practicality of outputs
- The first step in establishing an effective network is developing a contact list that ensures all stakeholders are involved, including all local industries, government agencies and local road safety experts
- The success of the network approach rests on targeting specific regional areas and issues, sharing information and the willingness of participants to engage with the process, something they are more likely to do if they feel their input is valued.

Synopsis:

Taking a local approach that brings drivers, owners, government agencies and local councils together to identify and address specific transport safety concerns has been so successful in a regional corner of Australia that the safe freight network model is being rolled out nationally.

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Introduction

Given the quantity and quality of the rural roads in the Gippsland State road network and the extensive local road network that supports heavy transport, it came as no surprise that the Victorian region had a history of above state average crash rates.

Over representation of heavy vehicles in casualty crashes in Gippsland was high cause for concern, with one in five casualty crashes involving a truck, and rollover crashes were quite common, with South Gippsland averaging one rollover every three weeks.

Analysis of the problem revealed some interesting causes and prompted a region-wide response that began with a willingness by all sectors of the industry to come together to deal with the issue.

The beginning was a safety forum hosted by VicRoads and the South Gippsland Shire Council in 2010. It was called as result of the high number of truck rollovers in the South Gippsland area and an absolute commitment by this Council to support the industry to develop initiatives to reduce the collisions and develop local solutions. At the same time, the log freight industry in East Gippsland was working on similar issues with VicRoads and had, with colleagues in South Gippsland, developed a training package.

Presentation of that material at the South Gippsland forum sparked interest in developing a broader network focused on the safety of truck drivers.

There was also a feeling that overall coordination was needed, with individual sectors taking responsibility for their own patch meeting with limited success. Some also felt they were being left on their own to deal with problems.

Other key groups, such as Victoria Police and VicRoads, were largely excluded from discussions rather than being partners in developing solutions.

The long haul

It was clear ongoing involvement from all parties with a stake in the transport industry and the road network would be required to create long term change.

The result was the Gippsland Safe Freight Network (Safe Freight), which had its first meeting in 2011. The first step was to scope the size of the safety problem and identify the key issues. Merging Victorian Police crash data and TAC casualty crash data and analysing the results provided insights into crash frequency and causes and identified the most common type of crashes.

From the first meeting, analysis of crash data identified common ground across the network, including:

- Road conditions at the time of the crash
- Loading of trucks
- Driver's perception of speed and dynamics of the truck immediately before the crash, and
- Types of car drivers involved in the crashes.

The Gippsland Safe Freight Network has grown to include 40 companies across Gippsland, representing several hundred trucks and 2000 local drivers, and its local success is being replicated nationally.

From an industry point of view, the imperative for safety is twofold: employers have an obligation and duty of care to their employees; the second is the incentive to remain competitive while keeping costs down.

Keeping trucks upright is cheaper than losing them in crashes

and there are reputational benefits for companies at the forefront of safety, such as being considered an employer of choice for drivers, a commercial advantage in a competitive environment where good truck drivers are hard to find.

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Partnership approach to safety

Partnerships between industry members and the wider community, like the Gippsland Safe Freight Network, offer a significant opportunity to improve the safety, productivity and wellbeing of the transport industry.

In addition to improving safety for the local industry and community and engaging key stakeholders, the benefits of such partnerships include:

- shared resources;
- access to broader networks, differing skill sets and a wealth of information and data;
- sharing of knowledge, information and practices;
- improved industry efficiency and quality of industry outcomes; and
- shared risk.

Since 2010, this model has proven extremely effective in providing accurate information about safer systems of operations as well as changing the culture of workplaces to ensure that safety becomes embedded in the businesses.

The approach in Gippsland focused on 'keeping it local' and setting up a number of smaller groups that link to each other rather than having one network covering a large geographic area. The Gippsland Safe Freight Network is made up of five distinct chapters based loosely on economic interest, geography and local government areas.

