

**Submission**

**No 28**

## **DRIVER AND ROAD USER DISTRACTION**

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Parliament of NSW: Driver and Road User Distraction (Inquiry)  
Submission by ROADwhyz

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To whom it may concern,

Please find attached our submission to the Parliament of New South Wales Driver and Road User Distraction (Inquiry). This submission has been prepared in response to the first Term of Reference for this inquiry: *the nature and extent of distraction as a contributor to crash causalities on NSW roads*.

ROADwhyz welcomes the NSW Parliament's inquiry into Driver and Road User Distraction. As an organisation working with young drivers, we are concerned with the increasing number of young people using and engaging with technological devices whilst driving.

We have experienced first-hand the devastating consequences that can occur when a driver is distracted, and as a whole, we believe that further measures need to be taken to reduce the number of drivers being distracted by technological devices such as mobile phones, iPods, CD players and GPS navigation systems.

In our submission we use latest statistics from current reports regarding driver distraction, which point to a common and worrying trend of mobile and music device use, which is contributing greatly to driver distraction and motor vehicle accidents.

We conclude with several recommendations we wish to see from this inquiry.

Sincerely,

*Ellie-Marie Watts, Trent Murray, Emily Guider and Cherish McDonald*  
on behalf of ROADwhyz.

# **Driver and Road User Distraction (Inquiry)**

Prepared by Ellie-Marie Watts, Trent Murray, Emily Guider and Cherish McDonald on behalf on ROADwhyz.

April 27, 2012

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## **1.0 Introduction**

ROADwhyz is a community driven, young driver awareness project initiated in 2007 by a team of volunteers who seek to educate young drivers (ages 16-25) of the potential fatalities and injuries that occur while operating a motor vehicle.

The ROADwhyz program runs in the Hunter Valley of NSW and the state of Victoria and is facilitated by several volunteers with years of experience in road safety and driver training.

We at ROADwhyz saw a community issue that needed to be addressed and created the 'Choice and Consequence' program, a joint initiative of NSW Police, ambulance officers from the NSW Ambulance Service and parents within the community to provide drivers with the tools, skills and knowledge to stay safe on Australian roads (ROADwhyz, 2012).

This submission identifies the sources of distraction to drivers and highlights those that are more likely to distract younger drivers in particular. It also outlines conclusions and recommendations for the management of distraction to drivers as a first step in inspiring NSW Parliament's agenda in handling this important issue.

## **2.0 Background**

"Distraction occurs when a driver, either willingly or unwillingly, engages in a secondary activity that interferes with performance of their primary task - driving the vehicle" (Regan 2005 in RACQ, n.d).

Despite the intricacies of driving (steering, scanning, gear change, braking, acceleration etc.), it is common for drivers to engage in other activities whilst driving, particularly using mobile devices and adjusting vehicle controls such as air-conditioning, iPods, CD players and cruise control.

According to a report into driver distraction by the Monash University Accident Research Centre (2003), any activity that distracts the driver or competes for their attention while driving has the potential to degrade driving performance and have serious consequences for road safety (Young et al., 2003, p.5).

As evidence proves, a wide variety of day-to-day activities contribute to distraction related crashes which vary for age groups, sex, and driver level (Learner, Provisional or Full license). Additionally, the continuing introduction of new technologies (both in-car and mobile) provides a continual source of distraction for all driving groups, but particularly to younger drivers who most likely to perform risk-taking behaviour and who are the most likely to engage with these technologies.

“The likelihood of today’s tech-savvy generation getting distracted behind the wheel has been compounded by the proliferation of these [mobile, musical and GPS] devices” (AAMI, 2010, p.5).

The AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety (2001, p.8) study found thirteen distraction categories integral to road crashes, including:

1. Eating/drinking
2. Outside person, object or event
3. Adjusting radio/ iPod/ CD
4. Other occupants of vehicle
5. Moving object in vehicle
6. Smoking
7. Talking listening on mobile phone
8. Dialling mobile phone
9. Using device or object brought into vehicle
10. Using devices or controls of vehicle
11. Adjusting climate controls
12. Other distraction
13. Unknown distraction

Five of these 13 listed distractions are device distraction related.

The AAA Foundation’s list correlates to AAMI’s Crash Index (2012) findings, which advise 23% of drivers have been distracted while talking on a mobile, 35% have been distracted by Sat Nav, 35% have lost concentration while changing music, 22% have been distracted by text message/MMS, 9% have been distracted by using Internet on a Smartphone and 8% have used a mobile to read emails or check Internet.

These identifiers too correlate to the Roads and Maritime Services’ ‘Top 5 Driver Distractions’ list which identify mobile phones (talking and texting), adjusting vehicle settings, passengers, eating, drinking and smoking and external distractions as “the top distractions turning the heads of drivers” (GEARED, 2012).

### **3.0 Driver distraction with a young driver focus**

Young drivers (16-25) are the most likely age group to be involved in a distraction-related crash, particularly by using technology and by being distracted by other passengers, as already identified above.

“Young drivers are over represented in all fatal crashes, including drink driving and fatigue. Despite making up only 15 per cent of drivers, young drivers represent around 36 per cent of annual road fatalities” (Roads and Maritime Services, 2011).

We at ROADwhyz work with younger drivers to overcome this percentage of road fatalities by developing an awareness of the main safety issues facing young drivers of today and explore the direct relationship between youth, inexperience and risk taking behaviour.

We also develop an understanding of the effects, impact and consequences of road trauma, and improve decision making skills with respect to driving and road traffic safety.

#### **3.1 AAMI 2010 Young Driver Index Report - Statistics**

A 2012 Crash Index Study conducted by Australia’s leading motor insure group, AAMI, states that there is a growing trend towards mobile phone use contributing to distracted drivers on NSW roads.

