

Open Road Project Evaluation

Prepared by Mike Seabourne, Transport Planner



Wearing a safety belt reduces your chance of death or serious injury in a crash by 40%. Whether you sit in the front or the back seat, the risk of serious or fatal injury is virtually the same. Give your family an Easter they want to remember.

Please **DRIVE SAFE** this **EASTER**

Environment Bay of Plenty
Transportation Publication 2003/04
September 2003

5 Quay Street
P O Box 364
Whakatane
NEW ZEALAND

ISSN 1175 - 8538

Contents

Foreword	iii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Project Goal	1
1.2 Project Objective.....	1
Chapter 2: Funding Framework	3
2.1 Transit NZ Act 1989.....	3
2.2 Community Road Safety Programme (CRSP)	3
2.3 Regional Land Transport Strategy (RLTS).....	3
Chapter 3: 2000-2001 ORP: Year Stage 1	5
3.1 Project Goal	5
3.2 Project Objective.....	5
3.3 Project Scope	5
3.4 Improvements that could have been made in delivering the Project	6
Chapter 4: 2001-2002 ORP: Stage 2	7
4.1 Project Scope	7
4.2 Improvements that could have been made in delivering the Project	8
Chapter 5: 2002 – 2003 ORP: Stage 3	11
5.1 The ‘Team’	11
5.2 Concept development.....	11
5.3 Project Scope	12
5.4 Summer Campaign.....	13

5.5 Winter Campaign15

Chapter 6: Budget17

Chapter 7: Conclusions19

Appendix 1- Newspaper and Bus Shelter Ads.21

Foreword

This report is the process evaluation for the road safety campaign run by the Bay of Plenty Regional Council. This report describes the process by which the campaign was delivered and evaluates that process.

The completion of the Open Road Campaign represented the completion of three years of work. Interim evaluations were submitted to the Land Transport Safety Authority (LTSA) yearly and this report will cover the first two years only briefly. Previous years evaluations can be found in the Appendix. Mike Seabourne, Environment Bay of Plenty was the project manager in only the final year of this projects completion.

Comments: Evaluating the entire project proved to be difficult given that I was not privy to the decisions made in years previous to my involvement and the reasons behind these decisions are not always clear. Although these factors necessitated rapid learning phase, this made the task more challenging and interesting to deliver these campaigns effectively.

Note: All references to years in this report denote financial years unless otherwise stated.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The Open Road Project (ORP) was a multi year, multifaceted project that attempted to deal with the road safety issues that confronted drivers on the open road (especially in the Western Bay of Plenty District). Open road refers to roads where the speed is 80km/hr or more. The first two years of the ORP are briefly covered in the background.

The ORP began with the following goals and objectives in recognition that open road crash and casualty rates were significant, especially in the western Bay of Plenty.

1.1 Project Goal

Over a three-year period, reduce the open road crash and casualty rates per 10,000 population and per 100 million vehicle kilometres travelled in the Bay of Plenty.

1.2 Project Objective

To undertake education projects that address open road safety issues in the Bay of Plenty, such as speed, alcohol, restraint wearing, inattention, and fatigue.

To assist in the design and delivery of the project, Environment Bay of Plenty established an 'Open Road Project Group' (ORG), comprising Bay of Plenty district road safety co-ordinators and officer representatives from New Zealand Police, the region's territorial authorities (Opotiki, Whakatane, Kawerau, Rotorua, Tauranga and Western Bay of Plenty District Councils), Transit New Zealand, Land Transport Safety Authority and ACC.

Chapter 2: Funding Framework

Environment Bay of Plenty is committed to addressing road safety issues in the Bay of Plenty region. In previous years the council has been unable to commit staff to large-scale projects but now are resourced appropriately to respond to these needs. The responsibilities and funding available to Environment Bay of Plenty is described below.

2.1 Transit NZ Act 1989

The ORP is one of two projects delivered by Environment Bay of Plenty as part of its regional programme. Environment Bay of Plenty may prepare a regional programme under the Transit NZ Act 1989¹. This act enables regional councils to apply for funding for safety (administration) outputs.

2.2 Community Road Safety Programme (CRSP)

Pre 2002, Environment Bay of Plenty's road safety responsibilities were defined by the goals and objectives of the then current CRSP. The ORP was planned and undertaken during the CRSP review and this clearly defined community development as the philosophy underpinning the CRSP, pre and post review. The review recognised that small-localised social marketing campaigns would support community development, but an advertising framework would more appropriately cover larger scale regional advertising campaigns. This concept of social marketing was the basis of the ORP campaign.

