

The impact of commuting, fatigue and workload on the safety of WA Police Officers

Prepared by the WA Police Union

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Table of Contents

Introduction	3
The work commute	5
Rosters, sleep and fatigue	10
Other fatigue-related concerns	18
Recommendations	21
Conclusion	23

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Introduction

The WA Police Union (WAPU) was compelled to canvass its Membership after it was made aware that a number of rostering issues arising from Reform at WA Police had adversely impacted Members. Following a particularly disturbing incident where a Member was involved in a serious car accident, it became apparent that Member concerns about commuting and the associated impacts needed to be explored.

More than 1,100 Members answered WAPU's survey and provided feedback about fatigue, commuting, workload, rosters and transfers. Beyond information about how they commute, costs of travel, parking and public transport and time and distance taken to travel to work, respondents gave insightful information regarding the impact of fatigue on their life.

Respondents are not obtaining sufficient sleep prior to or after working an evening or night shift. Coupled with an intense workload, the inability to take a break or enjoy a meal period whilst at work and long commute times, Members have experienced numerous frightening incidents of being so fatigued while commuting that they have:

- Fallen asleep at the wheel;
- Driven off the road or onto the other side of the road;
- Completely lost concentration while driving;
- Run red lights or stop signs;
- Hit stationary objects alongside the road or kerb; and
- Been involved in traffic accidents.

One Member summed up WAPU's concerns perfectly by saying:

“Given that police officers should be setting an example to other community members, it does not appear good to have tired officers commuting large distances, especially when other factors may prevent them from having decent rest when at home.”

Despite WA Police acknowledging fatigue, little appears to be practiced in the way of fatigue management. From Member responses, it is abundantly clear to WAPU that Reform is having an adverse impact on Members' health and sense of wellbeing, especially those working in Response Teams.

Respondent demographics

WAPU received 1,172 responses to the survey; 79 per cent were male and 21 per cent were female.

The demographics can be broken down accordingly:

- Approximately 74 per cent of respondents were from the metropolitan area;
 - The majority of metropolitan officers were from Central Metropolitan Police District (approximately 45 per cent), with officers split fairly evenly between South Metropolitan Police District (20.5 per cent), North West Metropolitan Police District (18 per cent) and South East Metropolitan Police District (16.5 per cent);
 - Most of these respondents worked in Local Policing Teams, Response Teams, Crime or Traffic;
- Approximately 26 per cent of respondents were from regional WA;
 - The majority of Regional WA officers were from the South West Police District (approximately 18 per cent), Great Southern Police District (18 per cent) and Mid West-Gascoyne Police District (15 per cent);
 - Most of these respondents worked in General Duties (approximately 80 per cent);
- The majority of respondents were Senior Constables (approximately 36 per cent), followed by Sergeants and First Class Constables (22 and 20 per cent respectively);
- The majority of respondents had been employed by WA Police for more than five and less than 10 years (almost 28 per cent) and less than five years (22.5 per cent), with numbers split evenly between more than 10 and less than 15 (13.5 per cent), more than 25 and less than 30 (12 per cent) and more than 15 and less than 20 (10 per cent).

The work commute

Modes of transport utilised to travel to work

Members were asked which modes of transport they used to get to work each day by selecting all of the options that applied:

- 89.80 per cent used their own vehicles;
- 13.75 per cent used public transport;
- 13.19 per cent cycled;
- 9.15 per cent walked/ran;
- Only 3.12 per cent used a work vehicle; and
- Less than 2 per cent car pooled.

The mode of transport respondents most frequently used when working *day shift* was their own vehicle (63.41 per cent). However, 10.65 per cent indicated they used public transport whilst 6.33 per cent cycled and 4.57 per cent walked/ran to work.

The mode of transport respondents most frequently used when working *afternoon shift* was their own vehicle (71.86 per cent). Interestingly, only 2.11 per cent indicated they used public transport whilst 3.25 per cent cycled and 2.81 per cent walked/ran to work.

The mode of transport respondents most frequently used when working *evening shift* was their own vehicle (69.57 per cent). Only 0.53 per cent indicated they used public transport whilst 2.11 per cent cycled and 2.37 per cent walked/ran to work. Thirteen per cent of respondents did not answer this question because they noted they did not work evening shifts.

The mode of transport respondents most frequently used when working *night shift* was their own vehicle (62.36 per cent). Just over one per cent indicated they used public transport whilst 1.58 per cent cycled and 1.58 per cent walked/ran to work. More than 23 per cent of respondents did not answer this question because they noted they did not work night shifts.

WAPU believes that few respondents use public transport to get to work for afternoon, evening and night shifts, despite it being free for sworn police officers, because there is a real lack of readily available or timely public transport options.

