

## **INQUIRY INTO YOUNG DRIVER SAFETY AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

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**Date Received:** 30/11/2007

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A Quality Rural Lifestyle – in a caring and thriving community

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# Fax

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Pages: *4* including cover page.

Re: *Young Driver Safety & Education Programs.*

From: *Jeff Bush*

Direct Tel: *65461164*

Date: *30/11/2007*

Copy to: *-*

**Message:**

*Please find attached submission in regards to young Driver Safety.*

*Kind Regards  
Jeff Bush.*



Contact Name: Jeff Bush  
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Reply to: Scone Office

27 November, 2007

The Committee Manager  
Staysafe Committee  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
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### **YOUNG DRIVER SAFETY & EDUCATION PROGRAMS**

Upper Hunter Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the enquiry into Young Driver Safety and Education Programs.

Upper Hunter Shire is located approximately 250 kilometres north west of Sydney in the Upper Hunter Valley and is known as the "Horse Capital of Australia". The Shire has four major towns, that of Scone, Aberdeen, Merriwa and Murrurundi. The area of the Shire is 8,100 square kilometres with a population of 13,000 and as with many rural shires the local road network is an important link in connecting our communities. Two major transport infrastructure facilities of national importance also pass through the Shire – these being the Golden and New England Highways.

The current incidence of road crashes involving young drivers in New South Wales cannot be ignored any longer and Council recognises the effort being undertaken to slow this horrific and unfortunate trend. The big six are speeding, driver fatigue, driver education, alcohol/drugs and pedestrians and road conditions.

The car is an essential requirement for youth living in rural areas for business, education and recreation and is something they cannot do without. Council's own apprentices and trainees are required to travel to either Newcastle or Tamworth on a regular basis to attend appropriate classes. For this purpose it is vital that reasonable and effective road infrastructure links are maintained to both rural and regional centres. These road networks provide vital links for those in rural areas to access services provided only in larger centres and for visitors travelling to rural areas. Such links are essential for the health and well being of our youth. It is well documented that *"country drivers are not necessarily less skilled than their city counterparts, however drive longer distances often on roads of inferior quality to those found in urban areas"*.

Studies undertaken in various areas around the Upper Hunter Shire have identified that the majority of road use is by car and motorbike (up to 80%). The second highest road use is by small trucks with 2 axles and cars with trailers have been identified as the third highest road user class. Heavy vehicles make up approximately 15-20% of total road users.

Many road authorities have undertaken road safety audits that recognise deficiencies within the local system and report on ways in which the network may be upgraded to a suitable standard throughout, for the purposes of improving road safety to a compliant level for anticipated road users.

Sealed sections of road network are predominantly sign posted with speed limits, however unsealed sections are such that users are expected to adjust speeds as necessary. The legal speed limit of the unsealed network is up to 100km/hour in optimal conditions. It is generally assumed that a vehicle speed of 80km/hour may be reasonably expected to be driven by persons who are familiar with the road and surrounding area. It is not acceptable to assume any more that youth are familiar with road environments.

Some of the more significant issues are:

#### **Unsafe roadside environment**

There is a need for additional roadside signage, including but not limited to warning signs, advisory signs and other signs as applicable. The replacement and/or maintenance of existing roadside signage is a must and needs to be funded accordingly. Road environments typically range from high standard dual carriageways to alignments that are steep, narrow and winding with tight curves.

There is a need for improvements to road geometrical design. Most of the unsealed roads across Australia have not been geometrically designed to safely accommodate current vehicles and road user requirements. The lack of engineering design has led to tight horizontal corners that appear sub standard, lack of road side signage warning motorists of these corners and no physical barrier protection or clear zone allowing for run off areas near these corners. Due to roads having little engineering design input there are uncontrolled access points at locations that are dangerous due to being concealed from motorists using the road or are located in positions that do not allow motorists enough sight distance to enter the road.

The vertical geometry of roads often includes crests, sags and steep sections. While motorists tend to slow during corners they do not typically slow for dips and crests, even though their stopping sight distance may be reduced as much, if not more during these changes in vertical geometry.