For the partnership approach to safety to be effective, groups should be based around a local area and one that is central and accessible. Groups should include those with a direct interest in the industry, such as owners, drivers and receivers, and those who work directly to enforce laws and regulations, including police, road authorities and local governments. Other interested parties may include equipment manufacturers, covering truck companies, the accessory industry and maintenance.

Having a local focus also results in bringing people on board who know their own 'patch' intimately, bringing history, experience and local knowledge to the table. Any iteration of a safety network should endeavour to have all these bases represented.

In essence, a road safety network is a simple process designed to engage those people who can contribute and are willing to learn from each other, with the focus being on the issue of safety.



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Links in the chain

Safe Freight is made up of five smaller networks centred on their own specific geographic area, coming together regularly as one large network to share information and concerns.

The majority of each network's membership is employer representatives, often company owners, who between them may employ and be responsible for more than a thousand drivers in the region and several thousand across Victoria. They represent the various road freight transport sectors, including livestock, general freight, food produce, farm vehicles, quarry and mining.

Like employer representatives, Industry Safety Officers may also be responsible for hundreds if not thousands of drivers, depending on the role they play and the size of their company. They are responsible for the safe operation of fleets and have a core role in ensuring the Chain of Responsibility within a company is being followed.

Critically, each network also has representation from Government agencies including local police highway patrol, VicRoads, Local Government and, from time to time, WorkSafe.

Initially, network meetings occurred monthly. As technology has allowed for greater consultation by electronic means, face-to-face meetings have reduced to quarterly. Each meeting is hosted by either the local council or at a suitable local venue; sharing a meal is a common element of all meetings.

Topics to be discussed are decided by working through a report process and identified issues as they arise. Typically Police and VicRoads collision data reports, combined with local safety concerns and industry near-miss reports, drive the agenda.

Meeting formats always include an around-the-table session so information can be shared about safety initiatives and concerns. The areas of discussion are broadly divided between issues relating to road infrastructure; driver safety training; and vehicle safety equipment and speed issues. While discussion generally centres on road safety, occasionally broader issues and how they impact safety are discussed, such as a Monash Freeway trail that reduced truck speeds to 90kmh.

A member of the network facilitates each of the smaller networks. In South Gippsland, for example, it is the shire's road safety officer and in East Gippsland and Latrobe local Police facilitate discussions with support from councils.

Sitting over these networks is a single part time role that provides administration support and follow-up. This position is funded through a VicRoads grant and, in recent times, has been supported through the NHVR.

Thankyou to our partners



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On the ground outcomes

The major outcome of Safe Freight has been the development of local round table safety networks with a major focus on and investment by individuals and companies in developing safer systems for their drivers.

Local initiatives have been effective in supporting other road users, such as near-miss reporting systems that support drivers by improving capturing of their on-road experiences.

The relationships formed with Victoria Police, VicRoads Transport Safety Services officers and Local Governments have seen enormous goodwill developed. This has meant issues around line-of-sight and near misses with other drivers, for example, have direct to driver timely action.

This is in addition to daily operational issues when two different transport types work in the same space. In this case, protocols have been developed between industries to ensure safer outcomes for other drivers as well as vehicle operators.

The main outcomes of Safe Freight include:

- Improvements in safety and compliance with a wider range of operators, particularly those who operate outside the areas normally covered by industry peak groups, such as farm trucks and private fleets not for hire.
- Support for new drivers and learners through supporting driver education initiatives and forums.
- Older drivers forums supported by truck drivers, with formal links to the presenters of these programs to ensure the involvement of the heavy vehicle industry.

- Safety days that are open to the general public so they gain confidence and understanding of the safe systems approach used by industry.
- The Truckies Light Up For Safety Campaign, which has grown to a program of national significance.
- In-vehicle camera systems that were first explored by the network's partners and went on to win a National Industry Safety Award for innovation in road safety. New trailer designs and load restraint systems developed by network members have also been recognised in industry awards.

The Safer Freight approach has taken the industry from a low point in 2009 where 40 per cent of crashes were fatal, and the majority of casualty crashes in the area involved trucks, to fatal crashes reducing to 1 in 10.