The numbers of respondents who cited they most frequently used a work vehicle to get to work for a day shift (13.98 per cent), afternoon shift (12.23 per cent), evening shift (11.70 per cent) or night shift (8.88 per cent) was higher than anticipated, especially given the percentage of people who indicated they ever used a work vehicle to get to work was low (approximately 3 per cent). These numbers do not appear to correlate with the initial finding that few people used a work vehicle to get to and from work. WAPU believes that the wording of the question may have confused some respondents. Respondents have possibly interpreted the question to mean which mode of transport is used most frequently *whilst you are working a particular shift*, instead of which mode of transport is used most frequently *to get from home to work (and back again) for a particular shift*. This would be a likely explanation as to why the numbers for these responses are greater than what has been initially indicated about the use of work vehicles.

Costs to travel to work

Members were asked, on average, how much they spend per week **on fuel** commuting to and from work. The following was noted:

- Approximately 35 per cent of respondents spent between \$25 and \$50 per week;
- Approximately 26 per cent of respondents spent less than \$25 per week;
- Approximately 23 per cent of respondents spent between \$50 and \$75 per week;
- Less than six per cent spent nothing per week; and
- Less than one per cent spent more than \$125 per week.

Members were asked, on average, how much they spend per week **on parking** when commuting to and from work. The following was noted:

- Approximately 79 per cent spent nothing per week;
- Approximately 12.5 per cent spent less than \$25 per week; and
- A combined 8.5 per cent spent between \$25 and \$125 per week.

Officers based in the metropolitan area were more likely to pay for parking than their regional WA counterparts, with approximately 75 per cent of metropolitan officers spending nothing per week on parking and approximately 15 per cent spending less than \$25 per week.

Members were asked, on average, how much they spend per week **on public transport** commuting to and from work. The following was noted:

- Approximately 95 per cent of respondents spent nothing per week; and
- Approximately four per cent spent less than \$25 per week.

Given sworn officers travel free on WA public transport, it was envisaged that the latter figure resulted from the police auxiliary officer respondents. However, only 12 auxiliary officers responded that they spent money on public transport in a week, whilst 41 police officers indicated they spent money on public transport. The reasons for this outcome are manifold: respondents may have included money spent on public transport carpark parking fees as public transport expenditure, given there have been numerous issues with Transperth waiving those parking fees for police officers; or Members have included the use of taxis to and from work as a mode of public transport.

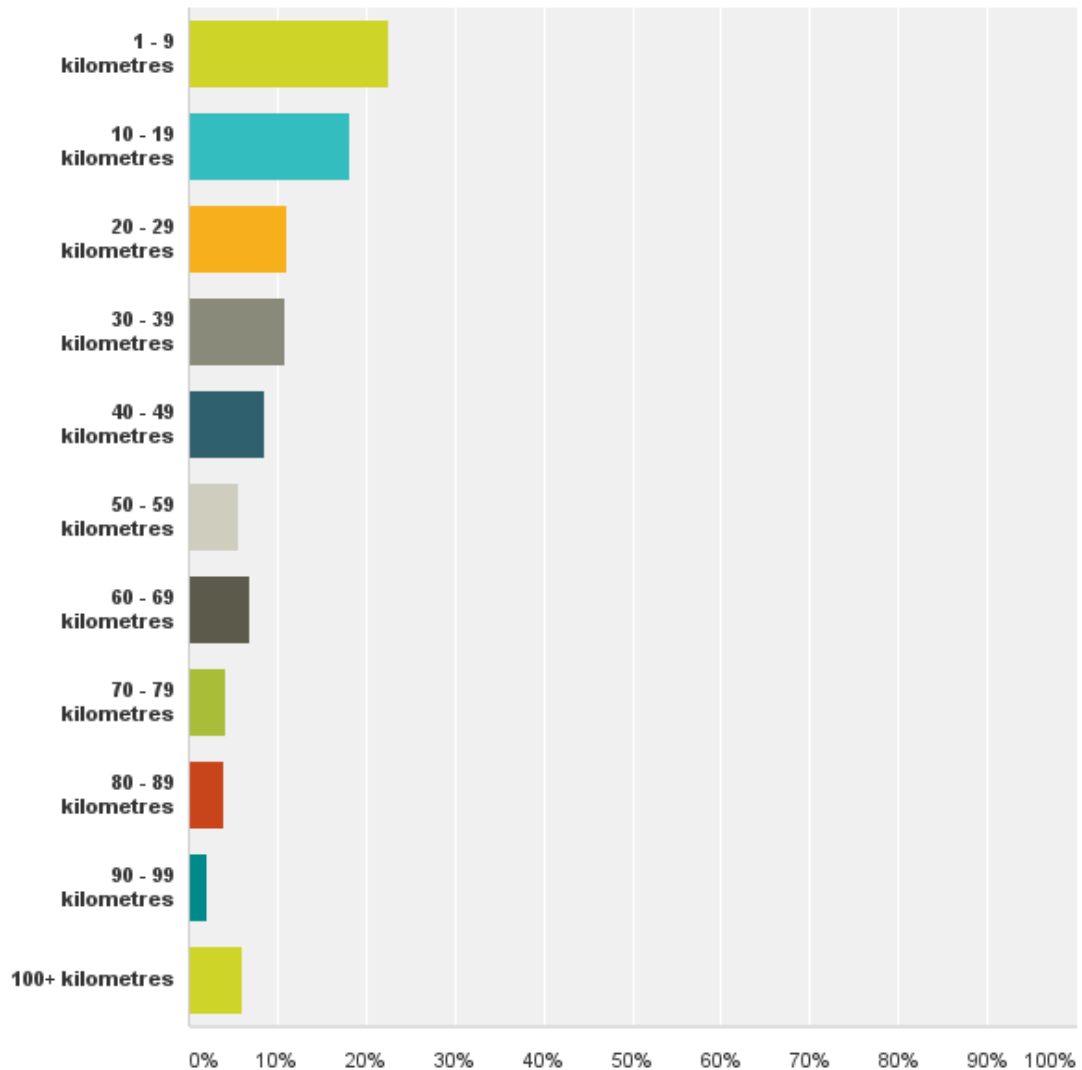
Distance and time taken to travel to work