2.3 Regional Land Transport Strategy (RLTS)

As a result of the increased resources allocated to road safety by Environment Bay of Plenty, council felt able to address these issues more comprehensively in reflection of Environment Bay of Plenty's RLTS.

This project started before the adoption of the current (February 2003) RLTS. The previous RLTS had the following as a stated objective:

Objective 12.2.2: To develop and implement a range of community based road safety initiatives and programmes, aimed at changing attitudes and improving road user behaviour.

The objective outlined Environment Bay of Plenty's rationale for Road Safety Projects.

¹ [Transit NZ Act 1989, s42F, see appendix 1]

Chapter 3: 2000-2001 ORP: Year Stage 1

Of the 34 rural black spots eight were located on one section of road in the western Bay of Plenty - State Highway 2 between Katikati and Bethlehem (a distance of 27 kilometres, or less than 4% of the total length of State Highways in the region). They accounted for a quarter of the total black spot crash costs.

Due to insufficient staff resources within Environment Bay of Plenty, Council appointed a Nicky Jury to manage the Open Road project in 2000/01.

3.1 Project Goal

Over a three-year period, reduce the open road crash and casualty rates per 10,000 population and per 100 million vehicle kilometres travelled in the Bay of Plenty.

3.2 Project Objective

To undertake education projects that address open road safety issues in the Bay of Plenty, such as speed, alcohol, restraint wearing, inattention, and fatigue.

3.3 Project Scope

In 2000/01 the Open Road project:

- (a) Focussed on the particular road safety problems with the section of State Highway 2 between Katikati and Bethlehem.

DELAYED

Environment Bay of Plenty funded an additional² study and agreed to do so from the Open Road project budget.

Lynette Hines, the local road safety co-ordinator for the western Bay of Plenty, co-ordinated a campaign that addressed the matters raised in the report. The bulk of this work was undertaken in the 2001/02 financial year.

- (b) Publicised the new Police initiative, the State Highway Patrol

Environment Bay of Plenty publicised launch of the Police State Highway Patrol in on 21 December 2000.

² 'Education & Enforcement Crash Analysis SH 2 Katikati to Bethlehem'

ACTIONED

- (c) Investigated joining a multi-regional road safety campaign (“Are you part of the dying race?”).

ACTIONED

Environment Bay of Plenty was invited to become involved a multi-regional road safety campaign called “Are you Part of the Dying Race?” It was decided not to join the campaign, as it would not serve the needs of the Bay of Plenty.

3.4 **Improvements that could have been made in delivering the Project**

One lesson that has clearly been demonstrated in the delivery of the 2000/01 Open Road project is the need for significant in-house staff time to manage the project. This is especially so when the project:

- Involves so many people and organisations both from within and based outside the region.
- Is a co-operative effort requiring a high degree of consensus to be reached in order to achieve buy-in from group members on what is delivered.
- In 2000/01 Environment Bay of Plenty’s Transport section was under-staffed, so it was not therefore possible to meet the management demands required by the project.

Another lesson learned is the need for good project planning, prior to project delivery. The Bay of Plenty Open Road project started out as an initiative driven by the Land Transport Safety Authority (LTSA) that the regional council would deliver. For the first year of the project this translated into:

- A project objective.
- The Project Group giving some thought to what behaviour’s should be targeted in order to achieve that objective.
- Some ambiguity on how to get there.

It is probably fair to say, that once the 2000/01 National Road Safety Programme was approved, Environment Bay of Plenty found it had to deliver a project of which it had little knowledge, compounded by insufficient staff resources to devote to all facets of its delivery. It has therefore taken some time to address that ambiguity and determine what direction the project will take.

Another option for a three-year project like the Open Road project, would have been to devote the bulk of the first year to planning for the project rather than focussing on actual deliverables. However, in order to do so and spread the total cost of the project over its life, it is suggested that provision should be made by LTSA to allow local authorities to carry forward unexpended (but approved), project year one LTSA funding, for years two and three.

Chapter 4: 2001-2002 ORP: Stage 2

The project goal and objective remained the same for stage two of the project.

4.1 Project Scope

In 2002/03 the Open Road project:

- (a) Focussed on the particular road safety problems with the section of State Highway 2 between Katikati and Bethlehem and delivered a specific campaign in that area.

ACTIONED

The Road Safety Coordinator responsible for the delivery of this project was Lynnette Hines (WBOP RSC). Her report was forwarded to the LTSA. The report declares the campaign a success that it achieved its objectives.

- (b) **In conjunction with Environment Waikato commissioned research to identify driver awareness and attitudes towards “driving to the conditions in the Bay of Plenty.**

ACTIONED

The report was prepared by Samuel G. Charlton, Ph.D., University of Waikato and Transport Engineering research New Zealand.