There is a need to construct physical barriers for road structures. Structures such as cattle grids, bridges, culverts and gates present on the road as part of the road environment generally have little approach visibility and no advanced warning signs. In addition there is generally no barrier protection on these facilities and where barrier protection does exist it is not compliant with current standards and requirements.

#### **Inclement weather**

There is a need for improved education and advanced warnings. During high rainfall events gravel roads become slippery and boggy. Cold temperatures during winter bring icy, slippery conditions and snow.

#### **Variable pavement conditions**

There is a need for improved consistent pavement conditions and/or increased advanced warning of changes in pavement conditions. The pavement is varied throughout rural New South Wales. In the higher altitude sections the unsealed pavement is generally gravely and rocky and loose gravel becomes a safety concern on steep descents or corners. Lower sections are generally unsealed plastic clays which become slippery when wet.

#### **Driver behaviour**

There is a need for increased behavioural education. These are behavioural issues whereby people put themselves in unnecessary danger. It is apparent that some youth either do not recognise that there is a risk to their personal safety or they think that the risk to them and others is acceptable. Driver education programs such as the "pinky finger" advertisements now appearing on national television are proving to be successful in raising awareness of the risks associated with foolish driving.

There are fewer overtaking opportunities along rural roads increasing the likelihood that motorists accept greater risks than usual when attempting to overtake slower vehicles. Overtaking lanes are not necessary however other measures such as truck pull over areas should be incorporated into the road network.

Driver fatigue is an issue on most roads, however it is particularly exaggerated in rural areas where there is little advanced warning of rest areas and general lack of information signs normally associated with thoroughfare roads.

Upper Hunter Shire Council is a strong supporter of the Black Spot Program which aims to remove or improve the safety of dangerous locations on road networks and in that way improve road safety to all communities. All projects funded are worthwhile however there are many more projects that need to be funded if targets of reduced road fatalities are to be met. The Roads to Recovery Program provides funding for roads in rural, regional and metropolitan areas. Upper Hunter Shire Councils focus has been to direct this funding, in addition to any Black Spot funding to the renewal of the road network targeting the removal of dangerous sections. There remains a continuing need for funding for road safety projects as part of an overall package to enable local authorities to achieve aims of improving safety at locations with a history of crashes involving death or injury.

Assuming current funding levels are maintained it will be some time before the removal of dangerous locations alone will enhance driver safety. The available young driver education programs and the potential for development and expansion of these programs is a must to further reduce the likelihood of fatalities among young drivers.

Initiatives such as the arrive alive-safe roads program, random breath testing, improved driver licensing practices, heavy vehicle safety improvements and more effective and efficient traffic enforcement are just the beginning to a reduction in fatality levels.

Further action and development of programs to improve rural road safety is required but not limited to:

- Road Infrastructure Improvements
- Road Safety Audits and Treatments
- Railway Level Crossing Initiatives
- Reduced Repeat Drink Driving
- Alcohol interlocks, education and rehabilitation
- Fatigue
- Occupant protection (increased restraint use, increased use of standard safety features such as ABS, ESC etc.)

#### SPEED IS ONE OF THE MAJOR KILLERS ON OUR ROADS

- As driving experience increases accident involvement declines.
- Driving practice is not enough. Supervised practice should be gained over a prolonged period of time in varied driving conditions.
- Learner drivers need to know how to anticipate hazards and take appropriate action. Increased or improved driving skills, attitudes and behaviour.
- Additional enforcement (improved detection of speeding vehicles).

The most common type of accident in our area is off road, round bend, hit object. Inappropriate speed and speeding saves little time on our roads but costs lives.

Upper Hunter Shire Council can only reiterate on the concerns of local communities, not only within the immediate area, but those in surrounding areas and supports the right of youth to access a driver's licence and the introduction of any initiative to reduce young driver fatalities. If you have any further enquiries regarding this submission please contact Jeff Bush, Manager Civil Assets on 65401164.

Yours faithfully



For Daryl Dutton  
GENERAL MANAGER