

Green Man Gets the Greenlight in Port Phillip



Photo: Mark Farrelly

Life as a pedestrian is not easy these days. With huge volumes of fast-moving traffic now dominating the streets, a pedestrian crossing can literally be a lifesaver for a walker. But it seems many of the existing crossings on major roads are not providing pedestrians with the time they need to actually get across the road safely.

While implementing the City of Port Phillip's Walking School Bus program, the coordinators found there was community concern over the number of intersections in the area that parents and children perceived as too dangerous to cross. Families were reluctant to join the Walking School Buses because of this.

Meg Selman, Sustainable Transport Officer from the City of Port Phillip, explains: 'Parents saying "We don't want to be part of this program" really got the wind up me'.

This inspired Port Phillip to take the next step: the Greenlight Project – a jointly funded study with VicHealth into the cross-ability of intersections of major roads – including those used by children on Walking School Buses – in the Cities of Port Phillip, Geelong and Bayside.

The key purpose of the study was to look at and understand how the operation of traffic signals at intersections affected people's decision to walk, particularly to and from primary schools.

Quantitative data was collected by observing the Walking School Buses that used the identified crossings and videotaping the journeys. Several measurements were taken, including the road distance kerb-to-kerb of the crossing sites; the time allocated for crossing, which included the green man time (walk) and the flashing red time (clearance); and the time it took for a Walking School Bus to walk to or from school on a regular journey.

Qualitative data was extracted using a survey and focus groups, and was designed to find out what pedestrians' perceptions of the crossings were. The survey was distributed to adults >>>

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who accompanied their children to school at six different sites. The focus groups targeted people who didn't use the crossings or who had doubts about using the crossings.

The data showed that major roads are indeed a disincentive for children and parents to walk to school. Over a third (34%) of respondents said that the time allocated to complete the crossing was too short for them to feel safe using the crossing. A typical comment was: 'More time needed to cross is essential but it does nothing to alleviate the huge volume of traffic.'

Vehicle size, the volume of traffic, the speed of the cars and driver behaviour was seen as the next major reason people didn't feel safe at the crossings (27% of respondents).

'Drivers do tend to zip around in front of pedestrians if they feel they can turn in time ... children are less aware of the potential danger as they see the green man with a bit of tunnel vision' (survey respondent).

The study also revealed that the Walking School Buses at the six sites were unable to complete the crossings in the walk (green) and clearance (flashing red) times. At one intersection in St Kilda the allocated crossing time was 21.28 seconds (1.32 m/sec), with the Walking School Bus taking 31.93 seconds (0.88 m/sec) to complete the crossing. This left a timing shortfall of over 10 seconds at just one crossing. This meant that the children would be crossing against a red light for 10 seconds, a very dangerous act, especially during the congestion of peak-hour traffic.

After analysing the data, Port Phillip came up with a series of recommendations that they presented to the Regional Office of VicRoads. These included:

- That a pedestrian crossing speed of 0.7 metres per second be adopted at the crossings;
- That there be an automatic call-up (ie, pedestrians don't have to press the button to activate the green man) as part of the signal cycle operation. Where automatic call-up is

not appropriate, there should be a 2-second 'early green' advance for pedestrians over vehicles performing turns so that pedestrians have crossing priority.

- Continuation of the use of crossing supervisors at school crossings on major roads for all signalised crossings on Walking School Bus routes.

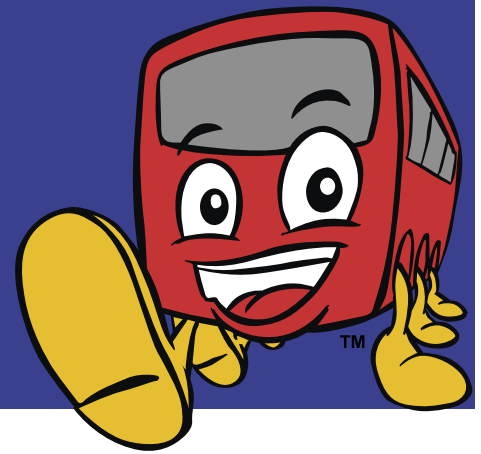
VicRoads accepted the findings and agreed to make signal changes to 14 identified intersections that were seen by the locals as being too dangerous to use.

An intersection at Pickles Street, Port Melbourne, was designated as a 'demonstration' site. Recognising that crossing Pickles Street was a safety and service problem for pedestrians and residents, the intersection was converted to a signalised crossing.

The crossing was then further improved by timing and phasing changes which provided pedestrians with changes to the green man timing, which led to almost double the standard crossing time; automatic call-up of pedestrian phase on the minor road, which meant pedestrians no longer had to push the button; advance starts (2–3 seconds) for pedestrians over right-turning traffic and minimum wait times (10–30 seconds) for pedestrians to cross the major road.

The changes have had a significant effect on the mobility of the local community.

Local parent Raelene Hunt explains: 'Since the crossing has been installed at Pickles Street the whole journey has become less stressful, less dangerous and a lot faster. Before the crossing I was really uncomfortable about letting my Grade 6 daughter cross on her own. It was so dangerous – you would have to cross in two goes – you would get to the middle and then you would have to stand there and wait. I had two children and myself on bikes and it was really difficult getting across. Sometimes we would make a detour that was about 600–800 metres further out of the way to avoid that intersection, then we would have to backtrack.'



Raelene believes the pedestrian priority crossing has reinvigorated the community.

‘I know three or four children who regularly ride from Port Melbourne to Middle Park on their own. I quite often see three or four girls riding together. More families are walking to Albert Park Primary School from Port Melbourne. Some families are now pushing prams with kids on bikes, coming from the opposite direction to a kindergarten in Port Melbourne.’

VicRoads is committed to applying modifications to the other 13 intersections in the municipality. Resourcing issues within VicRoads have, however, delayed the implementation of these changes.

The Greenlight Project is an innovative example of small infrastructure changes having very positive effects on mobilising a community. Making a road safer to cross encourages locals to walk and cycle more. It links communities and transforms the area into a safer, more vibrant place to live and work.

It also demonstrates what can be achieved through positive partnerships, such as this one developed between local government, VicRoads and VicHealth.

For more information on the Greenlight Project contact Meg Selman, Sustainable Transport Officer, City of Port Phillip on (03) 9209 6274, mobile 0417 517 580 or at mselman@portphillip.vic.gov.au



Photo: Courtesy City of Port Phillip

What made the difference?

- *Walking School Bus coordinators identified major barriers to children crossing busy intersections and were committed to bringing about change*
- *Supportive partnerships developed between local government, VicHealth and VicRoads to research these barriers*
- *VicRoad's support of the Greenlight Project and commitment to implementing recommendations*
- *The Transport Minister's support and validation of the Greenlight Project and adoption of recommendations by VicRoads*