

**Submission
No 20**

DRIVER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND ROAD SAFETY

Name: Mr Michael King
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**Parliamentary
Stay Safe
Committee
Inquiry into Driver
Training**

Invitation to make a
submission

Michael King

Driver Education, Training and Road Safety

I refer to the Stay Safe Committee inquiry and to the terms of reference as listed below:

“The Committee will inquire into, and report on, the role of whole-of-life driver education and training in supporting improved road safety outcomes in New South Wales, with particular reference to:

- a) Trends in road safety research and crash statistics*
- b) Evaluating current driver training, including the effectiveness of refresher training and skills updating, and adaptation to changing vehicle technology*
- c) The needs of any particular driver groups*
- d) The needs of driver trainers, both professional and non-professional*
- e) The needs of metropolitan, rural and regional drivers*
- f) The needs and expectations of passengers and other road users*
- g) The cost of driver training standards and how the costs should be allocated*
- h) The experience of other jurisdictions, and interstate cross-border issues*
- i) Other related matters.”*

I make this submission with particular reference to the need for whole of life driver training.

I hope that the Committee gives due consideration to the issues I raise and to the recommendations that I have made.

Recommendations

I ask that the Stay Safe Committee give consideration to the implementation of, at least, the following measures to make our roads a safer place for all road users:

- 1. Impose a mandatory requirement for all learner drivers to have a minimum number of lessons from a professional Driving Instructor**
- 2. Further to 1 above, that the minimum number of professional lessons prior to being able to sit for their practical driving test be set at five (5)**
- 3. Impose a mandatory requirement for all open licensed drivers at the time of renewing their license to sit for a Driver Knowledge Test and an on-road practical driving test, and that they pass both these tests, prior to being able to renew their license**
- 4. Further to 3 above, that this requirement be imposed on all persons regardless of age, class of license, profession, financial standing, years as a license holder, infringement record, crash history, health status, place of residence and nationality of person applying for a NSW license**
- 5. That all new traffic signal installations be fitted with, as part of their standard equipment, red light cameras on each leg of the intersection at which these lights are fitted**
- 6. That, further to 5 above, all existing traffic signal installations be funded such that they are progressively installed over time, but not more than five (5) years, with red light cameras on each leg of the intersection at which these lights are fitted.**

My Background

I am a driving instructor, based in the Tweed Heads area and I am licensed to operate in NSW and Queensland.

I am alarmed at the behaviour and general standard of drivers on the roads.

I was a local government engineer for over 30 years (*4 years in Queensland and the rest in NSW*) involved in road design and construction, maintenance, traffic engineering, transport planning and road safety. I was responsible for planning new public infrastructure including roads, footpaths, stormwater, bikeways and traffic facilities.

I was responsible over many years for applying for and subsequently spending the funds from both the State and Federal Government Black Spot Programs. I became conversant with the criteria for allocating these funds, based on crash types, economic impacts and the benefit / costs of the projects proposed to improve the infrastructure.

I have also been involved in the education side of road safety, overseeing Road Safety Officers and the development and implementation of Road Safety Plans. I was at the fore-front of the introduction of the 40 kph School Zones, the 50kph General Urban Speed Limit, the introduction of the "Australian Road Rules", the introduction of the multi-lane roundabout rule and so much more.

The saddest day of my working life was when I had to attend court to give evidence, as a local government engineer (*not an eye witness*), in a criminal case against a teenage boy who was the only survivor (*driver*) of a single vehicle crash. Four other teenage boys were killed in that crash. It may be obvious to some, if not all, of the Committee members as to which crash I am talking about. A very sad time for all those families involved.

Unfortunately, since that crash in 2006, other similar incidents have occurred across the country. It's time it stopped.

