



City of Richmond

Report to Committee

To: Community Safety Committee
From: Ted Townsend
Manager, Communication and Public Affairs
Re: **COMMUNICATION STRATEGY TO DISCOURAGE STREET RACING**

To Community Safety - Dec. 10/02
Date: December 3, 2002
File: 6450-09

Staff Recommendation

That the report (dated December 3, 2002) from the Manager, Communication and Public Affairs outlining a communications strategy to support the campaign to discourage street racing, be approved.

Ted Townsend
Manager, Communication and Public Affairs

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Staff Report

Origin

A concentration of motor vehicle fatalities as a result of aggressive driving and/or street racing within the last two years has profoundly impacted the community. The City, working with the Richmond RCMP and other partners, has launched a major campaign to combat street racing and other criminal driving behaviour within the community.

A three-pronged campaign has been developed combining education, engineering and enforcement initiatives designed to combat this problem. At its Nov. 25, 2002 meeting, Council approved capital spending of \$232,000 and operational spending of \$56,000 to fund a combination of immediate enforcement and engineering measures to discourage street racing. In addition, Council requested that a Communications Strategy be developed to raise public awareness about the ongoing campaign and further enhance the initiatives being undertaken.

Analysis

While, education, engineering and enforcement are the primary tools in discouraging street racing, a communications strategy can support this objective by raising public awareness of the City/RCMP initiatives both among the general public and targeted interest groups. These goals may be achieved through a multi-faceted communications campaign which would include an ongoing media publicity campaign; development of collateral materials in support of the campaign, including posters, brochures and Public Service Announcements (PSAs); use of online media; presentations and briefs to other government agencies with supporting publicity; and continued development of partnerships with other community agencies and stakeholders.

Elements of a Communications Strategy include goals, audiences, key messages and actions.

Goals: The primary goal of this Communications Strategy is to discourage street racing and other criminal driving behaviour. To accomplish this, a communications strategy should:

- inform the public about the issue and its impacts;
- warn drivers about the consequences of engaging in criminal driving behaviour, and
- issue a “call to action” that allows members of the public and decision makers to take responsibility and initiative for bringing about change.

Audiences: The basic audience is the general public and “influencers” within the group, such as parents and other role models. By raising awareness of the City’s initiatives and the impacts and consequences of street racing and criminal driving behaviour, influencers can be encouraged to take an active role and responsibility for discouraging and preventing such activities.

Street racing and reckless driving must become perceived as a socially unacceptable practise. Individuals must be encouraged to take personal responsibility for communicating that message to others and to take direct action by supporting initiatives for education and/or legislative

change; role modelling safe driving habits; and encouraging drivers, particularly new and young drivers, to make safe and informed decisions about driver training, vehicle purchases and enhancements and to make responsible choices about driving behaviour.

A key second audience is youth, the demographic most likely to engage in street racing or criminal driving behaviour. Youth typically receive information through media and mediums, which serve their specific demographic as opposed to more broad, mainstream media. In addition, youth may have different perspectives on issues from the general public. To be effective, messaging needs to be developed that is targeted specific at youth concerns and ideals.

Youth should be informed about both the social and legal consequences of street racing and criminal driving behaviour, including vehicle impoundment, licence suspension or other sanctions. In addition to profiling the human costs of such behaviour, youth should be made aware of the enhanced enforcement in Richmond and punitive consequences. Research shows that youth are typically less responsive to messages that emphasize personal safety risk, however they may be more likely to respond to perceived real threats of punitive consequences, particularly a loss of mobility through licence suspension or vehicle impoundment.

On a broader level, all youth should be encouraged to exert peer pressure on those involved in criminal driving behaviour and to make safe choices by refusing to ride with drivers who engage in such activities.

Key Messages: A successful communications strategy should communicate simple, easy-to-remember and dramatic messages that challenge the audience. Current communications practise has also found that awareness campaigns, particularly those targeted at youth, must be aggressive and edgy and use dramatic, memorable and strongly visual imagery to achieve maximum impact. In support of this, three conceptual messages/slogans have been identified, which address the campaign goals and could be used in the development of supporting communications materials.

1. Dead on Arrival
2. Go Directly to Jail
3. Street Racing - You're In the Driver's Seat

The first two messages speak directly to the consequences of street racing. They would be accompanied by supporting information and imagery, which detail the human and punitive consequences of street racing. The third message is more broad and emphasizes that everyone has a role to play in discouraging this activity and mirrors the Community Safety Division's vision: "A community where everyone takes responsibility for the safety of people and property." While all three messages can be broadly communicated, the second message in particular can be used to target likely street racers.

These messages will be further refined during campaign development, but provide an initial focus to begin the conceptual process. All messages would be accompanied by a "call to action" providing a specific step that individuals can take to bring about change.

Actions:**1. Ongoing Media Activities**

The City's ongoing efforts to combat street racing and other criminal driving behaviour have already generated considerable publicity. The City and the RCMP have produced a number of media releases in support of the latest initiatives approved by Council. City and RCMP communications staff have also facilitated numerous media interviews with members of Council and staff, provided background information and assistance for media and have actively worked to engage media interest in the issue. This has generated extensive media coverage of the City's efforts to combat street racing with extensive stories in most major local, regional and ethnic media outlets.

City and RCMP staff will continue to collaborate on ongoing communications efforts to raise the profile of the campaign to discourage street racing. As appropriate, additional media releases and other communications initiatives will be implemented to further highlight the campaign. This will include continued media releases highlighting enforcement activities and other milestones.

