

## 1.9 FUTURE OF SCHOOL CROSSING SUPERVISION PROGRAM

Responsible Director: Peter Panagakos

### **RECOMMENDATION**

That Council:

1. *Notes that the Mayor invited all Local Government Mayors, CEOs and the MAV to discuss the future of school crossing supervision at an on-line forum held on 28 July 2022, and that at least 112 representatives from approximately 40 councils attended the forum.*
2. *Notes that a survey of Councils who attended the forum found:*
  - 97 per cent of Councils have unsupervised crossing sessions
  - 82 per cent regularly face crossing supervisor staff shortages, and
  - 87 per cent consider the system no longer fit for purpose.
3. *Notes that having heard the different perspectives from other councils there is general consensus that the Victorian School Crossing Supervision model is failing, in that:*
  - *Victorian Government financial support for Councils to provide the service has gradually, but significantly, decreased over time*
  - *changing demographics are making it increasingly difficult to attract staff*
  - *growing numbers of crossing sessions are unstaffed each day*
  - *costs to Councils are increasing each year.*
4. *Accepts that the basis of an ongoing advocacy campaign will highlight Local Government's concern about the sustainability of the school crossings service, seek reform to the way road safety around schools is managed and that this work continues to be led by the City of Monash with support from the MAV and a representative committee made up of other Council representatives.*
5. *Notes that following the on-line forum held on 28 July 2022 to discuss the future of the school crossings, Council representatives were asked to indicate their willingness to participate in the campaign and make a modest financial contribution towards an advocacy campaign and that to date 22 Councils have agreed to participate with a further 9 still considering their position.*
6. *Notes that the School Crossings Advocacy Campaign has been developed and includes the following objectives:*
  - *The Victorian Government to commit to fully fund the delivery of the School Crossing program*
  - *Requesting the Victorian Government conduct an urgent review and reform of the current School Crossing Supervisor model (noting that in 2016, the Government made a commitment to undertake a broad strategic review into the movement and safety of school students that to date remains unfulfilled).*

- *Engage with community stakeholders to increase awareness and support of the reduced/lack of financial support for Councils to provide school crossing supervisor services.*
- 7. *Notes that the campaign has received recent media attention including TV, print and radio with the Mayor being interviewed.*
- 8. *Allocates \$50k to cover the cost of the School Crossings Advocacy Campaign noting that most of these costs will be recovered from the municipal Councils participating in the campaign with any remaining shortfall being paid for by Monash Council.*
- 9. *Notes that due to a nation-wide labour shortage the contractor who provides school crossing services under the provisions of School Crossing Supervision Contract No. 2022069 has requested a variation to suspend the clauses that provide a failure to commence supervision of a crossing will incur a penalty of \$50 per occasion to a maximum penalty of \$250 per day and notes the relevant clauses are intended to serve as an incentive to ensure all efforts are made to safeguard adequate on-going and casual staff being retained to deliver the service during normal times.*
- 10. *Notes that in light of point 9 above, offices will execute a variation to the School Crossing Supervision Contract No. 2022069 that in affect suspends the clauses that provide a failure to commence supervision of a crossing incurs a penalty of \$50 per occasion to a maximum penalty of \$250 per day, for the duration of the current contract term which expires on 30 December 2022.*
- 11. *Notes that given the current status of the advocacy campaign, and the need for the continuation of the service, the current school crossing supervision contract will be extended for a further 6 months from 30 December 2022 as allowed in Council's resolution at its 29 March 2022 meeting.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

This report provides an update to Councillors regarding the future of school crossings and recommends that Council allocates \$50,000 for the continuing advocacy campaign which involves seeking full State Government funding for the program and reform to the way road safety is managed around schools. It is also asks Council to note that the current contract in place for the provision of school crossing services will be varied in a manner that removes liability for a \$50 penalty per occasion a crossing is not supervised to a maximum penalty of \$250 per day, and identifies the likelihood that the current contract for the provision of school crossing supervision services will need to be extended for a period of six months.

