

1.7 FUTURE OF SCHOOL CROSSING SUPERVISOR PROGRAM

Responsible Director: Peter Panagakos

RECOMMENDATION

1. *That Council calls for tenders for the provision of School Crossing Supervision for an initial period of one year from 1 January 2024 to 31 December 2024 with an option for four, one-year extensions.*
2. *Notes the update on the ongoing School Crossing Advocacy project, undertaken in collaboration with a number of other Councils and the Municipal Association of Victoria.*
3. *Notes there are currently five crossings that are not receiving subsidies from the School Crossings Subsidy Scheme, and one further crossing that is currently not receiving subsidies from the School Crossings Subsidy Scheme, but this crossing will be included in the next application round for funding as it has been assessed as meeting the relevant requirements for funding.*
4. *Notes the low utilisation rates of five crossings that are currently not receiving subsidies from the School Crossings Subsidy Scheme, as detailed in the report.*
5. *Notes that whilst utilisation rate and failure to meet the relevant criteria for the five crossings was identified in 2019/20, the pandemic-related school closures prevented further assessments of utilisation rates, and with Council considering the tendering of a new school crossing contract (as recommended in this report) it is timely to assess and determine whether these crossings should continue to be supervised or decommissioned.*
6. *Notes, that with the five school crossings that are not receiving subsidies from the School Crossings Subsidy Scheme, it is proposed that:*
 - a) *Officers write to and meet with the affected schools whose students utilise these crossings advising them that as the Vic Roads funding no longer covers these crossings and Council is considering no longer providing crossing supervisors at these locations.*
 - b) *Schools and parents are given time to write to Council with their thoughts and any concerns for consideration by officers prior to a decision being made as to whether some, or all of these crossings should remain supervised or be decommissioned.*

- c) *A further report for noting will be presented to Council on the outcome of this process, and should officers determine that a crossing(s) should be decommissioned, the report will include detail of the implications of any such decision as well as outline the timing and a planned approach to decommissioning these crossings in consultation with the Department of Education, the Department of Roads and Road Safety, and the affected schools and the recommended timing.*
7. *Notes despite efforts to address the persistent labour shortage and backfill shifts based on risk and officer availability, an analysis of crossing supervision in 2022 revealed that roughly 20% of crossings remained unsupervised due to staff shortages and that this highlights the ongoing challenge of maintaining sufficient staffing levels to ensure supervision at all crossings.*

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to update Council on the following matters:

- 1) **Advocacy Work:** The report provides an update on the advocacy undertaken aimed at seeking reform of the School Crossing Supervision Program (the Program). It highlights the progress made so far and the outcomes achieved.
- 2) **Contractual Arrangements:** The current contractual arrangement for the provision of the Program expires on 30 December 2023. To ensure the continuity of the Program, the report recommends that tenders are called for the provision of the service for an initial period of one year. This will be followed by four, one-year extensions to be exercised at Council's discretion.
- 3) **School Crossings:** The report identifies five school crossings that do not meet the criteria for VicRoads funding. Based on this, the report describes the process officers intend to utilise to inform their considerations around whether crossing supervisors should continue to be provided at some, or all of these crossings, noting that the ability to staff these and other crossings is subject to the availability of staff.
- 4) **Labour Shortage:** Due to the persistent labour shortage, a significant number of crossings continue to be unsupervised.

BACKGROUND

Based on concerns about ongoing costs associated with the Program and emerging challenges that also require Council funding, recent meetings of the Council have resulted in the following decisions:

- Council tendered for the provision of school crossing services to cover the period between 1 July 2022 and 31 December 2023.
- Council will lead an advocacy campaign to highlight the concerns of local government regarding the sustainability of the Program, and to seek reforms to the way road safety is managed around schools.

The various resolutions of Council have been actioned and are still being undertaken.

DISCUSSION

School Crossings Advocacy

In response to Council's meeting on 21 September 2022, Council Officers implemented an advocacy campaign with the following objectives:

- 1) To request the Victorian Government to fully fund the delivery of the School Crossing program.
- 2) To request the Victorian Government to 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 remains unfulfilled to date.
- 3) To engage with community stakeholders to increase awareness and support for the reduced or lack of financial support for Councils to provide school crossing supervisor services.

The advocacy campaign aimed to raise awareness of the challenges faced by Councils in providing school crossing services and to urge the Victorian Government to take action to address these challenges. By fully funding the delivery of the School Crossing program and conducting a review and reform of the current School Crossing Supervisor model, the Government can ensure the provision of safe and reliable school crossing services for the community.

Under the leadership of the former Mayor, Councillor Stuart James, Council coordinated the campaign with a cohort of 28 Victorian Councils. This work was assisted by The Agenda Group and was timed to engage the State Government in the lead-up to the November 2022 State election.

Twenty eight participating Councils engaged in a range of activities including writing to Ministers, local members of parliament and election candidates, issuing press releases and posting material on their websites and social media platforms. The key messages were:

- 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.

The campaign garnered state-wide media attention and was prominently featured in various regional newspapers and mainstream media outlets, including ABC radio, The Age, and Herald Sun. Additionally, it was highlighted in televised reports on channels 7, 9, and 10, which provided the campaign with significant exposure and reach.