Members were asked how far they commuted (in kilometres) to work each shift for a total round trip.

The following was noted:

Q17 How far do you commute (in kilometres) to work each shift (total round trip)?

Answered: 1,124 Skipped: 48

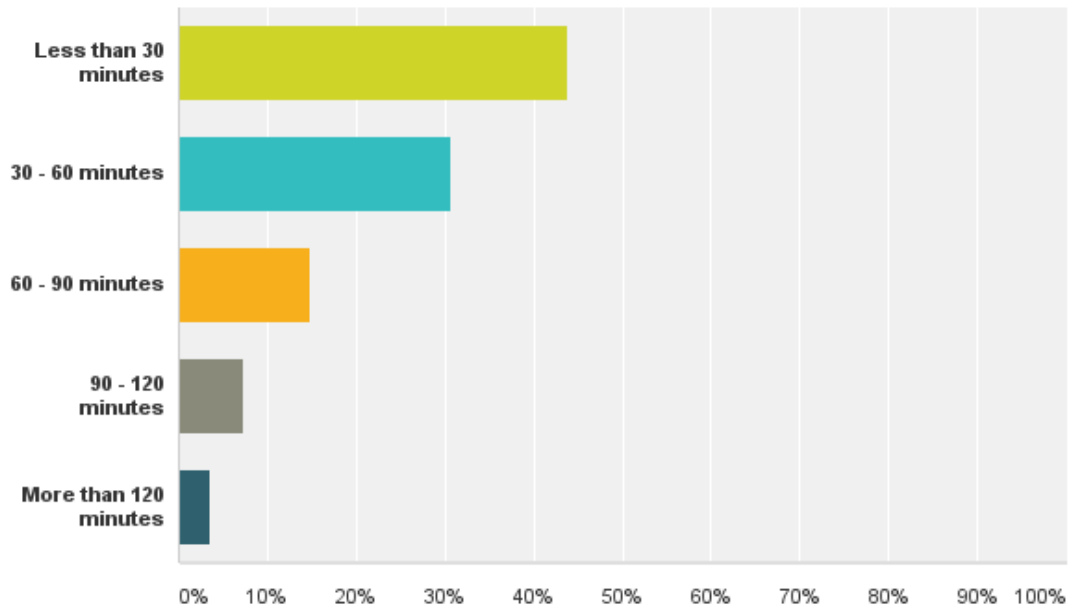


More than 64 per cent of Members working in regional WA commuted between one and nine kilometres and approximately 16 per cent travelled between 10 and 19 kilometres to work. In the metropolitan area, more than 18 per cent travelled 10-19 kilometres to work from home, with approximately 13 per cent travelling 20-29 kilometres and 13 per cent travelling 30-39 kilometres.

Members were then asked how long it took (in minutes) to commute to work each shift, on average, for the total round trip. The following was noted:

Q18 How long does it take (in minutes) to commute to work each shift, on average (total round trip)?

Answered: 1,124 Skipped: 48



More than 86 per cent of Members working in regional WA said it took them less than 30 minutes to commute to work. However, in the metropolitan area, only 28 per cent said it took them less than 30 minutes. More than 38 per cent said it took them 30 to 60 minutes to commute to work and almost 20 per cent said it took them between 60 and 90 minutes.

Rosters, sleep and fatigue

Roster policy - background

Currently, WA Police HR Policy 26 (which refers to rostering) stipulates that “12-hour rosters are prohibited unless expressly approved by the Deputy Commissioner” and that “3 x 8-hour rosters are prohibited unless expressly approved by the Deputy Commissioner”. A 3 x 8 roster is:

“The traditional model, in which three 8-hour shifts are worked each day in three separate panels.