2. Media Events

Two media events in the form of press conferences or photo opportunities are also being planned to bring awareness to significant milestones in the ongoing campaign to discourage street racing. This would include a media event unveiling the RCMP's new surveillance equipment (radar sets, in-car camera, night vision goggles, remote control spike belts) once it is acquired. Another media event will mark the installation of improved traffic signage, including specific road safety messages. These media events will involve participation of members of Council, appropriate City and RCMP and community partners.

3. Awareness Campaign

While a great deal of material already exists promoting road safety, much of it is more generic in nature or targets speeding, but not specifically street racing and similar criminal driving behaviour. In addition, these materials do not address the specific initiatives Richmond has taken to combat this activity within the community.

It is important that any communications strategy be coordinated with other groups, both local and regional, working in this area, to ensure an integrated and effective approach and avoid unnecessary duplication of efforts and expenditures. However, given the importance of the issue to this community there is an opportunity and need for Richmond to take a leadership role in developing an awareness campaign on a local level.

An awareness campaign could involve development of graphic poster campaign, and brochures could be developed to reach target audiences. Specifically, materials could be distributed to schools, specialty car shops and other automotive industry locations, civic facilities, as well as restaurants and other late night businesses that may be frequented by street racers.

Assistance will be sought from community volunteers from RCMP school liaison officers, other school, youth and parent groups, Speed Watch and community police stations volunteers, social

service agencies such as SUCCESS, road safety groups such as ICBC and other partner groups to ensure the posters and brochures receive wide distribution and attention.

Poster design will also be used to create camera-ready Public Service Advertisements for newspaper and other print media. Support will be sought from local and regional media to donate free advertising space to run the PSAs as frequently as possible. This can be augmented by allocation of some of the City's existing discretionary advertising budget in support. Support will also be sought from additional media partners in the development and broadcast of similar PSAs for radio and television.

An initial press run of 250 posters and 5,000 brochures would provide effective penetration of the community. All materials would be translated and produced in multiple languages with the assistance of community partners.

Some materials can be developed in house through the auspices of the City's Communication Manager and the Production Centre. However, printing and some developmental work (photography, design, translation) would have to be outsourced.

Some seed funding may be identified within the Community Safety Divisions' communications budget. However, additional funding for the external costs would have to be sought from community partners, including ICBC, SUCCESS and others. Development of materials would also be coordinated with others groups that may also be developing similar campaigns.

Cost for the initial development, printing and distribution of posters, prints and PSAs is estimated at \$5,000-\$10,000. Funding for this would be sought from external partners. If external funding is unavailable or limited, printing and design costs could be reduced to about \$2,000, however the scope and effectiveness of the campaign would be dramatically limited.

The final scope and implementation of the awareness campaign would be determined by the City's success in leveraging support from partnership groups.

4. Dedicated Website

The Internet is increasingly becoming the primary information source for young people, particularly those in the age group most likely to engage in street racing. A website presence is a key component of any effective communications strategy targeting today's youth.

An engaging dramatic and visually attractive website with interactive and multimedia features would provide the best vehicle for reaching youth. To have the highest impact, the website should have its own distinct URL as youth are less likely to visit the City's official website. It should mirror the visual design of the awareness campaign.

City research has currently shown that there are numerous websites and online bulletin boards focussed on street racing and many promote the activity. A dedicated website would provide an alternative viewpoint. Search engine positioning strategies can be used to drive online traffic interested in this topic to the site.

While City Communications and Information Technology staff have expertise in web site development, the time and resources required to develop content and design such a website would negatively impact on existing work programs.

More research is required to identify the full financial and manpower costs of developing a website and to identify potential funding sources. As a website would have an extensive reach beyond Richmond this project may best be undertaken in conjunction with groups such as the BC Coalition for Safer Communities, ICBC and CARS BC which have a mandate to promote road safety issues throughout the province and may be doing parallel work in this area.

5. External Communications

City and RCMP staff, along with community partnerships, will be developing a variety of submissions, presentation and collateral materials in support of Council's stated goals to lobby for stronger local and provincial commitments to road safety education and other legislative changes. This may potentially provide a number of opportunities for Council and staff to make formal submissions to various School Board, provincial and other officials. These presentations will be supported with media releases, press events and other communications initiatives designed to enhance public awareness and rally community support for the City's efforts to encourage other governments to support and participate in positive change.

6. Community Partnerships

The effectiveness of the City's efforts to combat street racing is highly dependent on working with community partners to inform, educate and change public attitudes and to further leverage the push for expansion of road safety education and other legislative change. The communications initiatives outlined above can also be greatly enhanced through coordination with and the support of other community agencies.

The City and RCMP have already established strong working relationships with a variety of community partners including ICBC, SUCCESS, the BC Coalition for Safer Communities and other stakeholder groups. The creation of a Street Racing Advisory Task Force would provide an ideal vehicle for coordinating the efforts of these and other community groups to ensure the City's communications efforts are effective and cost efficient and avoid duplication.

Financial Impact

There are no financial impacts at this time. Ongoing communications support for most of the initiatives can be provided using existing City and RCMP resources. Additional initiatives such as the Awareness Campaign and Web Site would only proceed once funding sources are identified that do not impact on current budgets.



Ted Townsend

Manager, Communication and Public Affairs

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