

Leading the way with innovative ideas

New Zealand's Visiting Drivers Project is attracting worldwide attention with road safety officials from the United Kingdom and Australia following its lead.

The project has caught the eye of officials in Central Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire in the UK and in Victoria, Australia and they are replicating some of its road safety initiatives.

Improving road safety for visiting drivers, while maintaining New Zealand's reputation as an attractive and safe tourist destination, is the focus of the project between the NZ Transport Agency, its road safety partners, and the rental vehicle and tourism industries.

Many of the project's initiatives benefit all international visitors to New Zealand as they reach them before they begin driving on our roads. The project also has a specific roads and roadsides focus in the Otago, Southland and West Coast regions where visiting drivers make up a large proportion of the traffic. On roads in these regions, safety improvements such as centre-line rumble strips, keep left arrows, no passing markings and new signage have been installed.

Since 2014, the project has delivered a range of initiatives to inform visitors about road safety in New Zealand. At each stage of their holiday - planning, booking, in-flight, arriving in New Zealand and when actually on our roads - they receive accessible user friendly road safety information. The resources are available in different languages and formats, including interactive videos and apps.

Steering wheel tag replicated in the UK

One of the project's initiatives, a steering wheel tag with pictorial road safety information, has been embraced in the UK by the Central Bedfordshire County Council and the Northamptonshire Safer Roads team (Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service and Northamptonshire Police).

The steering wheel tag (similar to a luggage tag) provides important road safety messages for drivers when they get behind the wheel of a rental vehicle. The messages and graphics were created based on feedback from the rental vehicle industry, the NZ Police, the Transport Agency and other partners in the Visiting Drivers Project.

Tim Burton and Henry Sleight, both fire fighters from the Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service, were attracted to the idea of the steering wheel tag. Tim contacted the project team to learn more about the initiative that he, with support from Henry, the Safer Roads team and Fire Service colleagues, is implementing in the UK to help inform and educate van drivers.

'I have been extremely pleased and encouraged by the impact your initiative has had over here in the UK and thank you for offering me the opportunity to develop it to suit our roads,' says Tim.

'Behaviour and attitude on UK roads is a real issue at the moment and trying to deliver messages to road users can be difficult. Some of our literature in the UK can appear complicated which can have an adverse effect on the recipients of road safety messages.

'However, I truly feel that the simplicity of the steering tag initiative has delivered some very welcome messages,' says Tim.

New Zealand law when driving



Everyone wears
SEATBELTS



Keep
LEFT



MAXIMUM
speed



NO overtaking
on yellow lines

Your trip may take longer than you expect
Allow extra time on New Zealand roads



NZ TRANSPORT AGENCY

For more information go to www.saferjourneys.govt.nz/visitingdriversproject



NORTHAMPTONSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE AND NORTHAMPTONSHIRE POLICE



CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL



Catalyst for the campaign

While working as a road safety officer for the Central Bedfordshire County Council, Tim noticed an increase in the number of people being killed or seriously injured in vans weighing less than 7.5 tonnes.

Research shows that a high proportion of collisions occur because of the difference in size of a van compared to a car, the greater braking distances and the vast difference in sight lines.

'In an attempt to reduce deaths and serious injuries, I researched how other road safety professionals had approached a similar issue. This is when I came across the New Zealand steering wheel tag with its striking design and unique approach to road safety messaging. It was something that had not been used in the UK and it prompted me to contact the project team and ask for permission to adopt the same approach,' says Tim.

Trialling and evaluating the concept

Before the concept was introduced in Central Bedfordshire, Tim studied the evaluation conducted by the Visiting Drivers Project team which he says helped him decide how to approach the van user group.

The steering wheel tag and a leaflet were trialled in Central Bedfordshire County for a month. The material was distributed to three rental companies at strategic points.

Before the tag and leaflet were distributed, a questionnaire was used to understand customers' knowledge of driving a van. After the tag and leaflet had been made available, an evaluation was carried out to understand if customers had retained the information and if it improved their driving behaviour.

The final evaluation was conducted by the University of Bedfordshire and included a questionnaire and the use of

state-of-the-art eye tracking technology. This involved the tag and leaflet being displayed on a screen while a computer monitored where the participant's eyes focused the most and the period of time the participant spent reading the literature. Through this technology, it was clear which messages were viewed intensively and which were not.

'The evaluation strongly suggested the tag and leaflet were successful and should be rolled out on a consistent basis,' says Tim.

He says their use is being monitored to gauge whether the intervention continues to have the desired effect.

The eye tracking evaluation was the catalyst for a much improved design, colour scheme and information content for the Northamptonshire Safer Roads steering wheel tag and leaflet, enabling it to reach a wider audience.