Telephone surveys of 800 drivers were conducted (400 in each region) and 19 specific driving to the conditions questions were asked. The research results were intended to facilitate the Open Road Group’s plans to achieve sustainable behavioural change, by educating and encouraging drivers to ‘drive to the conditions’.

The report’s conclusion notes several points for the Open Road Group’s consideration when planning future campaigns. The report advises that the six issues highlighted should not be exclusively employed when planning a driving to the conditions campaign. Preferably all 19 issues identified should be examined and used, so that they complement other regional and national road safety campaigns.

The findings from the research will provide the basis for next years’ Open Road Campaign.

- (c) Completed the construction of Billboard sites in the Rotorua District.

ACTIONED

In the Rotorua District billboards were erected at six sites on both sides of the road. The billboards were also used in conjunction with the Environment Waikato and the Auckland Regional Council (ARC) passenger power campaign (i.e. "Speak up to slow him down"). The ARC's Regional Land Transport Committee thought this campaign was very successful with a recall rate of 88%.³

- (d) Identified and let a contract to construct billboards in the western Bay of Plenty.

ACTIONED

The billboard sites in the western Bay of Plenty sub-region were given final approval from Transit New Zealand and the Council's project manager, (Mark Appledorn) let a contract for their construction.

- (e) Began identification and construction of the billboard sites in the eastern Bay of Plenty.

ACTIONED

The eastern Bay of Plenty sub-region billboard sites are currently being appraised by John Tailby of Transit New Zealand.

- (f) Radio Advertising

Environment Bay of Plenty has been involved in holiday weekend road safety radio advertising with Radioworks Rotorua over the last year. The holiday weekends of Labour weekend, Easter and Queens Birthday were targeted for 'driving to the conditions' advertisements.

ACTIONED.

4.2 Improvements that could have been made in delivering the Project

To improve the delivery of this project and future projects would require the appointment of a project manager at an early stage. This would ensure that there was efficient lines communication between stakeholders. The more control a project manager has over the delivery of a project, the greater the likelihood of achieving the targets set.

Comments: There were inherent difficulties in delivering the OPR as the project scope was very wide and covered many different issues. Organisational issues affected the project in its initial stages and led to delays in the delivery of the project objectives.

The original project goal was:

"To address the significant open road crash and casualty rates in the Bay of Plenty."

³ <http://www.roadsafeauckland.org.nz/NewsAndEvents/> - [Speak Up campaign cuts through \(8 April 2002\)](#)

The issues that contribute to the open road crash and casualty rates could not be effectively addressed by one generic message as the target audience are in differing stages of behaviour change for different issues. There was a danger that the Open Road Group (ORG) was in danger of 'biting off more than it could chew' by delivering a too generic message with little or no effect.

Chapter 5: 2002 – 2003 ORP: Stage 3

5.1 The 'Team'

Staff from Environment Bay of Plenty facilitated this project in 2002-2003, with the assistance of an Open Road working group to allow input and assistance from road safety partners. These partners include ACC, LTSA, local Police, TLA roading engineers, Transit New Zealand representatives, Road Safety Coordinators and Transport Engineering Research New Zealand (TERNZ). Members are listed below.

Garry Maloney	Manager Transportation, Environment Bay of Plenty
Michael Seabourne	Transport Planner, Environment Bay of Plenty, Project Manager
Lynette Hines	Road Safety Co-ordinator (RSC), Western BOP Sub region
Cedric Rogers	RSC, Rotorua Sub Region
Bruce Mc Call	RSC, Eastern BOP Sub Region
Kay Kristensen	Injury Prevention Consultant (IPC), ACC
Carole Fleming	IPC, ACC Tauranga region
Marilyn Ross	IPC, ACC Rotorua region
Sue Jolley	Regional Education Advisor, LTSA
Cliff Griffiths	Manager Rooding & Transportation, Tauranga District Council
Inspector Chris Douglas	NZ Police
Kevin Thompson	State Highway Administrator, Rotorua District Council

5.2 Concept development

"Driving to the Conditions"

Environment Bay of Plenty and Environment Waikato commissioned this study (*see 5.1 Project Scope, No 2 of this report*) for the purpose of determining the public awareness and attitudes towards "driving to the conditions". It was prepared by Samuel G. Charlton, Ph.D., University of Waikato and Transport Engineering research New Zealand. Telephone surveys of 800 drivers were conducted (400 in each region) and 19 specific driving to the conditions questions were asked. The research results were intended to facilitate the Open Road Group's plans to achieve sustainable behavioural change, by educating and encouraging drivers to 'drive to the conditions'.