Despite several meetings and discussions with Members of Parliament and election candidates, aimed at raising awareness of the issue, the campaign failed to generate the necessary traction to elicit a meaningful response or commitment from the Government leaving the issue unresolved.

It is worth noting that, despite the unresolved status of the issue, there has been a recent 20% increase in funding for the program for the 22/23 financial year, which the state has provided. However, it should be acknowledged that this funding increase occurred prior to the joint advocacy work discussed above and appears to have arisen as a result of the Council's direct approaches to the Government between March and June 2022. Nonetheless, it remains unclear whether this funding increase will be sustained over the long term or if it was a one-time allocation, as there has been no indication from the Government on this matter.

As the matter remains unresolved, it is intended to keep urging the government to review the program. It is worth noting that following the state election, the same Minister holds both the Roads and Road Safety portfolio and the Local Government portfolio.

Officers are seeking a meeting with the Mayor and the Minister to provide a briefing and terms of reference document outlining the following matters requiring urgent investigation and review:

- Examining models used in other states and countries
- Assessing whether the school community is better equipped to provide the resources needed to facilitate the service
- Identifying potential traffic improvements to eliminate the need for a crossing supervisor while improving safety

- Developing an appropriate funding model that considers hidden costs for councils, such as uniforms and recruitment.

During its meeting on March 29, 2022, Council directed officers to organize a forum with schools in the Municipality to discuss the possibility of schools nominating and providing crossing supervisors without cost to the Council. However, it should be noted that this forum has not yet taken place, as it is intended to commence this discussion with the Minister should they agree to a meeting with the Mayor.

Tender for Service

It should be noted that while Council may consider withdrawing from the Program at some point in the future, the current contractual arrangement for delivering the service will expire on 31 December 2023. Therefore, it is necessary to re-tender the service to ensure that school crossing supervision can continue in its current form until a decision is made.

To achieve this, it is proposed to call tenders for the provision of the service for an initial period of one year, followed by four one-year extensions that can be exercised at Council's discretion. This approach allows for continuity of service on an annual basis instead of a long-term contractual obligation.

The tender for the provision of the school crossing supervision service will include the following key activities:

- Provision of 100 Crossing Supervisors who are trained and equipped
- Replacement of Crossing Supervisors directly employed by Council
- Initial training and refresher training for Crossing Supervisors
- Maintenance of a pool of relief School Crossing Supervisors
- Compliance with "working with children" legislation

To ensure proper monitoring and evaluation of the service provider's performance, the service specification will include workload indicators and key performance criteria. An amount of \$1.21m has been allocated for contract costs in the draft 23/24 budget.

For the 2022/2023 financial year, the Department of Transport allocated Council \$701,765 in subsidy funding, which included an additional 20% from the previous year's funding. However, there is no guarantee that this funding increase will continue in future years. As a result, it is expected that future subsidies will be around \$580,000 per annum.

Unfunded Crossings

There are currently five crossings that are not receiving subsidies from the program despite being supervised.

The subsidy program is based on a detailed formula that determines whether a crossing supervisor is warranted. The formula takes into account the number of children (primary and secondary) using the crossing, the number of vehicles passing through the crossing, and a minimum requirement for the number of pedestrians crossing and vehicles passing through.

Under the formula, crossings and pedestrian crossings at signalised intersections are eligible for subsidy under the scheme if the following warrants are met:

- Children's crossings for primary school children - where the number of children (minimum 20) multiplied by the number of vehicles in the hour (minimum 100) exceeds 5,000.
- Children's crossings for secondary school children - where the number of children (minimum 20) multiplied by the number of vehicles in the hour (minimum 250) exceeds 25,000.
- Pedestrian operated signals - more than 20 primary school children per hour.

Subsidies may also be provided for "other crossings" due to special needs, such as children with disabilities, or other safety factors, including excessive vehicle speed, road geometry, limited sight distance, volume of heavy vehicles, or road width.

When a crossing meets the prescribed "warrant," the Department generally provides a subsidy for that crossing. However, it is uncertain how "special needs" crossings are treated, as a crossing subsidy may be provided one year but not the next.

The following five crossings have not received any subsidies since 2019 due to not meeting the warrant in that less than 20 school children use the crossing.

Crossing location	Nearest intersection	Suburb	School serviced	Type	Road type
Blackburn Rd	Doon Ave	Glen Waverley	St Christopher's PS	Pedestrian Lights	Arterial
High Street Rd	Hunter St	Glen Waverley	St Christopher's PS & Wesley College	Pedestrian Lights	Arterial
Grandview Rd	Whalley Dr	Wheelers Hill	St Justin's PS	Flags	Local
Jells Rd	Petronella Ave	Wheelers Hill	Jells Park PS & Caulfield Grammar	Flags	Local

Phoenix Dr	Columbia Dr	Whealers Hill	Waverley Meadows PS & Wheelers Hill SC	Flags	Local
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The table below illustrates the current number of students using the crossings and an indication of how often the crossings are supervised.

