**The human story: refocusing fatal crash reporting**

Too often media reporting on fatal crashes focuses on the network impacts of the crash, rather than the tragic and unnecessary loss of life that has occurred. When a fatal crash occurs in New Zealand, often the media is quick to report on it. This was a headline from a fatal crash in Otago on 5th of October 2021: “**Truck drivers face two-hour diversion after fatal crash closes Otago highway**”. The headline centred on the network impact of the crash, rather than the loss of life that has occurred. Reporters focus on the

‘road closure’, the ‘delay to commuters’ or the ‘long detour’ and overlook the human element – the life lost and the impact that has on their friends and families.

Compare this to other types of reporting on unexpected or tragic deaths. If a Covid-19 patient dies, you will never see the headline: “County must lock down for two weeks due to the death of a covid-positive patient”. You are also more likely to see words and phrases such as ‘deepest sympathy’, ‘loss’ and

‘friends and family’.

As practitioners we can also be guilty of dehumanising serious road trauma in our reporting. For example, the acronym ‘DSi’ is liberally used in engineering reports to discuss safety benefits and treatments, which can lead to indifference to the real impacts of road safety strategies, programmes, and projects on preventing deaths and serious injuries

This presentation will look at how fatal crashes are reported in New Zealand, in both the media and among technical practitioners. It will challenge practitioners to think differently about how we discuss death and injury, and will provide practical suggestions for how we can improve our reporting to focus on the human element of road safety, and encourage others outside our industry to do the same.