This three-panel roster rotates weekly so that each panel works one week of day, followed by afternoon then night shift.”

WA Police has confirmed that no 3 x 8 rosters exist but has also stated that there are stations in regional WA that “run rolling 8 hour day, afternoon and night shifts from a two-panel roster” which does not require Deputy Commissioner approval¹.

Rosters, sleep and fatigue

Members were asked a number of questions pertaining to their rosters and other fatigue-related concerns. Almost 82 per cent of respondents expressed that early morning finishes on evening shift (being, the shifts that finished between 0300 and 0500 hours) created significant fatigue-related issues when commuting home. The percentage of those who agreed with this was higher for those working in Response Teams (more than 86 per cent).

More than 60 per cent of the respondents who worked evening or night shifts could not get any sleep before their first shift (and this was higher, at 66 per cent, for those working in Response Teams). There were two reasons provided as to why Members were not getting any sleep before their first evening or night shift. Family commitments (namely the provision of care for children) were cited in most responses as the reason why no sleep was obtained before an evening or night shift. However, just as many responses cited the sheer difficulty of obtaining sleep during the day. Respondents said that their body clock was out of whack, that they physically could not fall asleep before a night shift, or that their body was not ready to sleep during the day. Several said that short shift changeovers prevented sleep before an evening or night shift and some said they had other work/life commitments that prohibited them from sleeping.

¹ As per a letter from WA Police Executive Director Anthony Kannis to WAPU President George Tilbury dated 16 June 2014.

More than half (approximately 53 per cent) of the respondents who worked evening or night shifts obtained three hours or less of sleep *before* their first evening or night shift, with 24.5 per cent only obtaining between four and five hours of sleep. Respondents who worked in Response Teams cited more frequently obtaining three hours or less of sleep before their first evening or night shift (58 per cent).

More than half (approximately 58.5 per cent) of the respondents went to bed between 0300 and 0500 hours following the cessation of an evening shift, with almost 28 per cent heading to bed at 0500 to 0700 hours. Interestingly, the majority of respondents who worked in Response Teams noted that they went to bed after an evening shift between 0500 and 0700 hours (48 per cent). Almost 90 per cent of all respondents went to bed between 0800 and 1000 hours following the cessation of a night shift.

Just over 50 per cent of respondents who worked evening or night shift obtained between four and five hours of sleep *after* working an evening or night shift. Approximately 39 per cent obtained six to seven hours. The findings were similar for those working in Response Teams.

WA Police produce a booklet entitled “An Introduction to Fatigue 2012” that is said to be available for police officers to read at each station or section. It is WAPU’s understanding that a limited number of booklets were originally printed in 2012 and to date, many have ‘disappeared’ from stations. The booklet addresses: the causes and effects of fatigue; sleep and how to improve it; circadian rhythms and shift work; managing fatigue at night; shift work, health and wellbeing; commuting; and sleeping disorders. The booklet commences by saying:

“The Western Australia Police recognises that fatigue can have a major impact on the health and safety of employees, their families and the community. Fatigue management is a major part of the organisation’s commitment to help employees benefit for work and fit for life”.

The booklet acknowledges that fatigue is very dangerous when driving and notes a number of warning signs. There is a section entitled “Commuting” that addresses how to manage the work commute when working shifts and ways to reduce commuting risk.

When queried, only 65 per cent of survey respondents had read the booklet.

Workload

Members were asked how often they were able to take their meal break in accordance with Industrial Agreement entitlements (being, as per clause 12(8)(b), a 40-minute break for an eight hour shift, a 45-

minute break for a nine hour shift, a 50-minute break for a 10 hour shift and one hour for a 12 hour shift):

- 15.87 per cent indicated they *never* took their meal break according to the Industrial Agreement;
- 44.30 per cent indicated only *some of the time* they were able to take their meal break according to the Industrial Agreement;
- 35.96 per cent indicated *most of the time* they were able to take their meal break according to the Industrial Agreement; and
- Only 3.86 per cent indicated they were *always* able to take their meal break according to the Industrial Agreement.

Almost 67 per cent of respondents had their meal breaks regularly interrupted with requests to deal with other tasks.

The responses for those working in Response Teams differed again, with 24.24 per cent indicating that *most of the time* they were able to take their meal break according to the Industrial Agreement and 63.64 per cent indicating that only *some of the time* they were able to take their meal break according to the Industrial Agreement. More than 79 per cent of Response Team respondents had their meal breaks regularly interrupted with requests to attend to other tasks.

Transfers based on commute time

Members were asked a series of questions about transfers based on excessive distances travelled to and from work. Just over 10 per cent of all respondents indicated that, in the last three years, they had requested a transfer to another station or section **on the basis that the distance they travelled to and from work was excessive.**

From those respondents, about 40 per cent had their request granted. The bulk of these applications for transfer were granted in 2014, with most requests approved by a Sergeant (20.93 per cent), a Senior Sergeant (27.91 per cent) or a Superintendent (23.26 per cent). Understanding how the transfer process works at WA Police (namely, that it is subject to managerial prerogative and in recent years has caused Members angst with respect to perceived inequities, lack of transparency and ever-changing policies) WAPU is not certain if these transfers were granted solely based on an excessive commuting distance. However, based on what Members have expressed, we can assume that for these transfers, excessive commuting distance was a factor considered for transfer.