The success of the Gippsland approach has resulted in funding through the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator (NHVR) to develop and expand the Safe Freight model across Australia, starting in key accident hot spots. The first will be focused on Mount Isa, in Queensland, to address high crash rates on the Barkly Highway.



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Truckies Light Up For Safety

This project was initiated by the East Gippsland and Wellington chapters of Safe Freight as a result of the high number of casualty crashes occurring in their regions involving older drivers and trucks.

Research into the issue revealed that the causes revolved around the physical appearance of a truck to an older driver.

This led to a highly effective three month trial where truck companies encouraged their drivers to turn on their headlights. Using effective internal communication channels, companies were also able to educate drivers on some of the issues older drivers face, such as seeing objects as they age and judging the speed of oncoming vehicles.

The Truckies Light Up For Safety campaign also had an extensive public information and communication package supported by VicRoads, including signage, billboards, television and variable message sign (VMS) boards.

The trial was so successful, all fleet operators across the State who had been involved ordered new fleet be fitted with daytime running lights and many retrofitted daytime running lights to their existing fleet.

For owner operators not part of large fleet operations, VicRoads Transport Safety Services (TSS) officers discussed the issue with drivers directly through truck safety days and roadside stops.

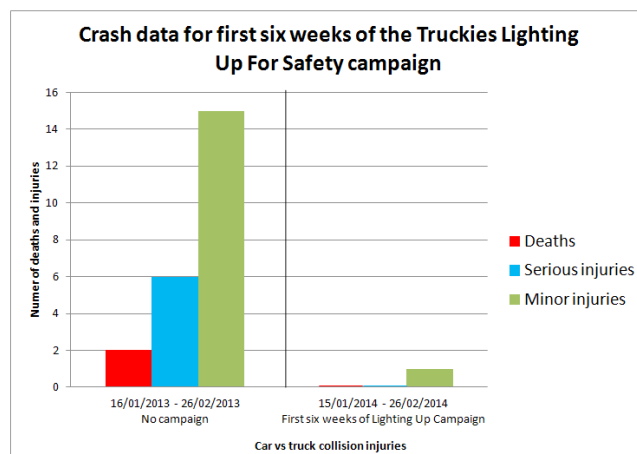
While not a major issue in other areas, the campaign was still supported and adopted by each Safe Freight network, which also meant drivers from outside the region had a better appreciation of the dangers they faced in the Gippsland region.



While the program was developed to achieve greater awareness of trucks in the broader driving community, it also was monitored in each of the participating companies to see if drivers noticed behavioural change in other road users.

Results from the first six weeks of the campaign showed that compared to the same period the previous year there was a remarkable decrease in casualty crashes between cars and trucks, with no fatal or serious injury crashes recorded during the trial, compared to eight the previous year. Truck rollovers have also reduced from one every three weeks to around three a year.

So a relatively simple idea in one section of the network resulted in a huge reduction in casualty crashes, investment in new safety infrastructure by fleet managers, and a mechanism to work collaboratively across a large region to deal with a specific local concern.



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Rollover prevention

Increasing truck rollovers in South Gippsland resulted in VicRoads TSS hosting a major forum to discuss the issue, giving rise to a group of concerned companies and drivers, along with local police, coming together to focus on the issue.

Further workshops were held with drivers and fleet operators to increase awareness of rollovers. The awareness program included local guests who had experienced rollovers and technical experts who discussed rollovers and how to avoid them.

The process focused on engagement and discussion with drivers about roads they used daily and allowed drivers to express their concerns as well as familiarise themselves with issues contributing to truck rollovers.