The six survey questions with the lowest rates of correct answers were:

- "Driving with worn tyres can have the same effect as counting to two before you hit the brakes".
- "Sometime the speed limit is too fast to drive on the open road."
- "You are most likely to crash on roads you are familiar with."

- “Driving at 110 kilometres per hour more than triples your risk of being in a casualty crash.”
- “Young men have the most trouble driving around corners.”
- “Driving with the maximum legal limit of alcohol, that is 0.08 Blood Alcohol Content, in your blood stream triples your risk of being in a crash.”

These questions highlighted the areas where the survey respondents had the most difficulty.

The Report’s conclusion notes several points for the Open Road Group’s consideration when planning future campaigns. The report advises, “The six issues highlighted should not be exclusively employed when planning a driving to the conditions campaign. Preferably all 19 issues identified should be examined and used, so that they complement other regional and national road safety campaigns.”

The findings from the research provided the basis for next stage of the Open Road Campaign. The “open road project and the concept “What’s Around the Corner?” was based on the research.

5.3 Project Scope

In 2002/03 the Open Road project:

(a) **Completed construction of billboards in the western Bay of Plenty.**

These were used for the restraint campaign, “We clicked in the back”. This part of the region has a total of nine billboards in urban areas and on state highways.

ACTIONED

(b) **Completed construction of billboards in the eastern Bay of Plenty.**

Eleven of these sites are situated on the state highway network and all were eventually approved by Transit New Zealand.

ACTIONED

(c) **Delivered a summer campaign based on the research by Samuel G Charlton.**

See below.

(d) **Delivered a winter campaign based on the research by Samuel G Charlton**

See below.

5.4 Summer Campaign

5.4.1 Concept

To deliver a campaign urging drivers to “Drive to the conditions” during the summer break and for summer conditions.

5.4.2 Timeframe

15th December - 15th February

The following messages were used on both billboards throughout the region, and in bus shelters in Rotorua and Tauranga. Also radio advertisements were placed over the summer break emphasising these messages with the tag lines of “What’s Around the Corner?” These billboards were rotated in this stage of the campaign to ensure the message remained “fresh”.

5.4.3 Stage 1 – Billboard messages



Figure 1 Bus Shelter Ads Stage 1

5.4.4 Stage 2 – Billboard Messages

All Billboards were replaced by the cross billboard except in the Eastern Bay (The change over coincided too closely with a local fatality in a small community) where the Bike Week message was utilised. Bus shelter advertising remained the same as in Stage 1.



Figure 2 Cross Billboard



Figure 3 Bike Week Billboard

5.4.5 Resources

Experience and feedback from the recent 'Regional Restraints' campaign showed that the frontline road safety partners, e.g. Police and coordinators, were able to maximise their message delivery and reinforce the messages on the billboards by distributing resources or giveaways. For this campaign the group hit upon the idea that sunscreen was a unique, useful item that was easy for police and coordinators to give away. It also "hung around" for a long time in the car and so added value to the message delivery. Tubes of sunscreen were distributed to police, TLA's and Road Safety Coordinators to use in conjunction with local road safety campaigns over the summer period with the following messages on them:



Figure 4 Sunscreen label advertisements.

5.5 Winter Campaign

5.5.1 Concept

To deliver a campaign urging drivers to be aware of different driving conditions in winter.

5.5.2 Timeframe

15 April – 15 June 2003.

Newspaper advertising was the primary medium for this campaign along with more generic messages on the billboards. The billboards had been in place for over two months and this necessitated a significant change in style. These billboards were selected to reflect this change. The messages utilised for the final stage of this campaign were sourced from the ACC.

5.5.3 Stage 3 - Billboard Messages



Figure 5 *Billboard messages sourced from ACC Taglines*

5.5.4 Comments

Working alongside the ACC has in the past been beneficial and we were able to share resources in this instance to cut down on design costs for this campaign. These taglines reflect the "driving to conditions" issues targeted for the winter campaign and were timed to coincide with the Easter break. The intent of this changeover was to

mark to onset of new driving conditions that arrive with winter conditions. This fact is more obvious in the newspaper advertisements.

5.5.5 Resources

The ORG created bus shelter and newspaper advertisements for the Easter period based on the billboard messages, examples of which can be found in the Appendix.

Comments: The newspaper advertising was an excellent way of communicating the complicated message, “drive to the conditions”. A picture equals a thousand words.

