

INQUIRY INTO YOUNG DRIVER SAFETY AND EDUCATION PROGRAMS

Organisation: City of Sydney
Name: Ms Monica Barone
Position: Chief Executive Officer
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City of Sydney

ABN 22 636 550 790

GPO Box 1591 Sydney NSW 2001 Australia

Town Hall House 456 Kent Street Sydney NSW 2000 Australia

Phone +61 2 9265 9333 Fax +61 2 9265 9222 TTY +61 2 9265 9276

council@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au www.cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au



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Mr Geoff Corrigan MP
Chair, Staysafe Committee
Parliament House NSW
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000



Dear Mr Corrigan

Inquiry into Young Driver Safety and Education Programs - Submission

Please find attached the City of Sydney's submission to the Staysafe Inquiry into Young Driver Safety and Education Programs.

The submission outlines the issues faced by new drivers in the City's unique inner-city road environment in response to the request for submissions.

The City welcomes the Staysafe Inquiry into Young Driver Safety and Education Programs and is pleased to have the opportunity to make a submission.

If you would like to speak with a Council officer about the City's submission, you can contact Len Woodman, Road Safety Strategy Project Coordinator on 9265 9212 or at lwoodman@cityofsydney.nsw.gov.au.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. M. Barone'.

Monica Barone
Chief Executive Officer

city of villages

Submission by the City of Sydney



Staysafe Committee

**Inquiry into Young Driver Safety and Education
Programs**

November 2007

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Overview

The City of Sydney welcomes the Staysafe Inquiry into Young Driver Safety and Education Programs.

Road safety is a key factor for the City of Sydney and critical to delivering the City's *Sustainable Sydney 2030* vision which is currently being developed. The City's Road Safety Programs will be closely aligned to meet the needs of the City's population over the next two decades. The objective is to provide long-term sustainable programs that will develop a road safety culture to encourage road safety from birth through to adulthood and beyond.

The City of Sydney supports reducing the speed limit in the Sydney CBD to 40km/h as part of the Road and Traffic Authority's program to reduce speed limits in areas with high pedestrian activity. With long shopping strips, entertainment precincts and areas with high concentrations of pedestrians it is clear that the Sydney CBD needs lower speed limits. A lower speed limit gives a signal to drivers, especially young inexperienced drivers, that there are special reasons to slow down – such as pedestrians and cyclists. Lower speeds give drivers, pedestrians and cyclists more time to react in a potential collision situation and enables drivers to stop in a much shorter distance.

1. Introduction

It is the City's intention to create a pedestrian friendly environment which encourages walking and cycling.

However city environment presents unique driving challenges which young inexperienced drivers may not handle appropriately and the anti-social behaviour displayed by some young drivers is detrimental to this goal.

With over 600,000 people in Sydney on a typical weekday pedestrians and motor vehicles are competing for space. Pedestrians represent a high proportion of road injuries in the City of Sydney, accounting for 28% of road injuries in 2004 compared to 11% for the rest of the metropolitan area.

The City of Sydney supports initiatives which improve driver education to bring about a reduction in crashes involving young drivers and welcomes the opportunity to have input into this Inquiry.

Addressing young driver behaviour to reduce the number of crashes involving young drivers is an important initiative that will also contribute to improved pedestrian and cyclist safety.

With an increasing number of residents walking and cycling to work and more vehicles on our road system there are concerns of potentially greater conflict between pedestrians, cyclists and vehicles. There are different speed limits around the City of Sydney from 10km/h in Shared Zones, to 40km/hr in residential areas 50km/h Urban Speed Limit with a number of main roads zoned at 60km/h. Police have observed that some motorists speed at traffic signals in order to avoid a red signal, or speed as soon as they have a green signal. This can create high risk situations for pedestrians, particularly those who are less mobile, such as young children, the elderly and people with disabilities.

A speed limit of 50km/h is considered inappropriate for the inner city and CBD environments and the speed limit should be reduced to 40km/h.

2. Submission addressing the Terms of Reference

(a) The current incidence of road crashes involving young drivers in NSW

While the City has a comparatively very low level of car ownership there is still a demand for young people wanting to drive. Young people in the City generally have the same desire to drive as those living elsewhere and many young people also travel into the CBD for work, to shop or for entertainment.

While there has been a decline in young drivers being involved in crashes they are still over represented in the total number of crashes in the City of Sydney.

Figure 1 shows the annual average number of crashes involving drivers aged 17 to 26 which represents a considerable contribution to the number of crashes occurring in the City of Sydney between 2001 and 2005.

