Help Phones Policy

This policy outlines VicRoads approach for managing help phones. Where alternative technology is provided for incident detection, help phones are generally considered unnecessary, except in high risk locations.

Context

Help phones seek to facilitate effective freeway incident detection, initiating a response. They enable road users to contact the VicRoads' Traffic Management Centre following an incident causing, or with the potential to cause congestion or further road safety incidents. Existing help phones are located on strategically important routes across the declared road network, namely on freeways and in tunnels.

Help phones are becoming increasingly redundant due to the availability of other methods of incident detection (for example: communication via mobile phones, closed circuit television (CCTV), freeway data stations, Incident Response Service (IRS). As these methods do not involve the road user exiting a vehicle and make it faster to detect incidents, these alternative methods provide greater benefits to transport network efficiency and road safety for incident detection when compared to help phones.

Furthermore, the costs associated with the installation and ongoing maintenance, combined with low utilisation rates, shows that help phones are not providing the greatest value for money for incident detection, nor are they providing a useful customer contact medium.

Consequently, there is a need to define where help phones should be retained, installed or upgraded, and where they should be decommissioned.

Scope

This policy is to be applied by VicRoads and parties acting on VicRoads behalf, when:

- Reviewing the need for existing help phones
- Considering the installation of new help phones
- Determining the appropriate level of technology upgrade or maintenance for help phones

Objectives

This policy seeks to support the following objectives as part of VicRoads' legislative responsibilities in the *Road Management Act 2004* and the *Transport Integration Act 2010:*

- Reduce the risk of death and serious injury;
- Minimise the operational delay and cost to road users; and
- Optimise the use of available maintenance funds

Policy Application

1. Policy Guidance

For most decisions, the policy guidance can be used directly. If the policy guidance can be applied, then the policy principles are considered met. Refer to *Policy Guidance* section of this policy.

2. Policy Principles

Where the policy guidance may not be appropriate and it is necessary to deviate from the policy guidance, then a principle-based decision needs to be made. All the policy principles need to be addressed.

The decision must be documented, (refer to Appendix A) and approved as outlined in the *Responsibilities* section of this policy.

3. Policy Exception

Any deviation from policy principles is discouraged and should only be made in line with broader Government Policy, Strategies and Legislation. Where it is absolutely necessary to deviate from any of the policy principles, a principle-based decision should be made demonstrating why deviation from the policy principles is considered necessary and acceptable.

The decision must be documented, (refer to Appendix A) and approved as outlined in the *Responsibilities* section of this policy.

Policy Principles

Policy principles have been developed to define VicRoads' position and support decision-making regarding trees in road reserves. To comply with this policy, all the policy principles are to be addressed to achieve the Policy Objectives and appropriately consider the Transport System Objectives. Further guidance is provided in the *Policy Guidance* section of this policy.

1. Road Safety Principle

In high risk locations; retention, installation or upgrading of help phones may be considered.

2. Value for Money Principle

Where alternative technology is provided for incident detection; retention, installation or upgrading of help phones is to be avoided.

3. Road User Expectation Principle

When removing existing help phones, appropriate information and advertising to advise road users (e.g. signage, publicity, etc.) and emergency and incident response service providers is required.

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Policy Guidance

To align with all the policy principles, the following guidance should be used:

1.   Road Safety Principle

In high risk locations; retention, installation or upgrading of help phones may be considered.

Generally where alternative technology is provided for incident detection (as a minimum CCTV coverage, mobile phone coverage and Incident Response Services (IRS) are necessary); retention, installation and upgrading of help phones should be avoided, except in high risk locations.

High risk locations can be identified on a case by case basis using professional judgement and drawing from experience with prior applications of this policy principle. However, generally tunnels of lengths greater than 80m would be considered to be high risk.

2.   Value for Money Principle

Where alternative technology is provided for incident detection; retention, installation or upgrading of help phones is to be avoided.

Due to the presence of alternative technology for incident detection (including: communication via mobile phones, closed circuit television (CCTV), freeway data stations, Incident Response Service (IRS)), help phones are being used less. As alternative technologies provided do not involve the road user exiting a vehicle and make it faster to detect incidents, these alternative methods provide greater benefits to transport network efficiency and road safety for incident detection when compared to help phones.

Furthermore, the increasing costs associated with the installation and ongoing maintenance of help phones, combined with decreasing utilisation rates, means that providing help phones across the metropolitan freeway network is providing decreasing value for money.

Generally where alternative technology is provided for incident detection (as a minimum CCTV coverage, mobile phone coverage and Incident Response Services (IRS) are necessary); retention, installation and upgrading of help phones is considered unnecessary.

3.   Road User Expectation Principle

Prior to removing existing help phones, appropriate information and advertising to advise road users (e.g. signage, publicity, etc.) and emergency and incident response service providers of changes is required.

Where an existing help phone is to be decommissioned, appropriate advertising to inform road users of the changes is required. Permanent signage advising road users of the Traffic Management Centre (TMC) contact number is to be installed at regular intervals along the freeway. Advertising of changes should be considered in consultation with the Communications and Stakeholder Engagement team.

Prior to removing any help phones, alternative location identifiers (e.g. gantry numbers) should be provided on the network to enable road users to clearly explain their location in event of an incident. Datasets associated with alternative location identifiers should be provided to emergency and incident response service providers.

Responsibilities

Roles & Responsibilities of VicRoads Officers

Regional Directors / Project Directors	
Use the policy guidance	
Use the policy principles in situations not covered by the policy guidance to make a principle-based decision and document the decision-making process using Appendix A.	
Approve policy principle-based decisions	
Demonstrate why it is necessary to deviate from the policy principles (policy exceptions) and document the decision making process using Appendix A.	
Endorse exceptions to this policy and seek approval from Strategy and Policy Governance Committee.	
Director Integration Services	
Review, monitor and disseminate this policy	
Strategy and Policy Governance Committee	
Approve this policy	
Approve exceptions to this policy	

Policy Evaluation and Review

This policy will be evaluated and reviewed on a regular basis to monitor its progress towards achieving the intended outcomes.

Contact Details

Questions relating to this policy should be directed to the Manager Transport Integration, Integration Services, VicRoads.

Policy Governance

Policy Ownership and Approval Record			
Business Area Owner – Transport Integration, Integration Services			
Rev. No. Date Released	**Sections/Update**	**Description of Revision**	**Approved by:**
Rev. 1.0 December 2016	First Edition	Development of policy	Strategy and Policy Governance Committee on 7 December 2016
This policy is effective as of the date of approval.			

Related Documents

Document Title	Reference
VicRoads Managed Freeway Guidelines Chapter 3.4	VicRoads Website
VicRoads Traffic Engineering Manual Vol. 2 Ch 12.8.2	VicRoads Website
Austroads Guide to Road Design Part 6B: Roadside Environment	Austroads Website