Reason for my submission

I believe some of the key elements of road safety that are not being given due consideration in the regulation of road users and to the improvement of road safety includes:

1. Driver behaviour
2. Driver knowledge of the road rules – old and new
3. Driver knowledge of safe/defensive driving principles
4. Driver skills

There is more to road safety than the “Fatal 5”:

1. Speed
2. Fatigue
3. Alcohol & Drugs
4. Inattention & Distraction
5. Failure to wear a seat belt

There is also more to road safety than spending millions of dollars on upgrading infrastructure. Whilst the existing money, and so much more needs to continue being spent, the most outstanding road safety concern I have is with the standard of the majority of motor vehicle drivers.

All governments across the country continue to focus on the ‘Fatal 5’ and consider that the solutions to road safety lie with the 5 E’s:

1. Engineering
2. Education
3. Enforcement
4. Encouragement
5. Evaluation

Other key elements of road safety includes the over representation of young people (*majority males*) from 17 to 25 years of age. There is also a growing trend, possibly a reflection of our aging population, of crashes involving older people.

However, without delving into the statistics (*I am sure you know them*), I think it is fair to say that **a majority of crashes involve open license drivers**. Forget categorising them into anymore groups such as their gender, age, ethnicity, or any other group you may break the statistics into.

Parliamentary Stay Safe Committee Inquiry into Driver Training

Another significant feature of road crashes is the fact that a majority of them involve driver behaviour/error.

The selfish and ignorant driver, (*ie the majority*) will tell you that they are “*a good driver, everyone else is the problem and the authorities are only interested in revenue raising, not road safety*”.

Changes need to be made such that there is a holistic and systematic approach to road safety. Politicians need to be brave enough to take the challenge and make those changes regardless of all the nay-sayers who will find all sorts of reasons why changes cannot be made.

The changes I propose are that all drivers be required to keep up to date with the road rules, and keep up their skills as they relate to safe driving principles. There is only one way to ensure this is achieved, force the issue by requiring all open licensed drivers to be tested (Driver Knowledge and On-road practical) at the time they renew their licenses.

Learner Drivers

The minimum requirements for learner drivers are:

1. Must be 16 to get your L's
2. Pass a Driver Knowledge Test (DKT)
3. Fill out the log book
4. Complete at least 120 hours, including at least 20 hours of night time driving
5. Have your Learner's license for at least 12 months
6. Must be at least 17 before you can be tested for your P's
7. Pass an on-road practical driving test (DT).

There are variations to these requirements such as your age (*over 25 do not need to meet all of the above requirements*) and transferring from one state to another. International licensed drivers also have varying requirements to obtain a license within Australia.

I am not going into detail about what I believe to be flaws in the DKT or the DT but as a package, the above requirements are inadequate. Quite simply put, the driver training at Learner stage and the test they undertake to get their P's are totally inadequate to prepare them to be safe drivers on our roads.

Many learners never have a professional driving lesson and as such are taught entirely by people (*parents mostly I assume*) who have had their license for a number of years. Whether or not they have a good driving record my observation of many open license drivers on the roads indicates that they lack both the knowledge and practical application of the road rules and the principles of safe/defensive driving. The learner does the minimum requirement to pass their test then go off thinking they can drive having learnt all the bad habits of their supervisor.

There is also the added concern of falsifying the log book. At least if they are required to compulsory take at least five (5) lessons with a driving instructor, the extent of log book fraud will reduce.

I see in so many learner drivers, when some do decide that they want a few lessons towards the end of their 12 months, failings in simple tasks, but not necessarily limited to, include:

1. An inability to park a car – reverse parallel or angle parking (*forward and reverse*)
2. Observation skills – scanning and shoulder checks
3. Knowledge of some of the basic road rules – whether to go or stop on amber lights, yellow No Stopping lines, speed limit (*questions such as "how many kms over can I go before I would be booked (or failed)?"*), giving way to buses pulling out from the kerb, travelling in bus or bike lanes

4. Knowledge of safety margins – passing a cyclist, distance between cars when moving and when stopped in traffic, passing parked cars
5. How to turn right at traffic lights when not controlled by a right hand arrow – doing it safely, positioning the car correctly and clearing of the intersection if the lights change while you are propped
6. Correct hand positions for steering – crossing arms, palming and gripping on the inside of the steering wheel
7. Safe reversing techniques.