Crossing location	School serviced	Type	Road type	Current school age pedestrian count	% of shifts covered (2022)
Blackburn Rd Doon Ave	St Christopher's PS	Pedestrian Lights	Arterial	11	97%
High Street Rd Hunter St	St Christopher's PS & Wesley College	Pedestrian Lights	Arterial	7	1%
Grandview Rd Whalley Dr	St Justin's PS	Flags	Local	5	89%
Jells Rd Petronella Ave	Jells Park PS & Caulfield Grammar	Flags	Local	12	90%
Phoenix Dr Columbia Dr	Waverley Meadows PS & Wheelers Hill SC	Flags	Local	16	90%

The above table shows that the High Street Road crossing as result of the unavailability of staff is left unattended most of the time. The remaining four crossings have a supervisor for the majority of the time required. Should a decision ultimately be made to decommission some or all of these crossings there would be an ability to redeploy these crossing supervisors to other crossings where there are a greater number of students utilising a crossing.

The cost of operating these crossings has been entirely funded by Council. The estimated cost of operating each crossing is \$12,800 per annum, resulting in a total estimated cost of \$64,000 for all five crossings.

While the low utilisation rate and failure to meet the relevant criteria were identified in 2019/20, the pandemic-related school closures prevented further assessments of utilisation rates. However, recent counts have confirmed that these crossings are still underutilised. With Council considering the tendering of a new school crossing contract (as recommended in this report) it is timely to assess and determine whether these crossings should continue to be supervised or decommissioned.

Officers intend to write to and meet with the affected schools whose students utilise these crossings. It is proposed to advise them that as the Vic Roads funding no longer covers these crossings, and given the low utilisation rates, Council is considering no longer providing crossing supervisors at these locations. The schools and parents should they choose will be given time to write to Council with their thoughts and any concerns. Officers will then consider the feedback and present a report to Council with their decision as to whether Council should cease providing crossing supervisors at some or all of these locations. If the officers decision is to cease providing supervisors at some or all of these crossings, and prior to any decision being implemented, a report for noting will be presented to a Council meeting detailing the implications of this as well as outline the timing and a planned

approach to decommissioning these crossings in consultation with the Department of Education, the Department of Roads and Road Safety, and the affected schools and the recommended timing.

Staff shortages and unattended crossings

The Program aims to provide crossing supervision at 100 road crossings across 96 sites, of which 54 are flagged children's crossings and 42 have pedestrian-operated traffic lights.

During the September 2022 meeting, Council acknowledged the contractor's difficulty in recruiting and retaining enough staff to operate all crossings. As a result, a considerable number of crossings remain unsupervised. In such cases, supervisors from lower-risk sites are redeployed, and parking officers provide additional supervision at high-risk locations, such as flagged crossings near primary schools.

Despite efforts to address the labour shortage and backfill shifts based on risk and officer availability, an analysis of crossing supervision in 2022 revealed that roughly 20% of crossings remained unsupervised due to staff shortages. This highlights the ongoing challenge of maintaining sufficient staffing levels to ensure supervision at all crossings.

Number of shifts per week (two shifts per day per crossing)	Average number of shifts where supervisor is not available	Average number of shifts backfilled by Parking officers	Average number of shifts not covered per week
1000	210	18	192

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Provision will need to be made in the operating budget for 2024/25 for the continuation of the service by contract. The budget required for the Program is approximately \$1.26 million, which includes a subsidy contribution of \$580,000.

CONCLUSION

Following Council's meeting on 21 September 2022, Council Officers implemented an advocacy campaign aimed at raising awareness of the challenges faced by Councils in providing school crossing services and urging the Victorian Government to take action. A cohort of 28 Victorian Councils joined the campaign and engaged in various activities, including writing to Ministers, local members of parliament, and election candidates, issuing press releases, and posting material on their websites and social media platforms. The Agenda Group assisted in this effort, timed to coincide with the lead-up to the November 2022 State election.

Despite several meetings and discussions with Members of Parliament and election candidates, the campaign failed to generate the necessary traction

to elicit a meaningful response or commitment from the Government, leaving the issue unresolved. As the matter remains unresolved, officers are seeking a meeting with the Mayor and the Minister for Local Government and Roads and Roads Safety to provide a briefing and terms of reference document outlining the matters requiring urgent investigation and review.

Meanwhile, it is crucial to ensure the continuity of the Program, given that the current contractual arrangement for its provision expires on 30 December 2023. Therefore, it is recommended that tenders be called for the provision of the service for an initial period of one year, followed by four one-year extensions to be exercised at Council's discretion.

In addition, it is noted that five crossings are currently supervised but are not receiving subsidies from the program because they do not meet the relevant criteria. It may be appropriate for the Council to consider removing supervisors from these crossings, given the lack of subsidies.

Furthermore, despite efforts to address the labour shortage and backfill shifts based on risk and officer availability, an analysis of crossing supervision in 2022 revealed that roughly 20% of crossings remained unsupervised due to staff shortages. This underscores the ongoing challenge of ensuring sufficient staffing levels to maintain supervision at all crossings.