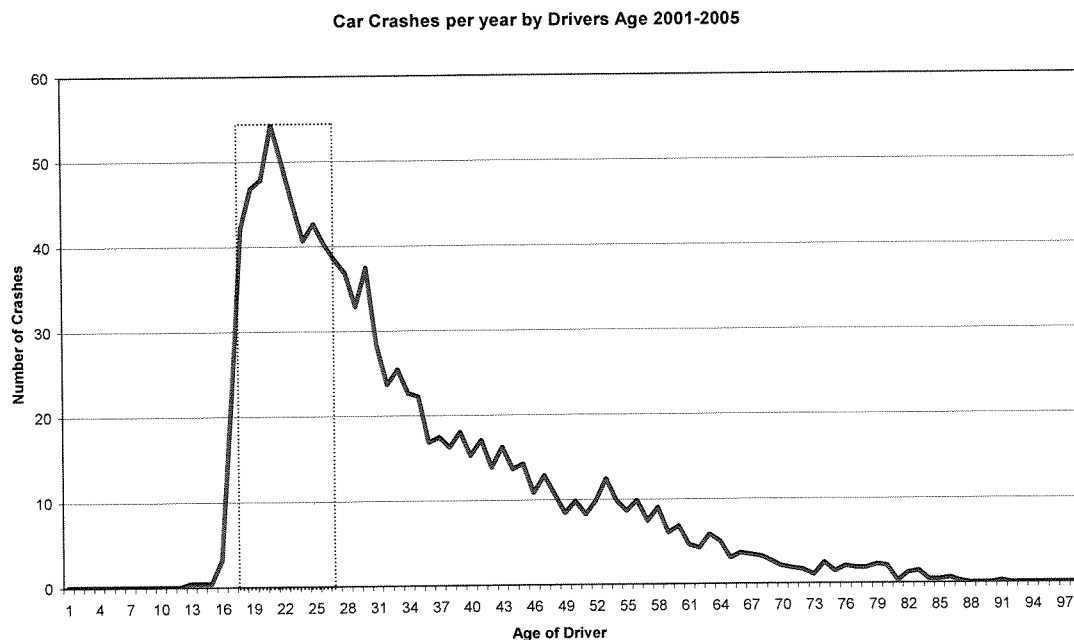


Figure 1. City of Sydney - Annual Average Car accidents by driver's age (2001-2005)

Statistically around 27% of crashes in the City involve at least one young driver. In ten per cent of these crashes excessive speed was shown as the major cause of the crash. Fatigue and alcohol generally account for less than 4% as a cause of crashes. Approximately 18% of crashes occurred during between 11pm and 5am. From 1 July 2007 new drivers (P-platers) are restricted to carrying no more than one passenger under 21 during this time period. Around one-fifth of the young drivers involved in these crashes reside in the City of Sydney.

The high number of crashes involving young drivers may be because they are still developing their ability to perceive risks and hazards and have limited driving experience. This is generally reflected in crash data throughout New South Wales and indicates that although car ownership in the City is relatively low there is still an important safety issue which needs to be addressed.

(b) The underlying risks and major factors contributing to such crashes

The major underlying risk in the City of Sydney is that drivers may not adequately adjust their speed for the narrow city streets and congested inner city conditions. The City's narrow streets which have high volumes of pedestrian activity are especially challenging for young and inexperienced drivers.

While excessive speed is responsible for around 10% of the crashes involving young drivers many crashes can be avoided if lower speeds are adopted. This is more important with regard to young drivers as they lack the experience to overcome minor mistakes they make or may encounter from other road users. Generally young drivers lack the observation skills that are more developed in experienced drivers.

It would be appropriate for the Inquiry to consider whether there are links between anti-social behaviour by young drivers (commonly referred to as 'Car Enthusiasts') and the incidence of crashes. For many years this sort of activity has regularly been witnessed in Central Sydney and The Rocks, particularly along George Street and Hickson Road. Apart from amenity issues such as disturbance caused to residents and visitors in the city from noise and general anti-social behaviour, it would be of benefit to determine whether this activity may contribute to poor driver attitude and crashes involving young drivers.

(c) Differences in driving behaviour, crash outcomes and relevant trends in urban and rural areas of NSW

Motor vehicle crashes in urban areas tend to occur at relatively low speed which results in generally minor injuries to occupants. Conversely crashes in rural areas generally involve high speeds and greater injury to vehicle occupants.

However low speed crashes in the inner city urban areas can seriously injure or kill pedestrians and cyclists. This is reflected in the crash data which shows the level of pedestrian crashes increases in inner-city urban areas.