For the approximately 60 per cent who did not have their request for transfer approved, most requests were denied at the Senior Sergeant (30.88 per cent) or Inspector (36.76 per cent) rank. When asked what reasons were provided by WA Police for denying the transfer, the following was generally noted:

- Incomplete tenure restricted a transfer;
- The officer was simply not selected from the pool;
- There were no available part-time positions;
- The District Office felt the distance was not unreasonable;
- Service needs would not permit for a transfer; or
- No reason was proffered.

Fatigue-related incidents

More than half of all survey respondents had experienced fatigue-related incidents while travelling home from work **in the last three years** (53.15 per cent, with seven per cent of respondents indicating they were unsure if the incidents they had experienced were a result of fatigue).

Almost 600 detailed responses were received from Members regarding fatigue-related incidents they had been involved in within the last three years. Respondents provided incredible detail about the incidents, much of which was shocking and gravely concerning. There were 358 responses (that is, more than 60 per cent of respondents to the question) that referred to Members falling asleep behind the wheel, having difficulty staying awake or drifting off whilst driving home. Innumerable responses referred to Members having “microsleeps whilst driving”. The following examples are representative of the responses received by Members who described driving whilst fatigued:

- “Driving home and nodded off on Wanneroo Road heading north, woke to find I was actually speeding a fair bit and veering off road. That woke me up! I have found myself driving regularly with windows down to stay awake and even resorted to star jumps road side to get home”;
- “Difficulty driving due to tiredness. No public transport and work will not pay for taxi voucher”;
- “It is not unusual to suffer microsleeps [behind the wheel] and poor judgment during the drive”;
- “Fallen asleep while stopped at the traffic lights. Noticed I was hitting the lane lines and only noticed when I felt the bumps”;
- “Falling asleep at the wheel of my car whilst on the freeway”;
- “Fell asleep driving home from work after 18-hour shift and woke up on the pavement heading for a light pole”;

- “Falling asleep whilst driving. ‘Microsleeps’ where I have been at a set of TCLs² and been unable to remember getting there. I have been driving home in convoy with other team mates and observed them drifting between lanes without indicating as they had fallen asleep at the wheel. Woken up by [other road users] using their horns”;
- “Whilst working at Perth Police Station in 2014 I suffered from work-related insomnia. I was working a five panel roster of day, afternoon, evening and night shifts. I sought regular medical treatment for a range of health conditions that stemmed from the insomnia/sleep disturbance/sleep deprivation – all of which was documented [by WA Police]... I was involved in repeated microsleep incidents in which I would suddenly (and without warning) fall asleep whilst driving a vehicle... After reporting the first incident (which was met with indifference and disinterest) I did not report the subsequent events”;
- “Completed a 15-hour night shift (with five hours overtime). Almost falling asleep at a set of traffic lights. Overtime after night shift is the most exhausting”;
- “Fell asleep at a red TCL to be woken by people tooting their horns”;
- “Two weeks ago whilst travelling home on last night shift I fell asleep at the wheel. I was on the freeway and woke to find I was still travelling 100kmph... [I saw my doctor and] am now trialling meds for my disrupted sleep and she has suggested that I don’t work nights and [that I] need to work shifts that allow my body to get into a regular sleep pattern”;
- “I have briefly fallen asleep at traffic lights several times. As a precaution, I always place my vehicle in to park when I stop at red traffic lights. I have had two or three occasions where my concentration has lapsed and a near miss accident has occurred that would have left me at fault”;
- “[Whilst conveying a prisoner in regional WA, I had] already worked 18 hours and requested a vehicle... to assist with the collection of the offender. They refused as they were too busy. After dropping off the offender and into my 24+ hour shift, I fell asleep behind the wheel... Lucky I woke as I was across the solid white line in the middle of the road and we didn’t crash. But I wish to point this out as it was extremely dangerous and we couldn’t get the support we needed to help in this matter”;
- “Fell asleep on the train and went to the end of the line when train stopped and driver woke me up”;
- “Fallen asleep behind my workstation. Fallen asleep behind the wheel of a work vehicle whilst driving back from an incident scene. Fallen asleep driving home after night shifts. Fallen asleep whilst driving patrols on night shift”;

² TCL refers to Traffic Control Lights.

