THE METROCOUNT VEHICLE CLASSIFIER SYSTEM AS USED BY THE DEPARTMENT OF CONSERVATION & LAND MANAGEMENT

The Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM) manages over 20 million hectares of Western Australia’s lands and waters. These natural areas include many of States principal nature-based recreation and tourism attractions. One of the strategies listed in the Department’s Corporate Plan involves the provision of a range of nature-based recreation opportunities, facilities and services while ensuring the natural environment is managed in a sustainable manner. In this regard, CALM has developed and currently manages over 800 nature-based recreation and tourism areas around the State which attract in excess of nine million visits annually.

One of the main aims of the Department’s VISTAT (Visitor Information & Statistics) Program is to collect visitor information needed to make strategic decisions on all facets of planning, funding, developing, managing and monitoring nature-based recreation and tourism opportunities. It is imperative that this data is accurate, reliable, relevant, current and cost effective to collect.

To this end, CALM initially purchased 50 Regular classifiers (5500 series) from MetroCount in 1999. These roadside units were distributed to all CALM District offices throughout Western Australia, and have been installed at the major National Parks and other highly visited recreation areas managed by the Department. CALM has since purchased further Regular and Plus classifiers (5600 series) due to the overall success of the MetroCount Vehicle Classifier System.

The main uses and benefits of the classifiers for CALM’s VISTAT (Visitor Information & Statistics) Program have been:

- To determine the number and type (class) of vehicles entering a Park or recreation area. The class/speed matrix report is generally run on a monthly basis at all Parks/areas where a unit is operating. The total number of visitors at each Park/recreation area can then be established when these vehicle numbers are combined with an estimate of the vehicle passengers for classes 1-2 and classes 3-4.

- To determine the number of vehicles entering a Park/area within specific time periods during the day. The weekly vehicle counts (Regular classifiers) or weekly vehicle counts—virtual week (Plus classifiers) reports are run by some Parks/areas to establish the optimum staffing requirements at entry points to Parks/areas where visitor entry fees are collected.

- To determine the speed of vehicles entering a Park/area. The class/speed matrix report is run to obtain a general overview of vehicle speeds, while the individual vehicles report (for Plus classifiers) can pinpoint the time of day and class of vehicle travelling a specific speed. It is useful to know the speed at which vehicles are travelling in and out of a Park/area for visitor safety reasons, security purposes (as some Parks/areas are closed at certain times) and road maintenance requirements.

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In addition, the roadside units have proven to be highly robust and functional across a range of geographic locations and associated diverse weather conditions. With respect to battery life, the 5600 series classifier is a real improvement on previous models, allowing approximately nine months of continuous data collection. While there were some teething problems with the lead acid battery in the 5500 series classifiers, this has generally been rectified with the installation of a solar hat to maintain the battery charge in this earlier model.

The above mentioned data reporting capabilities of the MetroCount vehicle classifier system coupled with durability of the roadside units has provided the Department with more reliable, accurate and extensive information regarding visitor use levels and patterns than previously recorded from other vehicle counting devices.

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10 August 2001