The City of Sydney includes the largest Central Business District in Australia as well as high density inner-city residential areas. Driving conditions are very different to other urban environments, particularly the interaction of vehicle drivers with pedestrians and cyclists. Narrow streets and one-way streets together with high density traffic and parking also challenge the abilities of inexperienced drivers.

- It is therefore recommended the Inquiry consider the differences in driving behaviour in inner city areas separately to other urban and rural areas.

(d) The availability and appropriateness of current diversionary and educational programs for young offenders involved in serious traffic violations

Remedial programs aimed at young offenders involved in serious traffic violations could incorporate 'Low-Risk Driving' programs as a mandatory requirement in certain instances. For example, incidents involving excessive speed and road rage.

- It is recommended the Inquiry consider suitable diversionary programs involving city driving with an emphasis on appropriate driver interaction with pedestrians and cyclists.

(e) The efficacy of young driver education programs and the potential for development and expansion of these programs, subject to proper evaluation

The City of Sydney supports and promotes walking and cycling as desirable forms of sustainable transport which have positive social and environmental benefits. The City's main road safety concern is for the safety of pedestrians and cyclists.

There is concern that some drivers may show inadequate respect for vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists. The current RTA Learner Driver Log Book places city driving in the "City and motorway driving" category however pedestrians and cyclists are not specifically mentioned at all.

A greater emphasis could be placed on learner drivers recognising and dealing with pedestrians and cyclists during the learner driver phase to address these concerns. By doing so, new drivers would learn to respect pedestrian and cyclists safety when driving.

The *Australian Road Rules (May 2007 version)* allows pedestrians to cross a road at any point if they are more than 20 metres from a controlled crossing, provided they cross by the shortest and safest route and do not stay on the road longer than is necessary.

However, many drivers have the incorrect perception that pedestrians doing so are 'jaywalking' and committing an offence. Greater emphasis should be made on new driver education to correct this misconception.

The current NSW *Road Users' Handbook* provides advice on sharing the road with pedestrians and cyclists. However supervisors and driving instructors need to give greater emphasis to this information during practical driver education sessions.

The Graduated Licence Scheme (GLS) was introduced in July 2000 to address the high number young driver crashes in New South Wales. A new driver needed to complete 50 hours of supervised driving prior to 1 July 2007.

The Graduated Licence Scheme has recently been revised and now requires new drivers to complete a minimum of 120 hours supervised driving before taking a driving test (the Driver Ability Road Test or DART). The current scheme also specifies that 20 hours must be taken during night time conditions. Supervising drivers are required to complete a log book which is presented to RTA Testing Officers prior to undertaking a driving test.

Learner drivers and their supervisors are encouraged to vary the type of driving they do as part of the Graduated Licence Scheme. It is recognised that it may not be feasible for learner drivers living in rural areas to access city driving conditions. However new drivers who live near or in city areas should be actively encouraged to gain experience driving in city conditions.

Encouraging supervisors to give learner drivers experience in city conditions with high levels of pedestrian and cyclist activity could help to develop a positive attitude in new drivers. Supervised practice in areas with narrow streets and one-way streets together with high density traffic and parking will also enhance the abilities and attitudes of young drivers.

The City implements Road Safety Programs and workshops for those who supervise new and therefore usually young drivers. Supervisors are often parents or close relatives of new drivers and workshops are run three or more times a year in conjunction with local schools.

The City of Sydney supports the current Graduated Licence Scheme program however the City has identified a number of issues to improve the program's effectiveness. The City's low car ownership level means that some young people do not have convenient access to a vehicle. Where this is the case professional driving instruction may be the alternative. However the cost of professional driving instruction may make it unnecessarily expensive to adhere to the schemes required supervised hours which are entered into the learner driver log book.

In lower socio-economic areas parents and carers may not have driving licences or vehicles and are therefore unable to help young people get through their required supervised hours. This is particularly evident in the Aboriginal community.

Since 2002 the City of Sydney has implemented a *'Drive for Work'* program, through its Youth Service Programs. This provides appropriate vehicles and organises volunteers to supervise driving sessions for young people who do not have access to a car or supervisor. This year the City is working with the NRMA to expand the program in the Aboriginal community.

Expanding the *'Drive for Work'* program has met with some difficulties. A key issue has arisen regarding volunteer supervisors. Volunteer supervisors are drawn from many sources including companies providing community support which may involve the volunteer being paid by the participating company as part of their normal work schedule.

However, under the *"Driving Instructors Act of 1992"* and the *"Driving Instructors Regulation 2003"* it is considered an offence for anyone to give instruction for hire or reward unless they are a licensed instructor.

