Overview
The Visiting Drivers Project was established in March 2014 under the Signature Programme which is part of the government’s road safety strategy to 2020, Safer Journeys. Its aim is to improve road safety for, and of, domestic and international visitors, while maintaining New Zealand’s reputation as an attractive and safe tourist destination.

The project is led by the NZ Transport Agency with partners from central and local government and the private sector. The project partners acknowledge that drivers make mistakes and so recognise that we all have a shared responsibility to create a safer road system for all users.

The project initiatives cover the entire tourism supply chain: planning, booking, in-flight, arrival and journey. The project is focused on the Otago, Southland and West Coast regions. International visiting drivers make up a significant proportion of the traffic in summer in these major tourist destinations.

The project partners have developed an action plan with a package of short, medium and long-term initiatives for the next three years. These initiatives will strengthen all parts of the system – safe vehicles, safe speeds, safe roads and roadides, and safe users – and complement each other to collectively achieve a bigger impact.

Crash statistics
Statistically, it’s important not to look at one year’s crash statistics in isolation. Instead we focus on looking at the long-term trends as many factors can influence crash numbers in one year.

More than three million international visitors come to New Zealand each year. Over the last five years (2011–15) the average number of fatal crashes on our roads per year was 264. Of these, an average of 17 fatal crashes per year involved an overseas driver.

It’s not known exactly how much driving international visitors do while they are here, which would allow a calculation of crash rates per kilometre driven. However we do know that overseas drivers have been involved in (not necessarily at fault) six percent of fatal and injury crashes on our roads from 2011–15.

The partnership approach
The project began with a workshop in April 2014 of key potential partners to talk about the perceived issue and how they could work together to make a difference. Following that workshop, a core group of project partners was established.

It was agreed that a partnership approach would be the best way of helping people make safe and informed choices at every stage of their journey. All the partners are committed to working together to find ways to look after and inform visitors, and keep them, and others, safe on our roads.

Involvement in the project goes much wider than just the core partners. There is ongoing support from organisations that are involved in some initiatives but are not officially part of the working group such as Air New Zealand, Immigration NZ, CamperMate, Christchurch International Airport and international embassies.

‘The Visiting Drivers Project is the finest example I know of the private sector and government agencies working together to address an issue of public concern. Everyone has been prepared to play their part; all ideas have been considered on their merit, and firm commitments have been made, all with the goal of achieving safer outcomes on our roads.’
CHRISS ROBERTS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, TOURISM INDUSTRY AOTEAROA

For more information go to www.saferjourneys.govt.nz/visitingdriversproject
The partners
The project partners go beyond the usual Transport Agency stakeholders and into the tourism supply chain so we can influence visitors’ driving choices even before they’ve left home.

The project partners are:
» NZ Transport Agency
» Ministry of Transport
» New Zealand Police
» Queenstown Lakes District Council
» Southland District Council
» Buller District Council
» Grey District Council
» West Coast Regional Council
» Westland District Council
» Environment Southland
» Automobile Association
» Rental Vehicle Association
» Tourism Industry Aotearoa
» Tourism New Zealand
» Tourism Holdings Ltd

Project purpose
Following the establishment of the project team the next step was to develop a shared purpose which resonated with everyone.

The agreed purpose of the Visiting Drivers Project is to: ‘Improve road safety for and of domestic and international visitors, while maintaining New Zealand’s reputation as an attractive and safe tourist destination’.

The linking concept for these two aims is ‘Host Responsibility’. This concept resonates really well with all partners because it has both a road safety and tourism outcome so everyone can see their role in it.

The project team want all drivers to experience New Zealand as a safe, attractive and accessible place. They accept that everyone has a role to play to keep people safe on our roads.

Project team structure
There are three core groups within the project team:

Governance Group
» Provide governance of the project and overall direction.
» Jointly or individually are the public spokespeople for the project.
» Report to Ministers as appropriate.

Working Group
» Work together to plan and deliver project initiatives.
» Support and advise the Governance Group, and report regularly on progress.
» Work with the communications working group on how best to promote the project.

Communications Working Group
» Use their organisation’s communications channels to deliver overarching communications strategy, key messages and resources.
» Deliver communications activity for any initiatives their organisation is leading and share information with other members.

Project initiatives
The project initiatives reflect New Zealand’s key host responsibilities to ensure:

» drivers are well informed; they have made good choices based on driving experience, correct travel times, speeds, road types and conditions; and have chosen a suitable vehicle and are prepared for New Zealand driving conditions

» roads and roadsides support a safe journey and experience, with good rest spots and opportunities for photography stops, and increased safety measures on key tourist routes to protect all road users when a mistake on the road happens

» New Zealand actively looks after its visitors, supporting them to enjoy their experience, and to rescue and care for them when crashes occur.