At least those who go to a driving instructor near the end of their time on their L's know they have some issues and they can be corrected (*in part*), but all those learners who never see a driving instructor can become a problem. Further, several hours may not be long enough to correct bad habits to achieve a life time of safe driving.

I have seen plenty of learners come for lessons but so many of them are only interested in what they need to do to pass their test. They then go off and do it '*their way*' after they get their license.

So how do we capture these people again in the future and give them more education and skills assessment over the next 40 years or more. Simple answer, unless they end up going through the courts, there is nothing in place until they reach a certain age, to force them to learn more. But to begin with, let's impose some additional mandatory requirements on Learners to make them safer drivers from the start.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. Impose a mandatory requirement for all learner drivers to have a minimum number of lessons from a professional Driving Instructor**
- 2. Further to 1 above, that the minimum number of professional lessons prior to being able to sit for their practical driving test be set at five (5).**

Whole of life driver training

As alluded to above in my discussion about learner drivers, one of the most significant problems associated with their learning experience is the knowledge and skill base of their supervising driver.

Further, there is one point I repeatedly make to the learner drivers I teach, that they have an unlimited learning resource out on the roads, all the other drivers. I point out to them, initially before I get them to start pointing things out to me, the mistakes of other drivers. Mistakes commonly seen include:

1. Red-light running
2. Tail-gaiting
3. Too close to the car in front when stopped in traffic
4. Stopping over the holding lines at both Stop signs and traffic lights
5. Not stopping at stop signs
6. Stopping in No Stopping zones
7. Parking on the wrong side of a road
8. Parking on footpaths
9. Poor turning positions – before and after
10. Speeding
11. Lack of signalling – often when merging
12. Non-use, or incorrect use of indicators in roundabouts
13. Non-use of indicators at various other situations
14. Queuing through intersections
15. Mobile phone use
16. Arms hanging out of the windows
17. Overtaking the car in front of them whilst merging onto the motorway
18. Driving excessively in bike lanes and bus lanes
19. Lane hopping
20. Passing too close to a cyclist and/or not indicating when they do so.

Many of the above would be seen in just one day and I could probably come up with more examples.

As alluded to before, if the opportunity arose to allow you to ask drivers who display the above problems if they are a good driver, they would all say **yes**.

But is it entirely their fault? That they do not know any road rules that came in since they got their license, or simply do not remember the older ones so well, nor have any recollection, or knowledge in the first place, about safe/defensive driving principles. As a believer in taking responsibility for your own actions, the answer is simply yes. But nobody bothers to update their knowledge about road rules. Some people may learn some things from their learner in the house, but not all open license drivers have a learner in the house, then you have those who would never listen to anything a learner would tell them.

Parliamentary Stay Safe Committee Inquiry into Driver Training

So how do we capture open license drivers to update their skills and knowledge? Unless the Highway Patrol or speed/red-light cameras get them, or they go through the courts and are required to attend driver training courses, or wait till they reach 85, or are medically assessed then need rehab and re-testing, then there is nothing. So, why not make changes?

The licensing system needs to change. All drivers, regardless of their driving record, class of license, age, profession, financial circumstance and locality, should be tested in their knowledge of the road rules and a practical on-road driving test, every time they renew their license. As well as these tests for those who are routinely renewing their license, it should apply to those who have had their license suspended/cancelled for whatever reason. So when they apply to get their license back, they are tested.

There are limited campaigns (*even fewer successful ones*) to educate drivers about new road rule changes. How many open license drivers are aware of some of the 'recent' ones including? Just to name a few examples:

1. Signalling left off a roundabout
2. Passing cyclists on roads
3. Rules allowing motorbike riders to creep up to the front of the queue at traffic signals.