## **BACKGROUND**

At its meeting on 29 March 2022, Council amongst other matters resolved:

5. *that the Mayor, convene a meeting with Mayors and senior officers of the Councils that provided a response to Council, as referred to in paragraph 3 of this Resolution*

*and other Mayors and senior officers from metropolitan Councils should they wish to attend; and relevant Ministers at the appropriate time, including the Minister for Roads and Road Safety and the Minister for Education, with a view to investigating alternative arrangements for the funding and provision of school crossing supervisors, including:*

- i. the common ground with all Councils on the issue and commencing an advocacy campaign to the State Government;*
  - ii. a focus on full cost recovery (inclusive of on-costs) for the provision of the school crossing supervisor service;*
  - iii. the opportunity (inclusive of cost) to investigate and, where appropriate, implement alternative traffic management arrangements at school crossings such as:
    - i. Wombat Crossing – raised pavement with line marking and signs;*
    - ii. Pedestrian crossing – Line marking with flashing lights; and*
    - iii. Pedestrian operated signals; and**
  - iv. the opportunity for schools to nominate and provide school crossing supervisors.*
6. *Makes available \$15,000 to give effect to paragraph 4 of this Resolution and provide for a facilitated session(s), understanding that Council will request a financial contribution from other participating Councils to provide for any external advice and to facilitate any agreed outcomes.*
7. *Convenes a forum with schools within the Municipality to explore the opportunity for schools to nominate and provide school crossing supervisors at no cost to Council.*
8. *Notes that it will receive a report and update at the appropriate time regarding the progress and any outcomes of the discussions with other Councils and the relevant Minister(s), any forum with schools within the Municipality and as needed.*
9. *Continues providing school crossing supervisors under the terms of School Crossing Supervision Contract No. 2022069 that has been awarded which provides for school crossing supervision services until 31 December 2022 with two six month extensions by which time the outcomes of the recommendations of this report will be better known.*

## **DISCUSSION**

On 28 July 2022 the Mayor hosted an on-line meeting to discuss the future of school crossings with Mayors, CEOs, Senior Officers and the MAV. The meeting was attended by around 112 participants from at least 40 municipalities.

Having heard the different perspectives it is clear that the Victorian School Crossing Supervision model is failing as follows:

- Victorian Government financial support for Councils to provide the service has gradually, but significantly, decreased over time
- changing demographics are making it increasingly difficult to attract staff
- growing numbers of crossing sessions are unstaffed each day
- costs to Councils are increasing each year

A survey conducted of these Councils revealed:

- 97 per cent of Councils have unsupervised crossing sessions
- 82 per cent regularly face crossing supervisor staff shortages, and
- 87 per cent consider the system no longer fit for purpose.

Whilst Councils are looking to the Victorian Government to fully fund the program the consensus from the meeting was that regardless of funding, the program is no longer fit for purpose and needs to change.

It was also made clear that the issue is highly emotive and one that requires careful management. Whilst some Councils could consider walking away from the program at some point, this was not the popular view and by and large there were genuine concerns in any advocacy campaign including or being based on any such ultimatum to Government given a range of risks especially around reputation, staff welfare and community concern.

Understanding this, the clear way forward with a good level of support is to proceed with an advocacy campaign highlighting Local Government's concern about the sustainability of the program and seeking reform to the way road safety around schools is managed. The work would be led by the Monash Council with support from a representative committee.

Following the forum that was held on 28 July 2022, Council representatives were asked to indicate their willingness to participate in the campaign and make a modest financial contribution (around \$1,500 for rural/peri-urban Councils and \$3,700 for metropolitan Councils) towards the advocacy campaign. At the time of writing this report, 22 Councils have agreed to participate with a further 9 still considering their position.

In consultation with the representative group the following campaign is proposed:

**School crossing supervisor campaign- September 2022**

The proposed campaign is designed to establish school crossing services funding as an urgent issue that must be addressed by the State Government.

Furthermore, the State Government needs to know that the current system is failing due to changing demographics which is making it increasingly difficult to attract staff. This is resulting in a growing numbers of crossing sessions that are unstaffed each day.

While broad level solutions will be provided, the campaign will be designed and structured to allow individual Councils to determine a solution that is tailored to meet their own needs, either in isolation or through coordinated activity with similarly aligned Councils.

### **Campaign Goal**

The Victorian Government will take action to ensure the SXS program is sustainable, and funds are provided to appropriately meet community needs.

### **Policy objectives**

The objectives of the advocacy campaign are:

1. *The Victorian Government to commit to fully fund the delivery of the School Crossing program.*
1. *Requesting the Victorian Government conduct an urgent review and reform of the current School Crossing Supervisor model (noting that in 2016, the Government made a commitment to undertake a broad strategic review into the movement and safety of school students that to date has remain unfulfilled).*
2. *Engage with community stakeholders to increase awareness and support of the reduced/lack of financial support for Councils to provide school crossing supervisor services.*

### **Campaigning objectives**

These objectives define the specific and measurable actions we will take to achieve the overall goal and policy objectives as follows:

- Use a local letter campaign, case studies, media, and social media campaign to highlight the problem and proposed solution of the school crossing supervisor program.
- Engage with local MPs and relevant ministers via meetings and letters to pitch proposed solution(s).
- Support Councils to engage with their communities on their proposed solution to the issue.
- To raise awareness about the reduced/lack of financial support for Councils to provide school crossing supervisor services and the fact the system is failing because of a lack of workforce.

