

## Review of Help Phones on metropolitan freeways

### Community Consultation Summary

*VicRoads conducted community consultation on the demand and usage of Help Phones on metropolitan freeways from 21 May to 21 June 2015.*

*The community consultation comprised an online consultation hub inviting people to contribute to a discussion forum and/or complete a survey.*

#### Who participated?

- **2,950** people visited the consultation hub
- **38 people** participated in the discussion forums
- **106 people** completed the survey



#### Background

The consultation related to around 390 phones on inner metropolitan freeways where VicRoads has 24/7 CCTV cameras and freeway data stations that monitor traffic movements, and a dedicated Incident Response Service.

A further 200 phones on outer metro freeways will continue to be maintained as monitoring in those areas is limited.

VicRoads will also continue to maintain Help Phones on regional freeways.



#### Rationale for review

VicRoads reviewed the demand for metropolitan Help Phones because:

- There has been a sharp decline in the use of the Help Phones, largely due to the increased ownership of mobile phones.
- Safety messages relating to freeway breakdowns are increasingly encouraging people to stay in their car and use their mobile phone to call for assistance.
- VicRoads has 24/7 CCTV cameras and freeway data stations that monitor traffic movements, and a dedicated Incident Response Service.
- Currently, VicRoads receives on average less than one call reporting a hazard or breakdown for every Help Phone per year.
- An evaluation of recent Help Phone use and maintenance costs found the low Help Phone usage resulted in an average call cost of \$1000.

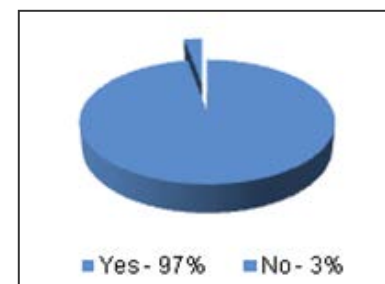
- The majority of Help Phones currently on the metropolitan freeways utilise 2G technology and will need to be upgraded to new technology at a cost of around \$300,000.

#### What did people say?

106 participants completed the survey.

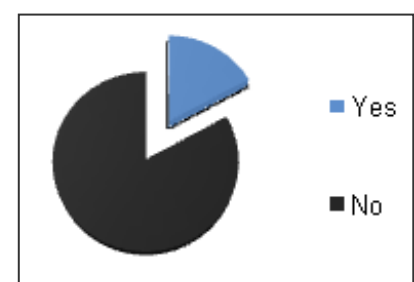
Almost all respondents (97%) were aware that VicRoads provided Help phones on major freeways.

**Were you previously aware that VicRoads offers Help Phones on the side of major freeways?**



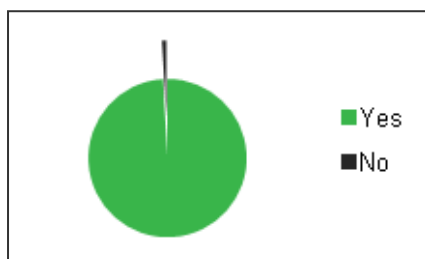
Less than one in five respondents (17%) have used a Help Phone. Car breakdown was the principle reason given for Help Phone use.

#### Have you used Help Phones?



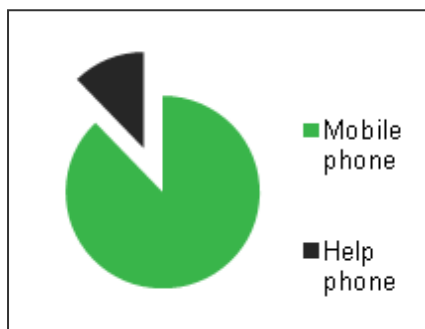
Almost all respondents (99%) owned a mobile phone. This is consistent with broader research regarding mobile phone ownership.

#### Do you own a mobile phone?

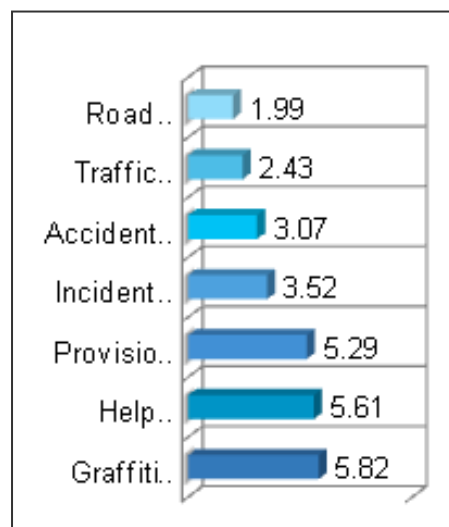


Almost nine in ten respondents (87%) indicated that they would use their mobile phones in preference to looking for a help phone if they required roadside assistance.

#### Would you be more likely to use your mobile phones or look for a Help Phone in the event of requiring roadside assistance?



Help Phones operation and maintenance was ranked as the second least important priority of seven VicRoads functions.



## Key points from the discussion forum

Thirty three comments were posted on the forum regarding retaining Help Phones on metropolitan freeways.

**Eleven comments** indicated a preference not to retain the Help Phones.

**A further ten comments** indicated they were comfortable if Help Phones were no longer provided subject to certain conditions.

These conditions included: VicRoads assessing locations where there is no or limited mobile phone coverage; reliable CCTV and traffic management systems; and the roadside assistance phone number promoted along the freeway.

*'The integrated CCTV cameras from Vic Police, Yarra Trams, Metrol & Vic Roads should be employed to greater efficiency, rather than Help Phones.'*

*'I do not think that Help Phones should be retained. Everyone has a mobile phone now and would choose to use that over the Help Phones. Use the budget to maintain these assets to better use, like improving congestion or future road projects.'*

*'Get rid of them on metro freeways and keep them on rural freeways. Maybe the money you save could be used elsewhere...'*

*'If the phone number to report hazards or request assistance was advertised along the roadways, I would be happy for the help phones to go. After an accident, most people don't know who to ring for a tow truck.'*

#### **Nine comments wanted the Help**

**Phones retained.** The concerns were: people not having access to or the ability to use mobile phones in some instances; motorist safety (particularly for elderly people); and the expense incurred by people using their mobile phone.

*'Not everyone uses a mobile phone. I, for one, do not use mobile phones, except to text messages.'*

*'While I have a mobile phone, it is not always charged and I don't always remember to take it with me. I would hate to think that anyone could be stuck without assistance, for what could be several hours. If it is fairly certain that this wouldn't happen, then that would be ok - but in the end, the safety of motorists and the need to be able to access help in an emergency is more important than a budgetary cost.'*

*'I think that they should stay, as people like my father don't have and don't know how to use a mobile phone.'*

A number of people posted comments relating to the dangers of getting out of the car on a freeway to look for a Help Phone.

*'Purely from a safety aspect, is it still safe for people to be walking along a freeway (day/night) looking for a blue phone? I would have thought the safest option is to stay inside the vehicle (or outside of it over the barrier) and wait for assistance.'*

*'Thankfully I have never broken down on a freeway but under NO circumstances would I get out of my car. I would use my mobile phone.'*

*'I have just never thought about using them (Help Phones). When you think about it, in the event of an accident, one could put themselves in more danger by looking for these phones along the freeway.'*

#### **Next steps**

The feedback from the consultation will be considered along with other data and intelligence to inform a decision relating to the future provision and maintenance of Help Phones on metropolitan freeways.