Challenges faced

Tim says the first challenge was getting funding to research, design, produce, distribute and evaluate the tag and leaflet. Introducing the material was also quite a challenge.

'Initially I approached some very large and globally recognised companies who, despite welcoming the content of the material, objected to its branding and colour scheme. The county council who had funded the project was very stringent on the colour scheme and branding which resulted in those large global companies not taking up the initiative.

'However the road safety literature was welcomed by local van rental companies and has been used by hundreds of rental van road users.'

Take up of the tag and leaflet

Both the tag and leaflet are being used in Central Bedfordshire and Northamptonshire with subtle differences between the two.

The Central Bedfordshire tag and leaflet are being widely used within the van rental sector only. This is due to the branding of the material not being consistent with many companies' own branding.

The Northamptonshire Fire and Rescue Service tag and leaflet are being used in all areas of van usage. This includes: van rentals, commercial van use and private van use. The Northamptonshire Police Force will also be delivering the leaflets and verbal messages through random roadside checks of all types of van.

Feedback on the concept

Tim says the feedback as a whole has been very positive. 'Staff members at the rental companies in Central Bedfordshire said the tag and leaflet offered accurate information and messages to help them communicate with the public about the safe driving of larger vehicles.

'They also commented that as a result of the material they were more confident providing road safety messages and that it contributed to a more relaxed atmosphere when offering a rental vehicle. They felt it showed their companies in a positive light and they also valued the knowledge they had gained,' says Tim.

The Northamptonshire Safer Roads team found the literature met their requirements in engaging with van drivers and implementation and evaluation work is underway.

A model for Victoria, Australia

Road safety promoters in the state of Victoria have also been looking at New Zealand's Visiting Drivers Project for guidance.

Dr Stuart Toplis Manager Industry Sustainability Tourism, Events and Visitor Economy Branch at Tourism Victoria heard about what was being done in New Zealand to keep visiting drivers safe and was keen to replicate the project in Victoria - focusing on the Great Ocean Road.

Stuart has received funding from the Transport Accident Commission to undertake some visiting driver safety initiatives.

'As a state tourism organisation, Tourism Victoria's role is essentially about facilitation. We assist departments and agencies to disseminate relevant health and safety information (including road safety information) to visitors and the wider tourism industry,' says Stuart.

'A colleague who had recently visited New Zealand brought the Visiting Drivers Project to my attention. Subsequent Google searches provided a greater insight into this initiative together with very informative discussions with key Transport Agency staff.'

In developing the project plan, Stuart used a wide range of information including data on the growth in international free independent travellers, data from Victoria Police and VicRoads (including their concerns) and information on successful visiting driver initiatives - both interstate and international.

'In this context, the comprehensive array of publicly available information on the New Zealand Visiting Drivers Project was incorporated into the project plan,' says Stuart.

The Transport Accident Commission was convinced of the benefits of the project and has provided more than \$AUD 100,000 to fund a suite of activities over the next 12 months. These are based on what has been done in New Zealand and include:

- » a simplified Chinese version of the *Safety tips for visitors to Victoria* brochure for distribution through selected China-based travel agents and other channels
- » a short road safety video (English/Chinese versions) for broadcast via key social media channels/websites
- » enhancing visitvictoria.com (and foreign language variants) to include key messages and supporting videos
- » liaising with Google Australia to adjust Google Maps' travel times to be more reflective of Victorian roads (particularly the Great Ocean Road)
- » a road safety video as part of inflight entertainment on key Chinese airlines flying to Australia (subject to discussions with airlines)
- » designing and producing a suite of road safety promotional materials which can be ordered on-line by vehicle rental companies and other intermediaries
- » billboard advertising
- » a review of the 'Drive on Left' road signage along the Great Ocean Road (including road sign design)
- » guidelines for accommodation providers and accredited visitor information centres on how to provide practical driving advice to customers.

Summary

New Zealand's efforts since 2014 to keep visiting drivers safe through education and information campaigns, as well as physical improvements to popular tourist routes, are unique to the rest of the world.

Other countries are following New Zealand's lead and using the work of the Visiting Drivers Project as a template for getting key road safety information to visiting drivers and others.

At the same time, the initiatives New Zealand is implementing are also enhancing its reputation for caring for overseas visitors so that they have a safe and enjoyable experience in this country.

The Visiting Drivers Project has a clear shared objective of host responsibility. Project partners agree that as the host country, New Zealand has a responsibility to help our visitors have a safe and enjoyable time and do whatever we can to keep them (and others they share the road with) safe.

With tourism now New Zealand's largest export industry, in terms of foreign exchange earnings, our reputation as a responsible host becomes all the more important.