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There are 3 logos appearing at the top of this word document – Vision Australia, Guide Dogs Victoria and Blind Citizens Australia.

**“Road safety for pedestrians who are blind or have low vision”**

December 2012

**Key facts**

**About the report**

The report was produced by Monash University Accident Research Centre, the nation’s most respected transport safety unit.

The report ‘*Road safety for pedestrians who are blind or have low vision*’ was produced with the financial support of the Transport Accident Commission and VicRoads.

Blindness sector partners Vision Australia, Guide Dogs Victoria and Blind Citizens Australia worked together with their clients and members to input to the study.

Participants in the study included 607 Victorians who are blind or have low vision, who were asked about their experiences and decision making processes as pedestrians. The study was conducted during 2011 and 2012.

**Key findings from the report include:**

*High number of collisions and near collisions*

* 1 in 12 people (7.9% or 48 people) involved in collision with motor vehicle or cyclist in last 5 years
* More than 1 in 4 (165 people) reported experiencing a pedestrian safety issue,
* 1 in 5 people (19.5% or 117 people) involved in a near collision.

*Colliding with cars and bicycles*

* Colliding with – Car (58%), Bicycle (21%), Truck (6%), Other (15%) includes a combination of motor vehicle/cyclists, motorcycles, electric scooters, wildlife, skateboard and unsure.
* Near collisions and collisions - Vast majority of collisions and near collision (63.9%) were with motor vehicles, and substantial proportions of collisions and near collisions were with bicycles (24.1%)

*Collisions and near collisions at intersections and footpaths*

* 1 in 4 collisions (26.1%) occurred at intersections,
* Approximately 28% occurred in other locations,
* Remainder were fairly evenly distributed between mid-block locations, at signalised crossings and on the footpath.

*Exposure while walking*

* high proportion of people who are blind or have low vision walk outside daily and cover substantial distances,
* pedestrians with vision loss likely to be exposed to a range of different traffic environments (including, heavy traffic, non-signalised intersections, signalised crossings, roundabouts, multiple lanes, traffic islands, electric vehicles and cyclists).

*Reliance on other senses*

* pedestrians with visual impairment are more likely to rely on other senses and non-visual skills when walking,
* likely to use alternative sensory systems to compensate (such as hearing).

*Confidence – signalised crossings (high), bicycles and silent cars (low)*

* confident walking in most environments, with the majority being very confident crossing at signalised crossings,
* less confident in heavy traffic, at non-signalised intersections, at roundabouts and crossing multiple lanes,
* least confident when interacting with electric vehicles and cyclists possibly due to the limited noise they create,
* People who were blind reported a greater level of confidence overall, compared with respondents who had low vision possibly because individuals who are blind have less visual information available about the situation to reduce their confidence level.

*Training*

Orientation and Mobility training is provided by Vision Australia and Guide Dogs Victoria in Victoria.

* Training focuses directly on specific individual needs and requirements, and therefore the experiences often vary amongst individuals.
* Training received had focused on strategies to address crossing roads safely, use of canes and other mobility aid devices, use of and accessing public transport, training guide dogs, and way-finding.
* Most participants who had received training reported finding it beneficial to their safe mobility.
* Negative relationship between confidence and training received. A possible explanation for these results may relate to exposure rates. For example, individuals who undergo training may be more likely to experience circumstances that encompass greater complexity.
* Training positively related to increased collision rates. However it cannot be concluded that a causal relationship exists. Explanation for this finding may be related to increased exposure rates (individuals who have received training more likely to partake in independent travel), and individuals who experienced collisions or near collisions are more likely to seek training and services to assist with their independent mobility in future.

**Report summary and recommendations (from page x and xi of the report)**

“*The present study provides some preliminary results to understanding the experiences of pedestrians who are blind, or have low vision. More specifically, the study concludes that:*

* *Maintaining safe mobility is important for pedestrians with vision loss;*
* *The degree of vision loss impacts on the skills and strategies utilised by the road user group;*
* *The degree of vision loss impacts on the confidence felt by this road user group; and*
* ***Safety is a concern, with a high proportion of pedestrians experiencing collisions or near collisions.***

*Furthermore, in the context of O&M training, it was found that:*

* *O&M training is a client-centred approach providing a range of different skills to individuals with vision loss; and*
* *O&M instructors have a complex role to play that requires flexibility, adaptability and a range of skill sets to cater for the clients physical, psychological and emotional needs.*

*Inconclusive results were also found regarding O&M training being related to reduced confidence levels and increased levels of collisions, or near collisions. There are limitations within the study related to data collection, which prevents a more detailed analyses related to these results. Therefore these results must be interpreted with considerable caution, as the study is unable to determine the nature of the relationship identified.*

*In addition, another* ***noteworthy finding from the study highlights potential challenges for pedestrians who are blind, or experience vision loss. The study identified electrical vehicles and cyclists as being two of the most difficult interactions within the road network system for these individuals to navigate safely****. Given the significant promotion and movement towards sustainable transport within many western societies currently, it highlights the need to consider other more vulnerable road user groups in the process of creating a safe road network environment.*

*Given the outcomes of this study, it is clear that more initiatives are required to manage the safe mobility of pedestrians with vision loss. Therefore, it is recommended that:*

* *Further research be conducted in specific areas of safe mobility for pedestrians (e.g. effect of confidence, collision risk) to enhance current understanding of these factors;*
* *More research conducted in the area of orientation and mobility instruction to inform a more evidence-based training program for training O&M professionals; and*
* *Engagement of relevant stakeholders to encourage safer behaviour by road user groups as well as improvements to infrastructure and road design to enhance environments that provide for safe mobility of pedestrians with vision loss.*

*It is important to note that in the area of road safety for pedestrians who are blind, or experience low vision, there are numerous avenues for further developments. The above recommendations only reflect and highlight some overall, immediate needs. As research within the area begins to develop further, it is likely that a better understanding of more practical requirements for this population group will be identified.*”