- “Finished work after 20 hours straight and fell asleep at the wheel on the way home”;
- “After having a two-week annual leave break I returned to work for an 1800-0400 shift. I was not able to sleep prior to the shift commencement and as a result I was extremely fatigued whilst driving home in the early hours of the morning. My vehicle drifted to the side of the road on the Great Eastern Highway Bypass where the speed zone is 100kmph and I was jolted awake after the tyre hit the gravel. I pulled over and walked around for 10 minutes to wake up a bit before continuing my drive home”;
- “Going to sleep [behind the wheel]. Stopping on the side of the road for sleep. Near misses... Sleeping in driveway on arriving [with] wife pulling me out of car, still running, me asleep”;
and
- “To be honest, there have been numerous times I have had to pull my car over because I have felt myself falling asleep behind the wheel. I’m not proud of it but when driving home after five night shifts or on a short changeover in the roster, I feel like a zombie when I get into the car and I have said before that it can, at times, feel like the equivalent of being drunk”.

One hundred responses referred to losing concentration, arriving home without realising it or not being able to recall the journey home:

- “Not remembering part of the journey. Having to pull over to rest in order to continue. Driving well under the [speed] limit and being overly cautious”;
- “Feeling tired, eyes sore, not remembering large portions of the drive, intolerance for other road users”;
- “Very drowsy, wanting to fall asleep. Not remembering which way I drove home... like being DUI”;
- “Driving on auto-pilot where you get home and do not remember the drive..., meandering across lanes before realigning myself”;
- “I have... found myself at a certain point on my journey home and have not been aware of going through certain junctions prior to that point”;
- “The feeling of getting home and not knowing how you got there because you cannot recall the drive due to being tired”;
- “A total faze out, meaning mind went blank for a period of time and had to consciously shake my head to bring my attention back to the road, and the inability to recall what colour was that TCL”.

Almost 70 responses noted that as they had fallen asleep or lost concentration they had hit kerbs, swerved across the road, run over the rumble strip without realising or had car crashes:

- “Several close calls while driving home after night shift where I have moved to the other side of the road towards oncoming traffic”;
- “Last year, on the way home from work I fell asleep in a residential zone, drove into a gutter, popped both tyres and buckled both wheels”;
- “Involved in a car accident after night shift. Fortunately I was not injured, but did write my car off”;
- “I fell asleep briefly at the wheel and drifted off the road onto gravel. Thankfully, I was only doing about 40kmph at the time and woke up straight away with the noise of the gravel”;
- “Have run off the bitumen several times into the gravel, have cut off other cars changing lanes or drifted onto other lanes on the freeway”;
- “Minor loss of control negotiating a corner... related to lack of sleep due to overtime doing an escort... Approximately 22-hour shift”;
- “I was involved in a minor car accident as a result of falling asleep while driving, after leaving work”;
- “Micro nap resulted in losing car wing mirror to pole in road”;
- “Fell asleep after a late shift finish, on the freeway drifted to the left and almost ran off the road at 100kmph”;
- “I failed to negotiate a right turn correctly. I was extremely tired and struggling to keep my eyes open. I mounted the curb, missing a street sign”;
- “Crashed personal car on the way home after a night shift. Hit a large curb blowing both left hand side tyres. I crashed because I fell asleep while driving on my 55 minute commute home”.

Eleven responses referred to Members running red lights or stop signs without realising they had done so:

- “Falling asleep when driving home in peak hour traffic and nearly hitting the car in front. Or finishing night shift and being so tired that I was trying to stay awake and ended up speeding and going through a speed camera”;
- “I drove straight through a... stop sign on two occasions due to lack of sleep. I have found myself having microsleeps at the end of night shifts”;
- “Doing 50kms in a school zone because I was lacking awareness of the time and my surrounds. And yes, got the infringement to prove it”;

- “One morning while driving to work I took off from a set of traffic lights at a major intersection only to realise when I observed oncoming traffic that I had driven on a green arrow not a green straight (I was travelling straight) and was very lucky I didn’t collide with any vehicles. This was purely due to fatigue”.

Several Members also recall being so tired that they have hallucinated:

- “Seeing things as I drove home – i.e. I thought I saw a bunny on the side of the freeway and it ran out in front of me, however I knew it wasn’t real as it was an ‘Easter bunny’ bunny, not a proper bunny. I managed to keep my head and broke just a little bit before continuing on”; and
- “Have had many microsleeps. Often arrive home not knowing how I got there. Have hallucinated on at least one occasion whilst driving and seeing an Asian man running beside the car on the freeway”.

When respondents described their fatigue issues, many of them expressed their concerns about performing overtime following a night shift. They expressed concerns about the impact of undertaking overtime at the end of what is already a physically demanding shift and noted that their fatigue was at its worst when this occurred. Interestingly, some respondents also noted that there was a general indifference by management towards Members who expressed their concerns about fatigue. These respondents felt that WA Police paid only lip service to fatigue management.

