



# CROWDED PLACES STRATEGY – DANGEROUS MOTOR VEHICLES

## *A Guide for Returning Officers and WAEC Personnel*

### Background

*Australia's Strategy for Protecting Crowded Places from Terrorism* (overseen by the Australia-New Zealand Counter-Terrorism Committee - ANZCTC) defines crowded places as 'locations which are easily accessible by large numbers of people on a predictable basis'. While the Strategy references such locations as sports stadia, shopping malls, transport infrastructure, concert venues, civic spaces and the like, polling venues at a State general election or by-election are clearly locations that attract small crowds of electors, campaign workers and other stakeholders, as well as electoral officials, at well publicised locations and times.

The above document specifies a number of reasons why terrorists may attack crowded places, many of which are applicable to polling places or early voting centres. Two of these reasons are of particular relevance:

- Crowded places are commonly open and accessible, sometimes reducing the need for complex attack planning; and
- Some crowded places may have high symbolic value, such as iconic representation of a country, government or culture.

Applying the ANZCTC Crowded Places Self-Assessment Tool to polling places, typically puts them at the lower end of risk spectrum, nevertheless an element of risk will always remain in respect of such venues and indeed any public place involving gatherings of people.

While this Strategy looks beyond the risks posed by deliberate terrorist acts and includes accidental vehicular impacts and non-terrorist related acts of aggression, the above document contains a range of useful and relevant information and recommended actions. It also reinforces the fact that while law enforcement and intelligence agencies are responsible and equipped to detect and disrupt terrorist activity, owners and operators of crowded places still have a duty of care to take steps to protect people that work, use or visit their site from a range of foreseeable threats, including terrorism. Thus, for example, whether a motor vehicle is being driven in a deliberate hostile manner or simply by a driver who is distracted or under the influence of alcohol, the Western Australian Electoral Commission (WAEC) has a responsibility to select polling locations that minimise the risk of a collision (deliberate or otherwise) between motor vehicles and stakeholders attending those venues.

## **WAEC Crowded Places Strategy**

This strategy aims to establish the principles that are to be applied by the Western Australian Electoral Commission when conducting major in person electoral events involving the potential for queues and the assembly of crowds. The focus is in respect of the potential dangers posed by motor vehicles.

In person electoral events conducted by the Commission are typically dispersed across a number of polling venues and involve relatively small crowds when compared to major sporting and venue specific cultural events. Nevertheless, while risk levels may be lower, the guiding principles remain largely the same.

The Commission has identified vehicular risks associated with crowded polling venues as falling into two main categories:

- (1) A deliberate act of aggression involving a motor vehicle(s), by an individual or group for whatever reason, against electors, political campaign staff or electoral officials at a polling venue (e.g. a terrorist inspired attack at a polling place).
- (2) Dangers posed to queues or crowds at polling venues by a motor vehicle(s) as a result of an accident or unintentional incident (e.g. an out of control motor vehicle colliding with a queue of electors).

The focus of this strategy is on polling venues involving electors and other external stakeholders or members of the public. Situations involving the assembly of significant numbers of casual staff and potentially scrutineers for longer term, behind the scenes electoral processing or vote counting will be dealt with by OSH and emergency response plans specific to the premises being utilised.

It must be acknowledged that it is not within the Commission's remit or capacity to predict or prevent terrorist attacks occurring, nor to predetermine and directly counter potential aggressive behaviour by individuals or groups who present at polling venues.

What the Commission is able to do is to ensure that it:

- selects polling venues that are accessible for electors, but do not put them at undue risk from vehicular traffic when entering or leaving the site
- selects polling sites that do not result in electors queueing alongside a roadway or the entry/exit to a busy car park while waiting to cast their vote
- where possible, selects polling venues that have pre-existing fencing, bollards or other safety barriers that prevent vehicles being driven into areas where electors and others are assembling
- provides training and guidance to electoral staff, particularly returning officers and venue managers, on procedures to follow when dealing with and reporting incidents that may arise
- undertakes appropriate liaison with police and other relevant authorities during the planning of major in person electoral events

- arranges agreed points of contact between relevant Commission personnel and security personnel in advance of an electoral event.

## Polling Venue Selection

At a State general election the Commission utilises over 1,000 venues as polling places, early voting centres, processing and vote counting locations and mobile polling sites, mostly for just one day. Most election day polling places are State government owned premises such as primary and secondary schools or local government facilities such as halls and recreation centres. Early voting centres will often be commercial premises, warehouse facilities or multi-purpose recreation centres.

Given the number of venues, the usage arrangements and the minimal time required, it is typically not practicable or financially viable to install special vehicle security barriers or significant traffic control devices in such circumstances. Venue selection therefore becomes critical in order to mitigate the hazards posed by motor vehicles, whether the associated risk stems from deliberately hostile or unintentional actions by a driver.

The best way to protect pedestrians and people queuing to vote is to ensure sufficient separation from roadways and parking areas in terms of both distance and accessibility. This can generally be readily achieved at polling places established within schools, where fencing, bollards and other barriers typically already provide the separation required.

It can become more complicated at multi-purpose venues such as community recreation centres, country halls and commercial premises in retail precincts. When utilising such venues, **it is critical that queues of electors waiting to enter the room or space established for voting are not forced to line up on a footpath immediately adjacent a roadway or the entry/exit lanes of a carpark.**

**Likewise, there needs to be sufficient separation between vehicular traffic and the area where campaign workers are likely to assemble in order to provide electors with how to vote promotional material as they approach the space selected for voting.** It should be acknowledged however that polling venue managers have limited authority and capacity in terms of monitoring and controlling the behaviour of campaign workers.

In view of the above, the key considerations when assessing the suitability of a polling venue from the perspective of this strategy are as follows:

- Elector queues must never extend along an open and narrow footpath immediately adjacent a roadway, where no barriers or fence exists to separate pedestrian and vehicular traffic
- The best polling venues are those set well back from roadways and carparks with separation provided by fencing and/or other barriers (bollards, raised garden beds, planter boxes, sculptured features)
- The entrance/exit to voting rooms/spaces should not open directly onto a carpark, unless sufficient space exists to accommodate a likely queue and suitable protective barriers are in place

- In the case of leased commercial premises in retail or commercial precincts, the entrance/exit of the voting space should not open directly onto the entry or exit lanes of a carpark, unless suitable protective barriers are in place
- In assessing the suitability of a venue from the perspective of this strategy, never assume that the driver of a vehicle will obey road rules or follow directional arrows or instructional signage.

For further information or to seek clarification on any of the above, please contact the Commission on (08) 9214 0400 or via [waec@waec.wa.gov.au](mailto:waec@waec.wa.gov.au).

Additional information and resource materials can also be obtained at [www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/CrowdedPlaces](http://www.nationalsecurity.gov.au/CrowdedPlaces).

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