

Better Conversations on Road Risk



# Talking about road risk

Better conversations in your community





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# Conversations with communities

## Working with communities to understand how to improve safety on their roads

This short guide provides some tools to support your conversations with communities about road risk. It includes:

- A recap of what we know about Better Conversations on Road Risk
- What to do when talk gets tough
- How to answer some tricky questions
- Phrases we use to tell the story of our unique roads
- Tips for productive conversation
- Places to go to learn more about the Better Conversations programme.



We hope this becomes something you glance at before heading out to an open day or a meeting, or just before a one-on-one conversation with someone who has questions.

Please let us know if it works for you, or if you feel there is something missing.

Further information on engagement and why it is important can be found in the Better Conversations of Road Risk online [Engagement Handbook](#).



# What we know

## The Better Conversations on Road Risk research tells us communities are ready and willing to engage

Comprehensive community-based research has been carried out by the NZ Transport Agency to understand what communities think about road safety and risk on their roads.

We found around three-quarters of people want to talk about road risk – that is, what can be done to make roads safer and where the trouble spots are.

Two findings have shaped this document and our overall approach to engaging with communities:

### 1. Locals know their roads

Locals have a view on what needs to be done to make their roads safer because they travel on them every day. Engaging with locals is important, as they often have a view on what should be done and can offer solutions. Early engagement with locals creates a good environment for consultation and ensures local perspectives are included in proposed solutions.

### 2. Focus on the road, not the speed

Speed limits are one factor among many which can influence the safety of a particular road. It can be useful to open a conversation on this point and bring up the issues of speeding and speed limits later. Research shows starting a conversation on speed is not very productive – many have already made up their mind and think this isn't the problem. Focus on the fact that roads in New Zealand are unique, they are often windy, single-lane and unforgiving.

For more information, read our [one-page research summary](#), or check out [New Zealanders' perceptions on road risk](#).

## Our conversation guidelines

Every conversation about road safety has the potential to make a difference in our communities. We have some [conversation guidelines](#).

- Every conversation counts.
- Conversation is an exchange.
- Conversation is real – use your own words and make points only if they make sense to you.
- Meet the conversation where it happens.
- Focus on the goal.



# When conversations get hard

## A few simple techniques can help with challenging conversations

### Hear them out

Conversations on road risk can sometimes be uncomfortable, but this doesn't mean they're not effective, even if the person you're speaking with walks away without a resolution. Sometimes people reflect on conversations and change their minds later, or they just need to be heard.

It might help to remember you're there to understand their perspective and tap into their knowledge of local roads. You are there to listen to them, as well as tell your own story.

The most important thing in any engagement is that the community is given an opportunity to share their ideas. If you can show you've gone in with an open mind and taken their views into consideration, you are more likely to gain their support.

### Actively listen

This conversation technique involves listening closely then summarising and relaying back to the person what they've said. It's useful when the person is upset or angry, as it demonstrates you are concentrating on what they are saying.

Ask questions and clarify what you think you heard. This helps you understand the person's point of view and shows their concerns are being taken seriously.

### You don't have to know it all

You might not be able to answer every question, and some might be highly emotive. If you don't have an answer for the tough questions, say so. Tell them you will find out and follow up with the information they need.

### Accept some people won't change their mind

Research shows New Zealanders can be grouped into six segments based upon their attitude to speed and road risk: 'Not on my road', 'Slow your roll', 'Pro Safety', 'Privately Pro Safety', 'Fast Lane' and 'Middle of the Road'. The segments differ in their concern for road risk, and support for speed management interventions such as speed limit reductions. 'Fast Lane' people are unlikely to agree to any intervention, however much you talk to them. 'Middle of the Road' people are not concerned about road safety and are unlikely to engage in these conversations. People who are 'Pro Safety', on the other hand, are likely to support



interventions before even speaking with you. This research suggests the most fruitful conversations are with the ‘Privately Pro Safety’, ‘Not on my Road’—people who think road safety is a serious issue but don’t see themselves as part of the problem, and ‘Slow your Roll’—those who are moderately concerned about road safety, segments.



# Tricky questions and easy answers

**Some commonly asked questions and some ideas on how to reply. More examples can be found in the Better Conversations on Road Risk [toolkit](#).**

## **Aren't you just trying to lower speed limits?**

No. We're using local knowledge and data to make sure we've done everything we can to make your roads safer. Sometimes this means road improvements so it's safer at the current speed limit, sometimes it means lowering the speed limit. In a few cases, speed limits could be increased. The aim is to make sure roads have travel speeds that match the risk.