How many open license drivers are aware of some of the more long standing rules including? Again, just a few examples:

1. Merging where a lane terminates both with the continuity line ending or where the lane line simply ends
2. Keeping left unless overtaking
3. Speeding in the '*fast lane*' – ie there is no such thing as a fast lane, but many people believe that you are entitled to travel above the speed limit when in the right lane as you are supposed to be going faster than those in the left lane
4. Travelling in bus lanes or bike lanes

Some of the worst driving I see is by taxi drivers. They speed, tail-gate, use their phones and run red lights. This is a frequent sight for me. One wonders what tests they go through to get their license to operate as a taxi driver. So along with all others in my proposal, they should have their tests as well when they renew their driver's license. The only exemption that I could possibly think of giving from this proposal would be the Police. I assume that they have in-house training and assessment for those officers authorized to drive a police vehicle. If not, then no exemption.

Then there are issues of safe/defensive driving that most drivers seem to have no knowledge of. Issues where the road rules are not specific and cannot be enforced

by Police actions, but ultimately can contribute towards crashes and be classed as 'human error'. Some examples include:

1. Safe distance from the car in front when travelling
2. Safe distance behind a car in front of you when stopped in traffic
3. Turning positions for left or right turns
4. Turning right at traffic lights when not controlled by an arrow
5. Shoulder checks when leaving the kerb or merging or turning.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. Impose a mandatory requirement for all open licensed drivers at the time of renewing their license to sit for a Driver Knowledge Test and an on-road practical driving test, and that they pass both these tests, prior to being able to renew their license**
- 2. Further to 1 above, that this requirement be imposed on all persons regardless of age, class of license, profession, financial standing, years as a license holder, infringement record, crash history, health status, place of residence and nationality of person applying for a NSW license.**

Traffic Signals

Everybody hates traffic lights but many do not understand their need and standing in the road safety/traffic management hierarchy.

Whilst they have a higher order of safety than a roundabout, when a crash occurs at traffic lights they are very often at speed and thus more severe than many other crashes at intersections in the urban environment. This is principally because of red-light runners.

Most red light runners do so in the belief that they will get to their destination quicker by saving themselves 30 seconds at a set of lights, and then catch the next set anyway. Many people believe that a green light means accelerate and make sure you get through them rather than consider the possibility that they may change before you get there. If they change to amber, then you should accelerate even more so. The next type of person is the one that quees across an intersection rather than sit behind the holding line, so that if the lights change, then they are through and the world is a better place for it. Inconvenience and potential danger to others is not a consideration.

By my observation, not just since becoming a driving instructor, red-light running is an epidemic. I believe no amount of driver training will stop this. Enforcement is the only answer, but you cannot put a Police officer at every set of lights.

So what should be done? I believe every set of traffic signals installed should be inclusive of a red-light camera and on every leg of the intersection as part of their standard equipment. This would soon stop many drivers from running red lights after they have been fined a few times. Nothing like a bit of road-rule enforcement to educate people.

Yes, this proposal needs to be resourced with the capital funds for their installation and the issuing and reviewing of any infringements. But over time, they will pay for themselves initially in fines revenue and then road safety improvements.

This then leads me to the political will to stand up against those who believe every action the Police/RMS are given and take, is for government revenue. It is clear in the history of road safety initiatives across NSW that the government is afraid of being accused of revenue raising. Look at the extent of signage that has been put up at School Zones, permanent speed camera sites, temporary speed camera sites, red-light cameras. You put in an initiative then add so many signs to warn people that they are there, not for any gains the signs will make for road safety (*in fact they can confuse*), but to appease your accusers.