Other fatigue-related concerns

More than 600 respondents elaborated further about fatigue-related concerns regarding workload, roster and commuting time. The responses were varied, but the following were common themes of concern:

- Low staffing levels are an issue;
- Members are often unable to take their meal break;
- Working a large number of evening and night shifts proves incredibly disruptive for sleep;
- Fatigue has a perceptible impact on morale and productivity;
- Short changeover shifts are physically taxing;
- Members felt there was an inability to incorporate fitness into their daily regimen;
- Conveying prisoners in regional WA was incredibly fatiguing as officers often have to drive inordinate distances over dangerous terrain at all hours of the day;
- Single weekly leave days do not provide adequate respite;
- Whilst a single weekly leave day is seen to be insufficient, a roster that features more than one weekly leave day is perceived by management to be a 'social roster';
- Distances travelled during work hours (due to the size of police districts in the metropolitan area) was fatiguing;
- Members felt there was an inability to adequately balance their work and life commitments;
- Breaks are frequently interrupted, if a Member has the opportunity to break during their shift at all;
- Fatigue did not simply arise from sleep issues but the increased workload and work pressures in the new Reform model proved to be one of the most draining elements;
- A culture exists within WA Police that makes it difficult for officers to refuse overtime or recalls to duty when tired, and this seems exacerbated in country stations with small staffing levels; and
- Like the "An Introduction to Fatigue 2012" booklet, Members felt that a similar Blackboard course merely paid lip service to fatigue management.

Some of the responses are noted below:

- "It is almost considered selfish by most senior management to book off for the entire 40 minutes. A lot of the roster, workload and condition issues are caused by the lack of available staff";

- “The failure by management to allow for full meal breaks during shifts. There is an expectation to work throughout the shift with no opportunity given to take the meal break in an attempt to reduce fatigue”;
- “Placing single weekly leave days in between a 10-hour night shift rotation is creating some fatigue issues for myself and other staff experiencing the same roster selection by management”;
- “At some police stations, for example in the Wheatbelt [where] Northam has no facilities to hold prisoners, you may have a 16+ hour shift conveying a prisoner to Perth, then are expected to drive back on the most dangerous road in WA”;
- “[As a Response Team officer], it’s not so much the distance travelled to get to work (as this is a given for most staff), it’s the distances travelled *whilst at work* given the size of the police districts”;
- “Fatigue is not just related to lack of or interrupted sleep but also the fact that more than not, response officers work constantly at a high intensity level for the full 10 hours or more of overtime. Breaks are rare and if you take five minutes to grab a coffee or just a quick five-minute break to recharge, DCC³ are on the phone or radio sending you to a P4 job... Mistakes [are] being made in the workplace”;
- “I’m concerned about the continuing lack of sleep on my long term physical and mental health. As a supervisor, I’m more concerned about the fatigue of my crew. On evening/night shifts, I ask the others how much sleep they’ve had and they are relaying to me they’re only getting 4-5 hours also. Some of my crew are commuting 45 minutes to and from work. I worry they’ll fall asleep at the wheel”;
- “We are not unbreakable either. In order to ‘go hard’ – to work hard, to do the long shifts at night in stressful conditions (high adrenaline, boredom, fatigue, [poor] diet, stress, sleep disturbances etc) – we need to acknowledge the well documented scientific evidence of detrimental effects on the human body and to factor in rest/recovery cycles... Regular breaks are essential – the ability to stop [and] eat a meal slowly each shift is essential to your long term wellbeing”;
- “I find that the Response Team roster induces fatigue. There is a section where you do a 100 hour fortnight which is hard”;
- “Yes, there is an underlying expectation (from supervisors) that we must work without sick days, work without a 10-hour break, and often work three different shift patterns in one week, on top of a large amount of recalls and overtime”;

³ DCC refers to District Control Centre.

- “I am at an LPT. Our shifts are not too bad. Nights are very hard. I can only imagine the poor Response people. They look exhausted a lot of the time. I would have crashed if over there”;
- “WAPOL continue to advertise ‘family flexible’ rosters... In my experience, this is not the case at all. I have never had the opportunity to work a roster that enables me to cope with both work and family life”;
- “I think it is somewhat laughable that this Agency has a fatigue management policy yet allow (and in some cases expect) members to drive both work and private vehicles after being awake [at work at times]... for 24 hours. In one instance, I have driven home after 40 continuous hours awake”;
- “The short changeover expected after overtime has an impact particularly when you are expected to return to work after four hours or so of sleep after completing an 18-20 hour shift. This is often expected of detectives and alternative after-hours transport such as taxi vouchers are not used and discouraged by the hierarchy”;
- “Difficulty sleeping when you have only one single rostered day off between ending nights and starting days. Your body is still in night shift sleep mode when you start dayshifts... We should get at least two rostered days off in a row to manage fatigue levels better and allow family time”;
- “Irregular start and finish times at current work location makes it hard to maintain a good sleeping pattern”; and
- “One day off in between six nights means you just spend that whole day off sleeping because you don’t want to disrupt your sleeping pattern if you have another four night shifts to go the very next day. That one day off is not restful or productive or practical... Every time I hit this part of the roster, I feel run down, tired and a lack of motivation because I know it’s another five days before I can have more than one day off again”.