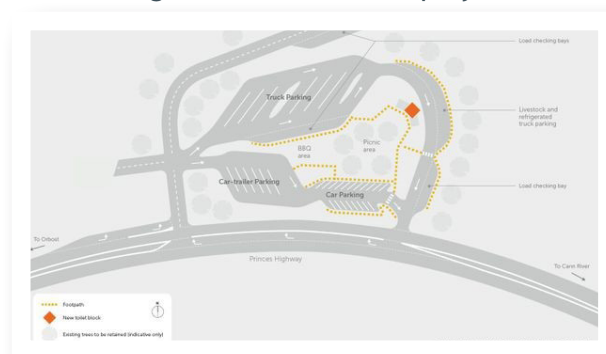
Many companies have incorporated the rollover training package into driver induction programs, with the training giving drivers a clearer understanding of the role loading plays in keeping a truck upright.

The project helped drive a dramatic reduction in crash rates in South Gippsland across all transport types and has served as a model for other areas to tackle the same issue, with the process since repeated several times in eastern Australia.

Analysis showed that 1000 drivers in the region had rolled 32 trucks in the year before the training; 900 of those drivers received rollover training and the following year the number of roll overs reduced by more than a third to 20. The 100 drivers not trained were responsible for the other 12 rollovers – in other words, 10% of drivers rolled 60% of the trucks – reinforcing the effectiveness of the rollover training.

Roadside rest areas

The advent of various Safe Freight chapters across Gippsland has resulted in infrastructure being developed in partnership with industry, with several examples of the networks supporting, and in some cases initiating, new infrastructure projects.



Poor fatigue management is a major contributing factor in truck crashes across the industry. In Gippsland, the industry proactively identified the significant issue of a lack of suitable rest areas for trucks.

The produce grown and made in Gippsland heads out in trucks, with many journeys crossing regions before entering NSW from the south. It was identified that crashes occurred in a cluster and that fatigue may have been a contributing factor.

The issue was discussed at the East Gippsland and Wellington chapters as well other networks and it was felt that an upgrade of an existing rest area in East Gippsland would enable drivers to plan a rest break. An exclusive area for truck parking was included as part of the upgrade to separate trucks and tourist visitors.

The outcome has been an excellent facility at Murrungowar funded in part by government, demonstrating an effective use of resources in upgrading existing infrastructure to address identified issues.

This contrasts to previous infrastructure development that was done largely in isolation. The lack of stakeholder or industry input meant local issues were often overlooked and infrastructure developed without discussion with the people it aimed to benefit.

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Truck safety days

Truck safety days have provided opportunities for the heavy vehicle industry to learn and share information as well as bringing together all parties involved in the freight task, including Victoria Police, VicRoads and safety equipment manufacturers.

As well as showcasing the latest technology, the days are particularly useful for owner operators and driver groups not part of peak organisations and provide a rare opportunity for industry to discuss concerns with the people who administer the systems.

For example, driver fatigue management and the systems around work diaries are complex and safety days have allowed drivers to discuss the requirements of work diaries with the people charged with enforcing the requirements.

The most important aspect to these days has been the willingness of industry to share safety knowledge. For example, one company developed safer systems for log restraint and proudly demonstrated in free workshops how the systems work. Another had looked at how the centre of gravity on trailers could be reduced and developed new designs for logging cartage trailers. Shared across industry through the Safe Freight network, truck safety days have discussed:

- GPS tracking of vehicles
- Trailer design and manufacturing
- Daytime running lights on all vehicles
- Roll over protection technology
- Roll over prevention and loader training
- Weight management
- Road infrastructure improvements
- In-vehicle camera systems, and
- Load restraint systems.

Best of both worlds

While each Safe Freight regional group has developed independently, they have done so at the same time and enjoy common links through facilitators and industry champions. This cross-jurisdictional aspect has allowed each network to receive support from another and resulted in access to a wider range of expertise informing solutions.

Even though issues are more prominent in some areas, mutual support has always been provided around projects. This can work both ways, allowing safety initiatives developed outside an area to be introduced or adapted for a new audience.

This structure has also allowed unintended consequences, where solving one problem creates another for others, to be identified. For example, the introduction of wire rope barriers to address run off issues used up an emergency stopping lane, introducing a new hazard by removing an emergency stopping area. Through feedback, subsequent wire ropes no longer take the space of the emergency stopping lane but still address the initial hazard, making the whole road system safer.