The initiatives are led by different partners and many involve providing information to visitors through existing communications channels.

Project initiatives at each stage of this tourism supply chain have been delivered since 2014 and include the examples listed below.

In the planning and booking stages, our tourism partners are upskilling overseas operators and providing information for people planning a visit to help them understand what it’s like to drive in New Zealand. This will help visitors make safe choices, for example having realistic journey times, booking a night’s accommodation when they arrive before driving, and choosing a safe vehicle.

An in-flight initiative developed by Air New Zealand is a Driving in New Zealand app that is available on all long-haul flights and has video content on driving in New Zealand, in a range of languages. This gives visitors another opportunity to engage with safe driving information before they get into a vehicle in New Zealand.
On arrival, many visitors will be reached again by rental vehicle operators. The Rental Vehicle Association and Tourism Industry Aotearoa’s Code of Practice recommends a range of activities to raise awareness of the New Zealand driving environment. The Code also recommends providing safety information in vehicles.

Accommodation providers have access to Tourism Industry Aotearoa’s toolkit which gives them information and resources to have a conversation with visitors about road safety.

Many of these project initiatives will benefit all visitors across the country but there’s a particular ‘on-the-ground’ focus in the Otago, Southland and West Coast regions. In these major tourism destinations, international visiting drivers make up a large proportion of the traffic in summer and a significant proportion of crashes in the region involve a visiting driver.

They are also areas expecting sustained growth in visitor numbers in the future. Actions like rumble strips and barriers are designed to reduce the likelihood of crashes occurring and to minimise the consequences when they do occur. Successful roading initiatives in these regions could be replicated throughout New Zealand.

**Benefits of the partnership approach**

One of the greatest strengths of the project has been the strong partnerships at all levels. This was established right at the start by the structure and governance of the project team who are spread across the country.

Having a shared purpose under the ‘Host Responsibility’ concept has been vital to getting such a wide range of partners pulling in the same direction.

All the partners have channels and networks to reach people with their messages and everyone is happy to share information where relevant. For example, Tourism Industry Aotearoa has thousands of independent accommodation, tourism and rental vehicle operators as members who talk to visiting drivers every day.

Some partners have said that the partnership model gives them a good basis to access resources within their organisation for project activities because it demonstrates that there are many people involved and they need to play their part for overall success.

**Host responsibility for visitors**

Helping visitors to have a safe and enjoyable experience
Over the last two years, the project has seen the benefit of a coordinated approach to communications and media. Developing shared key messages and a statistical factsheet ‘source of truth’ helps the partner organisations speak with one voice when commenting to media. This has resulted in more balanced media reporting and journalists being better informed about all aspects of the project.

One of the aims of the broader Signature Programme is to work with new partners to improve road safety. Bringing a wide range of partners together for this project has helped to spread wider knowledge of the safe system approach to road safety, which is another key aim of the Signature Programme.

Even one death on our roads is one too many. With tourism expected to grow even further, the Visiting Drivers Project team are working hard to ensure visitors have the information and guidance they need to stay safe. The team are also focusing on designing a safer transport system to protect visitors in the event of a crash.

For more information about the Visiting Drivers Project go to www.saferjourneys.govt.nz/visitingdriversproject
You can contact the project team at visitingdrivers@nzta.govt.nz

‘Obtaining the desired tourist outcomes by using traditional road safety partners would not have been possible. The sphere of influence that has been achieved by broadening the group across the tourism industry has resulted in better information flow for both our overseas and local visitors. The positive inputs from this group will see improvements in road safety for all in the lower South Island for many years to come.’

RUSSELL HAWKES, SENIOR POLICY PLANNER – TRANSPORT, ENVIRONMENT SOUTHLAND

Further information about the Signature Programme and the Safer Journeys road safety strategy

The purpose of the Signature Programme is to:

» enable and facilitate the implementation of ambitious and innovative safe system projects that will reduce serious road trauma or the risk of serious road trauma

» apply interventions that incorporate the safe system approach and reframe the road safety conversation

» employ a collaborative approach (public and private, national and regional) to deliver improved road safety and other desired outcomes

» generate demand for improved road safety from a wider audience through showcasing best or emerging practice and the outcomes that can be achieved.

The Safer Journeys road safety strategy follows the Safe System approach. Key principles of the Safe System are:

» People make mistakes and some crashes are inevitable.

» Human bodies have a limited ability to withstand crash forces.

» We need to strengthen the system around them - roads and roadsides, speeds, vehicles, and road use so that if one part fails, other parts will still protect the people involved.

» We need to share responsibility for creating a safe road system - this is an important principle in the Visiting Drivers Project.