RECOMMENDATION:

- 1. That all new traffic signal installations be fitted with, as part of their standard equipment, red light cameras on each leg of the intersection at which these lights are fitted**
- 2. That, further to 1 above, all existing traffic signal installations be funded such that they are progressively installed over time, but not more than five years, with red light cameras on each leg of the intersection at which these lights are fitted.**

Resourcing my proposals

Should any serious consideration be given to my proposals, there would be many people asking why this should be done, and how this could be done and come up with reasons why it should not be done.

I briefly alluded to the political will to try unpopular regulations, but only the strong willed politician will give consideration to this if they are serious about road safety.

The following paragraphs provide a brief detail of how I believe my proposals could be achieved.

Changes to Learner Driver Regulations:

There is no reason this could not be done as an immediate measure.

It is no harder to achieve than when the log book was introduced along with all the other regulations for Learners. The checks carried out now can remain in place with just one more quick check required. Make sure there are at least five (5) professional lessons carried out and recorded in the log book. If they have not complied, then along with any other non-compliance, they are sent away and are required to rebook their test for another day, thus further delaying their right to get their P's.

Open Licensed Driver Tests:

Perhaps this is my most controversial proposal and is perhaps the most likely to be cast aside.

The current Examiners employed by the RMS could remain the same. They test learners going onto their P's. The Drivers Knowledge Test (DKT) may need some resourcing.

My proposal for the DKT of open licensed drivers is that they undertake this at the RMS offices, as it is done with Learners, and when they pass they receive notification that they have passed. They then use this notification to book a test time with a professional driving instructor.

Yes, I did say, *let the driving instructors test the open licensed drivers to renew their license*. The professional driving instructor carrying out the test, when they pass the driver, gives them a notification which is then used for them to renew their license through the usual way at the RMS (*or on line of course*).

If the driver fails, they book a time to do the test again and their license is not renewed until they do pass. Of course some time frames need to be

considered as to when the tests must be done prior to, or after, the date for the renewal of their license.

Now we hear how this could lead to corruption. If we were worried about corruption, then nothing in this world would ever happen. I'll leave it to the state solicitor's office as to how to put anti-corruption measures in place for such a proposal, but as this proposal has limited impact on the state government resources, how can it fail.

Then we will hear about the costs incurred by the driver. A user-pay system is the answer for a fee to the RMS for the DKT, a fee to the instructor for them to conduct the on-road test and then the usual license renewal fees.

So the next comment is *how evil the government is* for imposing more hardship on the elderly, low income people and other groups who struggle.

My answer is this, "***a driver's license is not a right, it is a privilege. If you own a car and drive regularly enough to incur the expenses of driving, then the small and occasional cost of payment to driving instructors and the RMS to undertake these tests when you want to renew your license, are affordable.***"

Red-light Cameras:

There would need to be an immediate capital injection of funds to add these as standard equipment to new installations. But in the short term thereafter, they would pay for themselves from infringements.

As for retro-fitting red light cameras to existing traffic signal installations, they would also need funding initially but again will become self-funding due to infringements.

After some period of time, I have no doubt that infringements will drop and road safety will have measurable improvements, thus the government funds will balance over time on these measures.

Conclusion

Please remember that road trauma is not all about law enforcement it is also a health care issue. Prevent road trauma and you keep people out of the hospitals.

One significant contribution towards road trauma is driver behaviour and much of this stems from the driver's skills and knowledge of both the road rules and their ability to apply them in the real world.

Let's make the roads a safer place to be for all road users by making better drivers, both as a learner and throughout the whole of life driving experience. We talk about better roads and better cars but when do we hear any talk about making better drivers?

We cannot put Police at every intersection, or along every stretch of road, let's face it, the only times some people do the right thing (*slow down, signal as required*) is when they see a Police vehicle.

So in the absence of putting Police at every problem spot on the roads (*every intersection and more*) let's get the driver to improve their skills, knowledge and behaviour. This won't happen voluntarily so it needs to be forced upon people, with no exceptions.

I implore the Staysafe Committee to give consideration to my recommendations as detailed above.