Recommendations

1. Wider distribution of the “An Introduction to Fatigue 2012” booklet

The booklet entitled “An Introduction to Fatigue 2012” is understood to have been produced by WA Police in limited quantities, to be made available to officers at all stations or sections. WAPU understands that many have disappeared from stations and from the survey, less than three quarters of all respondents had read the booklet.

Given the importance of the information contained within the booklet, WAPU recommends that WA Police reissue the booklet to all police officers **and** that the booklet be made available in electronic form on the WA Police Intranet. However, in order for the information contained within the booklet to be applied effectively, a holistic, top-down effort must be made to ensure that the recommendations are actually put into practice.

2. Where an officer resides is taken into consideration when transferring, particularly within the metropolitan area

The commute to work by Members, particularly those within the metropolitan area, is substantial (both in measures of distance and time), especially when combined with early morning finishes and long periods of overtime. More than 80 per cent of respondents expressed concerns that early morning finishes on evening shift created significant fatigue-related issues when commuting home.

In the last three years, only a few respondents (approximately 10 per cent) indicated they had requested a transfer on the basis that the distance they travelled to and from work was excessive, yet only 60 of those respondents who requested a transfer had their request approved. For those who had their requests denied, some of the reasons proffered concerned WAPU. WAPU wonders how many requests for transfer are made that stipulate concerns about commuting distance and would be interested to know how many transfers are actually approved with consideration for where an officer resides and their associated work commute.

As such, WAPU recommends that *all* transfers, particularly within the metropolitan area, are made with consideration for where an officer resides and that officer’s subsequent commute. Conversely, Members should consider their commuting distance when applying for or accepting a transfer, specifically in the metropolitan area.

3. Implement 10-hour shifts across the State

Currently, WA Police HR Policy 26 (which refers to rostering practices) stipulates that “12-hour rosters are prohibited unless expressly approved by the Deputy Commissioner” and that “3 x 8-hour rosters are prohibited unless expressly approved by the Deputy Commissioner”. WA Police has confirmed that no 3 x 8 rosters exist but has also stated that there are stations in regional WA that “run rolling 8-hour day, afternoon and night shifts from a two-panel roster” which do not require the approval of the Deputy Commissioner.

WAPU believes the implementation of 10-hour rosters is a win for Members, as they are afforded an extra day of leave in their work week which gives them time to rest, recover and balance work/life commitments. Accordingly, WAPU recommends that WA Police endeavours to explore the implementation of 10-hour shifts across the entire State, where practical.

4. Roster considerations

The use of evening shifts in preference to late finish (0200 hours) afternoon shifts was introduced in the Industrial Agreement in 2006. This has developed into a popular shift type, however, the use of 10-hour evening shifts that commence at 1900 hours and end at 0500 hours generate a number of fatigue issues, as noted by the majority of Members.

Although the 0500 hour finish may be an effective operational instrument during the warmer months (by making the most of hours of light within the day), WAPU believes that during winter, evening shifts should commence at 1700 and cease at 0300 to give Members the best chance of obtaining reasonable sleep following their shift.

Conclusion

A number of fatigue-related recent incidents that had occurred on Members' commute to and from work prompted WAPU to investigate the impact that rosters, sleeping patterns, workload and commuting habits had on Members.

Long commutes coupled with insufficient sleep, immense workloads, an inability to properly balance work/life commitments, a lack of suitable alternative transport options and a lack of commitment from management to appropriately manage employee fatigue is adversely impacting our Members. Some of the experiences described within this report are incredibly alarming – the incidents Members relayed of microsleeps behind the wheel, losing concentration and hallucinating indicate that fatigue is an issue that is not being properly managed.

Members have rightly pointed out that it feels incongruous that police officers are tasked with enforcing safe road behaviours, which include monitoring driver distraction and deterring tired drivers, yet the aforementioned workplace issues see police officers commuting great distances in a fatigued state. The problem is further exacerbated by the fact that Members perceive a total lack of concern and care from their employer about fatigue, as a “suck it up and carry on” culture is fostered. From the examples provided by Members, WAPU fears it is only a matter of time before a serious on-road incident occurs that involves an overworked, overwrought, fatigued police officer.

Consequently, WAPU recommends the following initiatives are introduced, without delay:

- That WA Police reprint the “An Introduction to Fatigue 2012” booklet and reissue it to all members of WA Police;
- That WA Police take into consideration where an officer resides when transferring them to a different station or section, especially if it is within another metropolitan police district;
- That WA Police endeavours to explore the implementation of 10-hour shifts across the entire State, where practical; and
- That during winter, evening shifts should commence at 1700 and cease at 0300 to give Members the best chance of obtaining reasonable sleep following their shift.