

Improving Safety in a Roundabout Way



Photo: Mark Farrelly

Sometimes a small change can have a huge impact on the health of a community. The pedestrian priority roundabout installed near Elsternwick Primary School is an inspiring example of this. It also illustrates what can be achieved when a school and a local council work together to reach a positive solution to a dangerous problem.

Elsternwick Primary School has been running a very successful Walking School Bus program in partnership with VicHealth since 2003. It currently includes five routes to school, 150 children and 35 parent volunteers. The school was also chosen as one of the 34 schools to participate in the School Travel Planning pilot program, funded through the Victorian Greenhouse Strategy. The School Travel Planning program supported the Walking School Bus program and actively encouraged cycling and independent walking to school.

In 2004, Bayside City Council started a Local Area Traffic Management (LATM) project for the area that included the school. The objectives for the area adjacent to the school were to reduce the volume and speed of traffic and to support walking and cycling to school. Local residents were invited to be part of the LATM plan for the area. John Grant became involved in the LATM planning process as a local resident, but had an extra interest in the plan because his daughter attended Elsternwick Primary School.

John explains: 'During this process, the possibility of a roundabout at Murphy and Head Streets, which is south of the school, came up. I went to a meeting and said, from professional experience (as a transport planner), a roundabout was no good for children crossing roads. At roundabouts cars can come at children from four different directions. Kids find them very difficult to navigate and understand. We wanted a pedestrian priority roundabout which requires pedestrian priority crossings on all four parts of the intersection.'



“The pedestrian roundabout has given the kids a sense that there is a real response to pedestrian needs in this area – a sense that pedestrians are important.”

Working with the school, John organised a survey of all the parents and families who lived in the catchment area of the junction. The parents were asked how many of their children already walked to school, and whether a pedestrian priority roundabout would change their attitude to walking and if it would change their behaviour.

‘We had a great response to the survey’, John says. ‘Many parents said they would walk more frequently or they were more likely to allow their children to walk to school. We found out that the number of children walking to school would at least double if the roundabout was installed.’

What followed was a great example of social action at its best. The survey information was given to Bayside City Council, who made an application to the VicRoads Regional Office for a pedestrian priority roundabout, using the argument of ‘latent demand’.

The concept of ‘latent demand’ infers a demand that exists but is not yet evident. That is, people wanted to cross at that particular intersection but didn’t use it because they saw it as unsafe. The Council argued that the installation of a pedestrian roundabout would result in increased community use of the crossing.

VicRoads agreed with Bayside City Council and a pedestrian priority crossing was installed at the intersection. Even VicRoads says that the term ‘latent demand’ is a little-used term these days, which made the decision an even more unusual one.

Community members believe the roundabout has had an enormous effect on the community in a number of ways.

‘It has definitely calmed the traffic. I imagine that the number of people walking has doubled. Off peak there are a lot of residents walking. The elderly, people with dogs and other locals are much more confident about walking. The roundabout has trained local drivers to stop and calm down’, John says.

‘There have been great benefits for the school. Local residents hated the huge volume of traffic outside the school – the amount of traffic in the local area has halved, which has made the residents a lot happier. This is a really important thing from the school’s perspective’, John continues.

Jana Scmazzon coordinates the Walking School Bus at Elsternwick Primary School. As a parent, Jana was aware that the intersection had been seen as problematic for some time and that low-key parent-led lobbying had been underway before the Walking School Bus started.

‘I think the success of the Walking School Buses greatly supported the school in lobbying for the roundabout, as the project has had a great impact on the school community.’

Jana says the roundabout has changed the local environment considerably.

‘Groups of kids that previously weren’t walking are now walking home independently. A lot of children moved on from the Walking School Bus and are cycling independently. I think this is a reflection of the parents’ confidence in the children’s road safety skills acquired while walking on the bus for 2 or 3 years. Parents apologise to me because their kids are now independently going to school and not walking on the bus. I think it is great. Hopefully the children’s skills and independence will carry through to secondary school.’

Identifying a local need, working with all stakeholders and successfully lobbying for infrastructure modifications can improve the culture and boost the confidence of a community.

‘The installation of the pedestrian roundabout and increasing the green man timing at a crossing on Nepean Highway has given the kids a sense that there is a real response to pedestrian needs in this area – a sense that pedestrians are important and that walking and riding is as important as driving’, Jana says. ➡➡



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The roundabout is at the corner of Head and Murphy Streets, Elsternwick. For more information on Bayside City Council's Walking School Bus Program contact Michael Blowfield, Walking School Bus Project Officer, Bayside City Council (03) 9599 4438 or at mblowfield@bayside.vic.gov.au

What made the difference?

- *Leadership and commitment shown by parents*
- *A high level of community input into infrastructure needs around schools*
- *Council's commitment to advocating and securing infrastructure change for pedestrian priority*
- *Positive action from VicRoads to pedestrian needs*