### **Key messages**

1. School crossing supervisors are vital as they ensure the safety of school aged children during school drop off and pick up times.
2. Councils are deeply concerned for the safety of children and want everyone to have a safe journey to school. Local Government will always be a partner.
3. The School Crossing Supervisor program has worked for almost 50 years, but it is now time for a new approach to keeping school crossings safe.

4. The decades-old school supervisor program is no longer fit for purpose and will not be able to continue functioning as it does now.
5. The system needs to be modernised to take into account technology and improved road design options – as is happening interstate and internationally.
6. The Victorian Government needs to recognise that Councils have shouldered the major financial contribution to a program of community significance. We call on them to increase funding to secure safer school crossings for the future.

Allowing for contingencies the estimated cost of the campaign is \$50k.

### **Recent media**

In some instances, Councils made formal resolutions about whether to join the campaign and this attracted considerable media interest in effect launching the campaign. Similar news items have appeared in local newspapers in rural areas.

### **Meetings with relevant ministers and local schools**

Councils' resolution of 29 March 2022 calls for meetings about the future of the school crossings to be held with the relevant ministers and that a forum is convened with schools within the Municipality to explore the opportunity for schools to nominate and provide school crossing supervisors at no cost to Council.

A meeting has been sought in this topic with Melissa Horne MP, Minister for Local Government and it is anticipated that further meetings with Government ministers will arise from the campaign, however, a forum with schools is premature and cannot be delivered until the outcome of this advocacy work is progressed and the outcome is known.

### **Monash – Current issues and request for variation**

School crossing supervision is currently delivered under a contractual arrangement with Chandler MacLeod (School Crossing Supervision Contract No. 2022069) to provide school crossing supervision services until 31 December 2022 with options for two six-month extensions at Council's discretion.

The contract provides that a failure to commence supervision of a crossing will incur a penalty of \$50 per occasion to a maximum penalty of \$250 per day. The relevant clauses are intended to serve as an incentive to ensure all efforts are made to safeguard adequate on-going and casual staff being retained to deliver the service.

The contractor has requested a variation to the contract to remove this provision for the duration of the current term because of an inability to attract sufficient candidates to perform the role. The contractor has provided a detailed account of their recruitment plans and activities to the satisfaction of the contract supervisor. The current labour shortage is well documented and retaining the contract provision at this point in time is considered unreasonable and likely to penalise the contractor unfairly.

Notwithstanding the contractor's inability to recruit and retain sufficient staff to operate all crossings, it is important to understand that an ongoing consequence of this is a considerable number of crossings are unsupervised at any given morning and/or afternoon. Where a supervisor is not available to take up duty at a high-risk site such as a flagged crossing at a primary school, other supervisors are moved from lower risk sites (e.g. crossings with pedestrian lights) to attend these. Parking officers also provide supervision at high-risk crossings in these circumstances.

Whilst necessary, this is not a sustainable model of service delivery, and rightly is a major driver behind the current advocacy campaign.

Given the ongoing campaign and the importance of the continuation of this service the recommendation also highlights that there will be the need for the current school crossing supervision contract to be extended for a further 6 months from 30 December 2022 as allowed in Council's resolution at its 29 March 2022 meeting.

### ***FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS***

The variation requested by the contractor will have no financial impact as the penalty is intended to be an incentive to ensure that maintaining adequate staffing levels are addressed. It is therefore not relied upon or accounted for.

For the advocacy campaign to proceed Council will need to allocate \$50k to initially cover the cost noting that most of this amount will be recovered from the municipal Councils participating.

Further reports and updates on this issue will detail any additional financial considerations that may be necessary.

### ***CONCLUSION***

The Mayor's meeting with mayors, CEOs, senior officers and the MAV was well attended and there is general consensus that Councils see the school crossings service being fully funded by the State Government as a high priority. Equally, there are growing concerns about the sustainability of the program due to an enduring inability to attract people to the role and that decades-old school supervisor program is no longer fit for purpose and will not be able to continue functioning as it does now.

An advocacy campaign has been developed and has commenced and is aimed at raising these concerns with Government and the community and there is strong support from other Councils to do this.

Due to staff shortages, Council's contractor has asked that it not be penalised for being unable to supply supervisors at every crossing in the context of a nation-wide labour shortage and this is considered reasonable in the circumstances. Nonetheless it remains there are crossings that are not supervised, and the available workforce is allocated to cover crossings based on risks.