Another key feature of the Gippsland approach is that the model has been developed primarily for safer outcomes for drivers, and this remains the priority of the various Safe Freight chapters. Focusing on those at the coal face of the transport industry has benefited infrastructure developers, which is particularly important where local knowledge is required, and usually results in better decisions and fewer compromises.



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CHALLENGES AND BARRIERS

Geographic challenges

Covering about one-third of Victoria, the Gippsland region has an extremely diverse economy. It is literally the powerhouse of Victoria, harnessing vast quantities of brown coal that is burnt in the region in three of the largest power stations in the country.



The region is rich in produce from the vast array of market gardens and provides huge quantities of Australia's dairy needs and exports. A paper industry produces paper for Australia and the world as well as hardwood timber and fishing industries. The heavy vehicle industry plays a massive part in transporting cattle, bulk liquids and general freight, ensuring everything from dairy pick-ups on farms to moving logs in the High Country and produce out of the region.

There is a freeway outside of Melbourne which runs until Morwell. Past this point, there is a divided carriage way through Traralgon with significant divided road upgrades being conducted by VicRoads through to Sale. Roads have been divided into A and B class routes, with many of the B class routes supporting huge volumes of freight traffic across terrain that ranges from long flat areas to narrow mountain passes. Seasonal pressure from tourist traffic in summer to access the Eastern beaches and lakes, as well as the Sapphire Coast in NSW, adds to the pressure. During the winter months, the snowfields also create weekend peaks. These roads are also popular with retirees.



All this diverse activity, which brings cars and trucks together in a compact area on an aging road network, presents significant challenges for operators in the region and for Safer Freight networks.

Best of both worlds

The size and diverse nature of the Gippsland region made bringing all the 'moving parts' together a significant challenge.

Within industry, companies operating across disparate industries and those in similar industries being competitors presented challenges. Although their contribution has been vital, government agencies work to different timeframes and priorities to industry, presenting a significant challenge to bringing all the groups together.

The major initial barrier to participation was ensuring Safer Together gatherings occurred at times convenient to industry. This recognises the fact that industry volunteers their time to come to the table and participation may actually cost them in lost revenue, so meeting times had to be set to minimise impact on their business, usually after hours. This also recognises that the key stakeholders that must be at the table are owners/managers and drivers of the trucks.

Public servants, including police, VicRoads and local government representatives, are recompensed for attending Safer Freight meetings. However those representatives are still required to give up their own time and work outside normal hours to accommodate the needs of freight operators.

Trust was another major initial barrier, with the relationship between heavy vehicle operators and law enforcement traditionally viewed as 'them and us'.

Working together for safer outcomes for all road users needed a shift in mindset and a commitment on both sides to work constructively. Law enforcement needed to view the forum as an opportunity to communicate their concerns and companies needed to feel their efforts were recognised and their input valued.

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KEYS TO SUCCESS

Staying in touch

Communication is a key area that determines the success or failure of initiatives like Safe Freight. In this case, communication between and with members, as well as with the broader communities, has been a key driver of the network's success.

Members are kept informed about their networks and its activities through attendance at meetings as well as information and proposed actions being distributed via email.

Easy access to SMS and private messaging services has allowed drivers and operators to remain in touch through their smartphones.

In more remote areas, toolbox meetings allow members to discuss concerns and issues, and members willingly share and engage with each other's expertise to provide peer-to-peer training. This was how the roll over training program began.

Information is distributed internally and externally through closed and open social media groups and the [Safer Freight Networks Australia website](#). Important information such as discussions on changes to laws impacting truck driving have been tracked to include several thousand more people through social media sites.

External communication is also provided through member organisations relaying meeting outcomes to appropriate parties. Some are very specific, such as identified line of sight issues that would be discussed with road managers, and others such as near miss reports may be taken up with Victoria Police and the parties involved for educative purposes.

The greater good

The attitude of all parties involved has been a key factor in overcoming challenges and driving the success of Safer Freight. Industry has responded enthusiastically and come together around issues of concern, such as frequent rollovers, single vehicle run off road crashes, and concerns around crash types involving car drivers.