## **Speed isn't a problem, bad drivers are. Why aren't you focusing on them?**

Even the most skilled drivers make mistakes, and most drivers understand New Zealand's roads can be challenging. Good speed management gives drivers the cues they need to judge the safe and appropriate speed for the road they're on.

## **What is good speed management?**

Good speed management is when technology, data, first-hand observation and local knowledge are used to inform interventions to make a road safer. Community engagement – before, during and after the consultation period – is at its heart. This ensures the public are fully aware and involved in any change proposed.

## **Going a few kilometres faster or slower doesn't make any difference to safety**

Actually, it does. Speed is the difference between a correctable mistake and a fatal error. Every extra km/h increases the likelihood of someone being killed or injured in a crash. Regardless of what causes a crash, speed always plays a part.

## **Slowing down will make it take ages to get anywhere**

Not necessarily. Research shows that going faster doesn't save as much time as we think. Waiting for lights to change or traffic to move means total travel times don't vary much, even if you drive 10 km/h faster.



## Why don't you change the limit on this road? Crashes happen here all the time

We use crash analysis data to prioritise roads that have the most risk, which is why we are talking to you about this road. We always appreciate local feedback about all your roads and will make sure to pass it on to the right people. We're interested in talking to you about a range of possible solutions. In some instances road improvements might be a more appropriate solution than changing speed limits.

## How can I make the roads around my child's school safer?

First, talk to your school. There may already be a project underway. You can access the [Safer Journeys for Schools Guidelines](#) on the Transport Agency website. These guidelines:

- provide a survey template to document your concerns
- list ways you can arrange meetings to discuss identified road safety risks with your school staff and local road safety personnel.

Any issue must be raised through the school so contact them to see whether there is already work underway to address safety in your area.





# Key messages

**These are the phrases we use to tell the story of our unique roads.**

You aren't expected to use every message every time and you don't have to recite them word for word. Use your own words and pick messages relevant to your conversation. They are starting points to get the conversation going and quickly bring attention to the unique nature of our roads and what can be done to make them safer.

## Key messages

Often the public will approach you with an issue or concern important to them. Hear them out and, where relevant, acknowledge their concerns with what we know.

### **New Zealand roads can be unforgiving**

Our roads are unique. Our roads are winding, hilly and sometimes single lane. Our roads can be challenging and demanding to drive and the consequences of small errors can be fatal.

Not all risks are visible, and often our roads aren't easy to read.

### **Drivers need to choose the right speed for the road**

Drivers use many cues to judge the right speed for the road and the conditions.

Conditions include the shape of the road; the weather; traffic; other road users; and road-side hazards, such as poles, trees or ditches. *NB: you could give examples of specific hazards on the road that you are engaging about.*

Regardless of what causes a crash, speed always plays a part.

### **When communities understand risk, they can discuss what to do**

To make roads safer, we can improve the roads. We can also lower speed limits.

Locals know local roads and have a perspective on what needs to be done.

Communities have an important role to play in contributing to discussions about making local roads safer.



# Quick tips

- Speak honestly and be authentic.
- Make sure your answers are clear.
- Use facts where you have them, but be aware that a person's emotion may overshadow the facts you have.
- If you don't know the answer, say you don't know and undertake to get back to them once you do.
- Listen and ask questions of your own.
- If there are options for the person to resolve their issue, explain them.
- Direct people to resources you think they might find useful.
- If there is no obvious answer, give an example of a similar local issue that's been resolved – it may help them visualise what you're discussing.
- Explain the process for addressing risk on the road, emphasising the community's role and reiterating your willingness to help.
- Have an open mind – you never know what you will discover.

# More resources

1. Speed management resources – <http://www.nzta.govt.nz/speed-management-resources>
2. Better Conversations on Road Risk – <http://www.nzta.govt.nz/safety/better-conversations-on-road-risk>
3. Engagement Handbook – <http://www.nzta.govt.nz/safety/resources-for-road-controlling-authorities/engagement-handbook>
4. Speed Management Guide – <http://www.nzta.govt.nz/safety/resources-for-road-controlling-authorities>
5. Conversation principles in full – <http://www.nzta.govt.nz/safety/speed-management-resources/better-conversations-on-road-risk/guidelines-for-using-the-messages/>