However, the creation of these messages required a long design time, as it was important to achieve impact for the road safety messages. Consequently to ensure exposure for the message, large amounts of advertisements (and ad space) were needed. This was an expensive medium (comparatively) to utilise in this regard and as a result the length of the newspaper campaign was not equal to the length of time that the billboards were utilised.

Newspapers advertisements can achieve impact in short amount of time with a detailed message. We have found though, that it is far better suited to a single message coupled with a larger budget for an advertising campaign.

The bus shelter advertising received a significant amount of positive feedback from road safety partners through word of mouth.

Chapter 6: Budget

Cost Type		Direct Costs
Salaries-hours		37,293
Vehicle /plant hire		2,130
Contract work		<u>152,191</u>
Total Expenditure		191,614
MISC INCOME	(TDC)	(7,300)
	(LTSA, Environment Bay of Plenty, Remaining ORP Budgets)	
SUBSIDIES		(136,591)
	Total Recoveries	(143,891)
	Outstanding	0
	Net Expenditure	47,723

Chapter 7: Conclusions

I believe that the ORG were able to effectively breakdown the issues into manageable parts and addressed in the campaigns the road safety issues that contribute to the open road crash and casualty rates.

Summarised below are conclusions reached by this evaluation. The points raised are recommendations that addressed the difficulties in delivering a project of this magnitude.

- Appointment of a project manager to ensure project completion.
- Establish a project outline and timeframe for the entire duration of the project.
- Establishment of common goals between partners at the initiation stage of the project.
- Detailed project planning completed with yearly goals and objectives.
- Provision should be made by LTSA to allow local authorities to carry forward unexpended (but approved), project year one LTSA funding, for years two and three.
- Encourage clear lines of communication and responsibility between organisations and partners.
- More emphasis to be given to testing and information gathering.

As Project Manager I believe that the Open road project was successful in delivering on the projects goals and objectives. A legacy of the project is the billboards that exist in the Bay of Plenty exclusively for road safety campaigns. The lessons learnt in this campaign are valuable and will be applied for subsequent campaigns.

Appendix 1- Newspaper and Bus Shelter Ads.

EASTER SALE!

Check Out These FREE Easter Bargains! Give your family the best you can this Easter.



Left: Why do I need to wear a safety belt?

This seasons fashion comes black, tan-in one size fits all (adult only). Designed with you in mind, this little number will reduce your chances of death or serious injury in a crash by 40%!

- Priceless

*Options include Child seats for infants and small children.



Hmmm.....Is it ok to be TURNED ON?

It doesn't just have to be at night! Fog, rain, dusk and dawn- go for it and turn on your HEADLIGHTS! If you've got it, flaunt it and make sure you're seen this winter.



Above: Rubber is in!

The tread on your tyres this winter darlings, will roll roll roll you into Easter! Check out your tread before winter gets here and get grip on that road. Check out your local WOF retailers for advice.



It's a must have this Easter!

What is fatigue?

Fatigue is tiredness, weariness or exhaustion. People often think that driver fatigue means falling asleep at the wheel. Falling asleep, however, is an extreme form of fatigue. You can be fatigued enough to impair your driving long before you 'nod off' at the wheel.

The signs and symptoms of fatigue include forgetfulness, being fixated, poor decision making, apathy (a lack of interest), slowed reaction times, lethargy (feeling drowsy and lacking energy), reduced vigilance, moodiness, not communicating well and nodding off.

Why is fatigue a problem?

Fatigue is a problem because staying alert is crucial for driving. Fatigued drivers have slower reaction times, putting themselves and others in danger when they encounter unusual, unexpected or emergency situations.

Left - 'Rest Well Pillows' give an excellent rest the night before you travel. Used with the patented 'Rest Stop' you can be assured of the best chance to get where you're going.