This issue needs to be addressed to allow volunteers not normally engaged as professional driving instructors to continue to help the City provide supervisors for the *'Drive for Work'* and other programs.

It is recommended the Inquiry:

- Consider suitable diversionary programs involving city driving with an emphasis on appropriate driver interaction with pedestrians and cyclists.
- Consider suitable educational programs for young drivers which educate new drivers on appropriate driver interaction with pedestrians and cyclists.
- Consider initiatives to encourage supervisors to give learner drivers experience in city conditions including areas with high levels of pedestrian and cyclist activity, one-way and narrow streets.
- Consider suitable legislative changes to allow volunteers not normally engaged as professional driving instructors to continue to help provide supervisors for *'Drive for Work'* and other relevant programs.

(f) Other initiatives to improve young driver safety

The City of Sydney considers the current variations in speed limit throughout the local government area do not indicate to drivers the risk level prevalent in the area. It is suggested that roads in the CBD and other high pedestrian and cycling activity areas be subject to the 40km/h speed limit and that the 50km/h Urban Speed Limit be applied on all other roads (with the exception of limited main through motorway style routes such as the Eastern and Western Distributors).

- It is recommended the Inquiry investigate a means to establish a consistent regime of 40km/hr speed limits for inner city areas.

The City would like to encourage research into risk taking behaviour by young people. Risk taking by young people, especially males is also prevalent among pedestrians. It is important to identify why young people take risks and then develop initiatives to reduce risk taking by young drivers.

This issue has been identified elsewhere throughout the world. For example the United Kingdom has identified young drivers as a key area to address in Road Safety Strategies.

Initiatives that could be considered include appropriate low-risk driver education programs. Pilot programs implemented in the United Kingdom have shown some positive outcomes.

- It is recommended the Inquiry consider appropriate low-risk driver education programs to address risk taking behaviour by young drivers.

(g) Other relevant matters

Engineering solutions can be put in place to limit the effect of risk taking by young drivers. For example appropriate treatments including speed management devices called speed-cushions have been implemented along Hickson Road, Millers Point to discourage anti-social behaviour.

While it may not be feasible to provide engineering solutions in all instances, making the City a low speed environment that is obvious to all drivers will also reduce the number and severity of crashes. The City supports the RTA's 40km/h in High Pedestrian Activity Areas program but is concerned at the inconsistent approach in the allocation of this program especially in the Sydney CBD.

- It is recommended the Inquiry investigate a means to establish a consistent regime of 40km/hr speed limits for High Pedestrian Activity Areas.

3. Conclusion and Recommendations

The City of Sydney is working towards a city that is pedestrian and bicycle friendly and will continue to encourage walking and cycling as the key methods of transport. However it is important to recognise that motor vehicle use in the City will continue and there is an ongoing need to improve driver skills and behaviour for the benefit of all road users, especially vulnerable at-risk groups such as pedestrians and cyclists.

The City of Sydney welcomes the Staysafe Inquiry into Young Driver Safety and Education programs.

The City of Sydney supports the introduction of the Graduated Licensing Scheme and associated supervised driving requirements as an appropriate means to address young driver behaviour and reduce the incidence of crashes involving young drivers.

The City's Road Safety Officers will continue to work with the RTA and other agencies to promote road safety for all road users in the City of Sydney. This includes supporting young driver initiatives and associated programs such as supervisor workshops.

The City of Sydney suggests the following recommendations to help reduce the number of crashes involving young drivers and over the longer term improve drivers' attitudes and behaviour towards pedestrians and cyclists:

It is recommended the Inquiry:

- Investigate whether anti-social activity associated with driving contributes to poor driver attitude and crashes involving young drivers.
- Consider the differences in driving behaviour in inner city areas separately to other urban and rural areas.
- Consider suitable diversionary programs involving city driving with an emphasis on appropriate driver interaction with pedestrians and cyclists.
- Consider suitable educational programs for young drivers which educate new drivers on appropriate driver interaction with pedestrians and cyclists.
- Consider initiatives to encourage supervisors to give learner drivers experience in city conditions with high levels of pedestrian and cyclist activity.
- Consider suitable legislative changes to allow volunteers not normally engaged as professional driving instructors to continue to help provide supervisors for 'Drive for Work' and other relevant programs.
- Investigate a means to establish a consistent regime of 40km/hr speed limits for inner city areas.
- Consider appropriate low-risk driver education programs to address risk taking behaviour by young drivers
- Support the introduction of a consistent regime of 40km/h speed limit for High Pedestrian Activity Areas, such as the CBD.