Government agencies, in particular VicRoads through its Transport Safety Services officers and Victoria Police through its Highway Patrol and Heavy Vehicle Units, have been prepared to work toward a better understanding while highlighting the major issues they see in their daily work. Council representatives have been engaged in the process and, in many cases, taken the lead in organising and administering local groups.

Converting that positive sentiment into action has not been difficult, as implementation was seen as low cost and high impact by a membership that takes ownership and responsibility for the response. Companies already know how to convert ideas into action – that is how many came to exist – so making initiatives happen is what they do every day.

Initiatives were industry driven while remaining in harmony with the broader objectives of evidence based road safety initiatives and initial safety objectives were kept simple and worked only on one safety aspect at a time.

Close monitoring by network facilitators using project management tools keeps projects moving forward.

Industry peak organisations are also good at rewarding good practices in relation to safety. Awards and external recognition boost company reputations and the success of the various initiatives has encouraged many to get on board.

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LESSONS AND LEARNINGS

The diversity in the transport sector and the geographical challenges of the Gippsland region meant one large network was not going to work and wouldn't engage a broad cross-section of industry.

By contrast, sub-regional groups worked well for several reasons, including around geography and access, and the Gippsland model has already been replicated in other areas.

Collaboration and research have been key elements of the Gippsland approach. From the outset, the group was determined to ensure that any response to problems must be evidence based.

Unfortunately there was no local research to quantify the problem, although both police and VicRoads kept extensive records. With the support of TAC, the group was able to combine data from the two sources and analyse some of the findings. Common threads across Gippsland began to emerge: truck rollovers, visibility of trucks to older drivers, and driving practices of older drivers.

The types of crashes seemed to be in two categories: single vehicle crashes were nearly always rollovers, and collisions between trucks and cars nearly always involved older drivers.

Effective intervention strategies using existing management practices were quickly developed through the truck safety forums. The key feature of these strategies was that they were SMART: Specifically targeted the issues, were Meaningful to those attending, and they could be Achieved in a Reasonable way and in a Timely manner.

Discussion turned research into meaningful action on-the-ground, starting with each industry type looking at the physical factors of their vehicles that contributed to crash causes, such as why some trucks tipped and others didn't. A body of knowledge was being developed through the collaboration of all industry sectors, including police, VicRoads, major and smaller fleet owners and drivers.

A more pressing and urgent response was to educate drivers about risks. Obviously the first step in effectively managing a risk is knowing it exists and understanding how it impacts safety.

Networks are most effective when the process and goals are kept simple, the purpose is clear and outcomes are based on good data. Effective networks also need diversity, with as many transport types sitting around the table as possible, including those who on the face of it may not think they have a role; they often provide valuable insights.

The first, and perhaps most critical part of establishing a network, is developing a contact list that ensures all industries are involved and includes local road safety expertise and all stakeholders who have a say in, and are impacted by, how local roads are used (see breakout box).



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Essential safety network invite list

- **Local highway patrol police:** Police are at the frontline, are well aware of emerging issues and often are the only people who work with all industry types, making their insight invaluable. They are usually happy to help but have no other avenue to effect change.
- **Major industry groups:** Ideally from each industry type; in Gippsland this includes livestock, mining, general freight, log and grain cartage, fertiliser and fuel.
- **Local, State and Federal Government:** Many issues cut across the three levels of Government and having these people available to discuss options is extremely useful.
- **Road managers:** Partnering with road owners and managers ensures the needs of all parties are met before issues arise.
- **Road safety experts:** Often found locally if you look, these people often have access to resources for initiatives or expertise to help address specific problems identified.
- **A facilitator:** A 'go-to' person is essential. The role is essentially to facilitate and organise meetings, set agendas and provide minutes and task sheets as determined by the membership.
- **Local Government:** Local councils must have a seat at the table but must also allocate time to support the safe and efficient movement of goods and services through a local government area.