ROAD INJURY PREVENTION QUIZ

- 1** NAME 2 SIGNS OF DRIVER FATIGUE
 A Sore or heavy eyes
 B Dull conversation
 C Constant yawning
 D All of the above
- 2** WHAT ARE 2 HIGH-RISK TIMES FOR DRIVER FATIGUE?
 A Dinner time
 B Mid afternoon
 C Between 2.00am and 6.00am
 D All of the above
- 3** NAME 2 THINGS YOU CAN DO TO AVOID DRIVER FATIGUE?
 A Wind the window down
 B Take a break
 C Avoid heavy meals or fatty food
 D Play loud music
 E All of the above
- 4** IF YOU NEED TO TALK ON YOUR MOBILE PHONE WHILE DRIVING, YOU SHOULD:
 A Pull over to take the call
 B Drive with your natural hand
 C Try and switch your phone off
 D Answer but talk quickly
- 5** WHAT KILLS MORE PEOPLE ON NEW ZEALAND ROADS THAN ANYTHING ELSE?
 A Following too closely
 B Speed
 C Road Rage
 D Driver Fatigue
- 6** ON AVERAGE, HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE KILLED EVERY YEAR BECAUSE THEY DON'T WEAR THEIR SAFETY BELT?
 A 10
 B 20
 C 30
 D 40
- 7** WHAT'S THE FINE IF YOU DON'T WEAR YOUR SAFETY BELT?
 A \$25
 B \$50
 C \$100
 D \$150
- 8** MOST CRASHES OCCUR IN WHICH 2 INSTANCES?
 A In 50kn/h areas
 B On motorways
 C On long trips from home
 D On short trips from home
- 9** IF YOU PLAN TO DRINK, WHAT'S THE BEST THING TO DO?
 A Have a good meal
 B Don't drive
 C Only have one drink per hour
 D Drive slower than normal
- 10** IN ADVERSE WEATHER OR TRAFFIC CONDITIONS, THE LEGAL SPEED LIMIT:
 A Is still too fast
 B Should be followed
 C Is 95 km/h
 D Should be ignored

Answers to the 'Road Injury Prevention' Quiz
 1. A & C, 2. B & C, 3. B & C, 4. A, 5. B, 6. C, 7. D, 8. A & D, 9. B, 10. A