The study found that 62% of drivers had been distracted in some form by their mobile phone, whether it be by talking, sending an SMS, browsing the internet or checking email (AAMI, 2012)

Similarly, a 2010 study also conducted by AAMI found an alarmingly high number of young drivers are being distracted on our roads. The report stated that: “young drivers (under 21) are most likely to be involved in distraction related crashes, particularly using technology and being distracted by other passengers.

“Furthermore, certain types of distractions are more prominent to different demographics and age groups. This reinforces the notion that while distraction is a problem for all age drivers; the specific sources of the distraction may vary considerably.

“Taken as a whole, these results reinforce the importance of considering a wide range of contextual factors in collecting and analysing data on driver distraction” (AAMI, 2010).

The AAMI 2010 Young Driver Index report found:

- Young drivers now have more access than ever before to new technologies. Therefore, the likelihood of young people being distracted whilst driving has been multiplied by the increases use of devices.
- AAMI report 2010 Young Driver Index found that there has been a 67% surge in young drivers use of mobile phones whilst driving (50% up from 30%) without a hands-free kit.
- Compared with other drivers, young drivers are significantly more pre-disposed to in-car technology and the corresponding distractions they pose. They are significantly more likely than other drivers to get distracted by changing the CD or radio station (53% compared to 31%). And young drivers are more than twice as likely as other drivers to get distracted from driving when using iPod or MP3 players (36% compared with 8%), which are increasingly compatible with the car stereos of today.
- Young drivers are twice as likely to have sent or read a text message while driving in the past.
- Young drivers are also far more likely to use their mobile for calls without a hands-free kit (50% compared to 36%), and twice as many young drivers have used their mobile to email or surf the internet (11% compared to 6%).
- GPS systems are proving more distracting for young drivers. One in three young drivers (32%) say they have been distracted from driving by their GPS compared to just one in eight other drivers (13%).

#### **4.0 Conclusions**

This submission has been prepared to address some of the key issues and sources of driver distraction of young drivers. Through our experience in educating young drivers, we have been able to identify key sources of driver distraction of young drivers.

We submit that the legislative reform can address the issue by:

1. Support education campaigns such as ROADwhyz in teaching drivers the risks of distraction and how to reduce the occurrence of distractions;
2. Further publicity highlighting the dangers of mobile phone use whilst driving;

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3. Further education for all road users on the general distraction of mobile phones, both in-hand and hands-free;
4. Stricter policing on the current laws regarding mobile phone use while driving;
5. Research to determine the prevalence of mobile phone use of drivers in order to address the problem and devise counter measures;
6. Ensure that all road signs and advertising are used suitably and properly to avoid the risks of becoming a distraction to drivers and to not generate confusion;
7. Focus on the promotion of safer use of GPS navigation systems;
8. Introduction of US system of event data records camera-based use of evidence in reviewing how driver distraction causes crashes/near misses and to be used as an education and monitoring tool;
9. Further research to account for the frequency of driver distractions and the account for young drivers willingness to engage in distracting and potentially dangerous driving behaviour;
10. Analyse and use data on how distraction affects driving e.g. reduced control, reduced situational awareness, longer response times, fewer mirror checks;
11. Designing a study in which the prevalence of driver involvement in distracting activities, and driver willingness to engage in distracting activities is illuminated;
12. Regulate the guidelines for roadside signage and advertising so to not further distract road users (including signs, colour, location, phrasing etc.).

## **5.0 Recommendations**

### **Recommendation 1**

Increasing the profile of road use distraction through a variety of agencies and education programs. We believe it is particularly important to include the use of local councils in driver education due to their specific knowledge of driving habits on local roads. Publicity and education campaigns should be undertaken to highlight the danger of distractions.

### **Recommendation 2**

Support and encourage car manufacturers to introduce integrated hands-free systems into newly built vehicles as a standard feature. We recognise that drivers are not going to stop using telecommunications whilst driving and believe that aiding safer management of driving and talking is the best solution. In addition, drivers must be trained in the ideal method to interact with new technologies accessed through portable devices such as hands-free to minimize distraction.

### **Recommendation 3**

Increased awareness and education for learner and provisional drivers during the driver licensing and training processes. This can include more information in handbooks to draw attention to the potential risks associated with engaging in distracting activities whilst operating a vehicle, more questions in knowledge tests relating to driver distraction and a continued enforcement of the current NSW rules relating to prohibited use of hands free on P1 type licenses.

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## **Terms of Reference**

### **Driver and Road User Distraction (Inquiry)**

This inquiry is a current Parliamentary inquiry conducted by the Staysafe (Road Safety) Committee. This inquiry was established on 22 February to review and report on the role of distraction in crash casualties as it affects all road users in NSW, with a view to identifying its impact and to propose solutions for mitigating its negative consequences.

Submissions close: 27 Apr 2012

This inquiry was self-referred. Resolution passed 22 February 2012, Minutes No 7, Item 3.

That the Committee examines the role of distraction in crash casualties as it affects all road users in NSW, with a view to identifying its impact and to propose solutions for mitigating its negative consequences, with particular reference to:

- a) The nature and extent of distraction as a contributor to crash casualties on NSW roads;
- b) Current rates and future trends in take up of electronic devices, both by road users and vehicle manufacturers;
- c) Regulatory means of enforcing harm minimisation caused by such devices;
- d) Technological solutions to managing the harmful consequences of distraction;
- e) Other solutions to reduce information overload for road users; and
- f) Any other related matters.

Staysafe (Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety)

Posted 22<sup>nd</sup> of February

<http://www.parliament.nsw.gov.au>