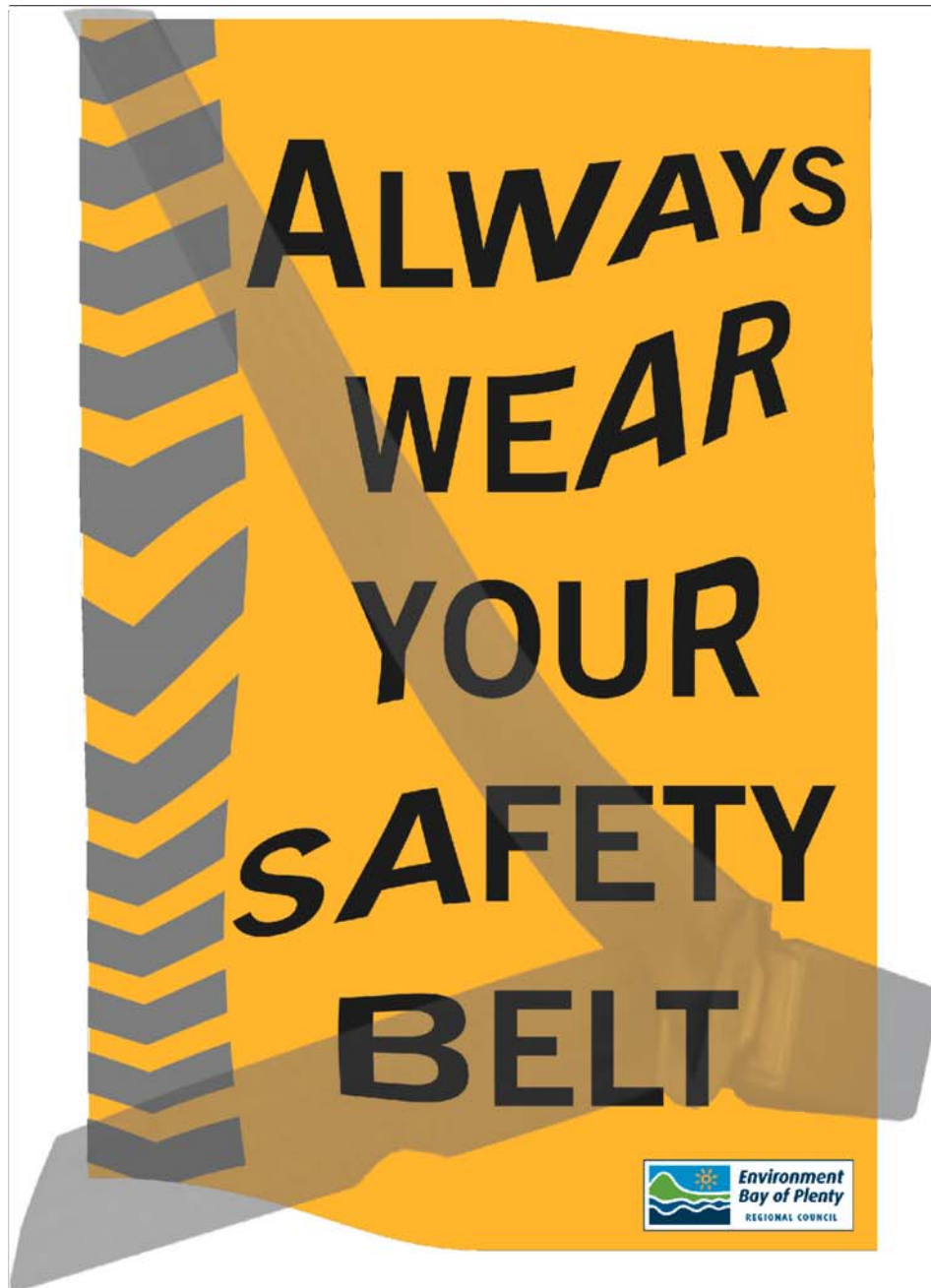
EASTER SALE



Drive safe this easter because the best bargin you can give yourself and your family is free.




DRIVE SAFE




Wearing a safety belt reduces your chance of death or serious injury in a crash by 40%. Whether you sit in the front or the back seat, the risk of serious or fatal injury is virtually the same.

Give your family an Easter they want to remember.

Please DRIVE SAFE this EASTER



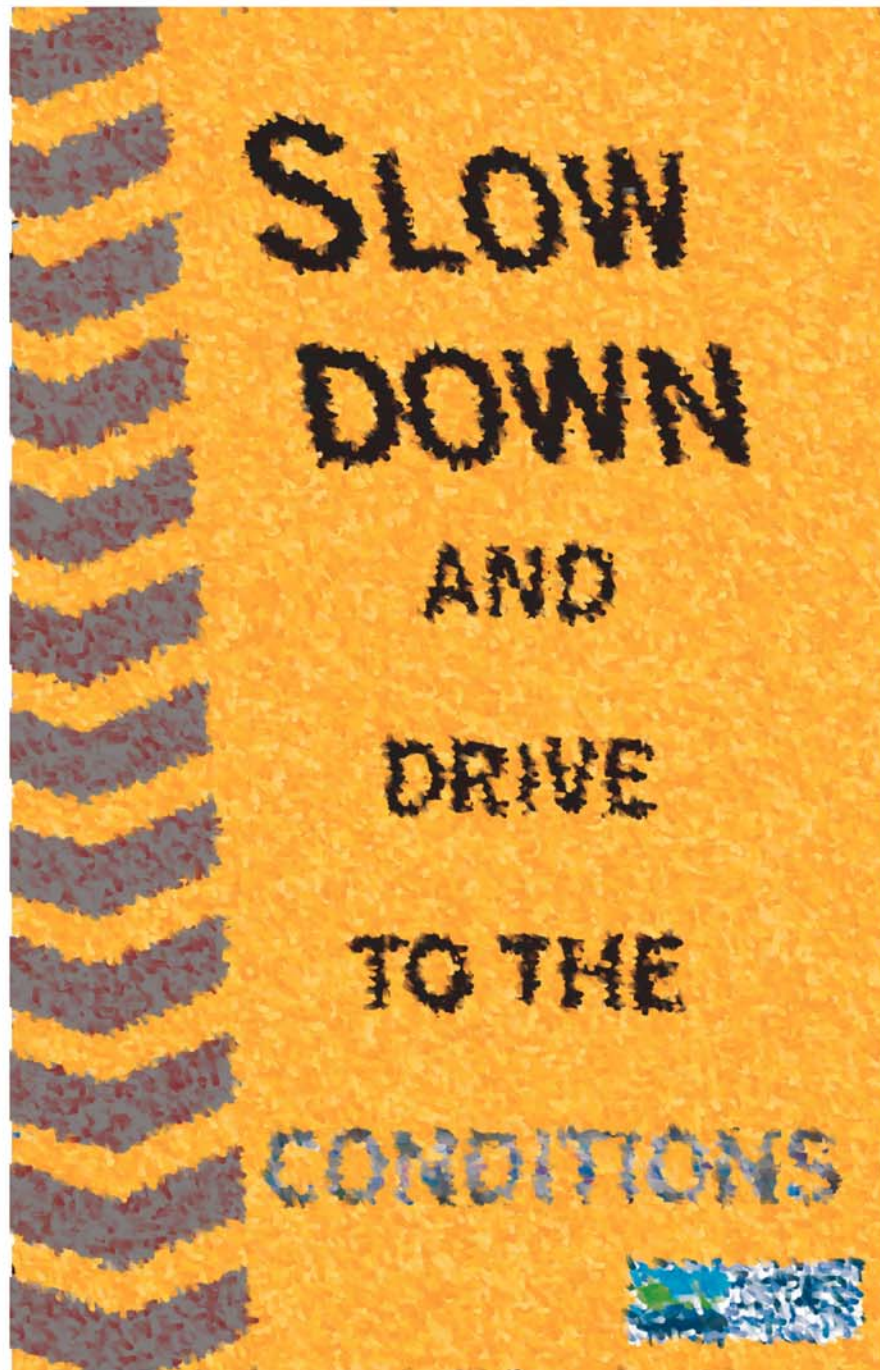
**DON'T
DRINK
AND
DRIVE**

 Environment
Bay of Plenty
REGIONAL COUNCIL

Once alcohol is absorbed into your bloodstream, it is taken up by cells in your vital organs, including the brain - slowing your reactions, dulling your judgement and vision and impairing your ability to drive.

Anyone who takes this risk is a potential killer.

Please DRIVE SAFE this EASTER



Every year there are around 20 fatal crashes and 240 injury crashes in which adverse weather conditions (rain, wind, fog, snow sleet or hail) are a contributing factor. However, bad weather seldom causes crashes. Generally crashes occur because people haven't adjusted their driving behaviour to take weather conditions into account.

Commonsense can save your life.

Please DRIVE SAFE this EASTER

TO BE OR NOT TO BE?



WHAT IS FATIGUE?

Fatigue is tiredness, weariness or exhaustion. People often think that driver fatigue means falling asleep at the wheel. Falling asleep, however, is an extreme form of fatigue. You can be fatigued enough to impair your driving long before you 'nod off' at the wheel.

The signs and symptoms of fatigue include forgetfulness, being fixated, poor decision making, apathy (a lack of interest), slowed reaction times, lethargy (feeling drowsy and lacking energy), reduced vigilance, moodiness, not communicating well and nodding off.

Why is fatigue a problem?

Fatigue is a problem because staying alert is crucial for driving. Fatigued drivers have slower reaction times, putting themselves and others in danger when they encounter unusual, unexpected or emergency situations.

Fatigue can kill you. Between 1999 and 2001, driver fatigue was identified as a contributing factor in 152 fatal crashes and 1,369 injury crashes. This represents approximately 13 percent of fatal crashes and six percent of injury crashes each year.

Driver fatigue is difficult to identify or recognise as contributing to a crash. This means it's likely that fatigue is under-recorded, and contributes to more crashes than we realise. Australian estimates indicate that fatigue accounts for up to 30 percent of single-vehicle crashes.

Fatigue needs to be taken very seriously.

HOW CAN I IMPROVE MY ALERTNESS?

Sleep

Get plenty of sleep prior to a long journey. Plan to drive during times of the day when you are normally awake, and stay overnight rather than travelling straight through.

Circadian rhythms

Avoid driving during times when we're programmed to be sleepy. Take a mid-afternoon break and find a place to sleep between midnight and 6am.

Take breaks

Schedule a break at least once every two hours and whenever you begin to feel sleepy. During a break get out of your vehicle and take or walk or some form of exercise to increase alertness. If you're feeling sleepy, take a nap.

Take a nap

If you realise you need a nap, don't wait. Find the first safe place and pull over. Try to avoid napping in the driver's seat, and it's best if you don't nap longer than 40 minutes.

Naps up to 40 minutes can be very refreshing but naps longer than 40 minutes can leave you feeling groggy and disoriented for up to 10 to 15 minutes when you wake up (it's called sleep inertia).

Get fresh air into the vehicle

You'll find it easier to stay alert if you have fresh air blowing into the vehicle. On long journeys it's best if you don't use the recirculating air function.

Food and drink

Eat sensibly throughout the journey, but avoid large meals. They can make you drowsy, particularly at lunchtime.

Stay hydrated — drinking plenty of water will help you to stay alert. Caffeine drinks (tea, coffee or cola drinks) may help, but they're only a short term solution.

Share the driving

If it's possible, share the driving.

Environmental stimulation

Conversation and music can help you stay alert but they're only short-term solutions. The best solution is finding somewhere to stop and sleep.

Don't drink and drive

Drink-driving is bad enough on its own, let alone in combination with fatigue. Alcohol worsens the effects of fatigue, making the combination very dangerous.

Avoid medications that make you drowsy

Avoid taking medications, both prescribed and over-the-counter, that lead to drowsiness. Examples of medications to avoid are some antihistamines, travel sickness tablets, sleeping pills, some cold preparations and some pain killers.

Always read the packaging of your medications before you drive to make sure they won't affect your alertness. If you're unsure, ask your pharmacist.

Don't speed

Speed contributes to a large number of crashes and makes the effects of a crash worse. If you're speeding and your reaction times are slower because of fatigue, you're more likely to crash.



DRIVE SAFE