

**INQUIRY INTO PEDESTRIAN SAFETY  
(MINISTERIAL REFERENCE)**

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**Date Received:** 19/06/2009

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## **Recommendations to NSW Staysafe Committee**

### **Preamble**

Most urban environs in NSW are “pedestrian beware zones” because roads are dominated by motor vehicles. This has evolved because of a failure to build motorways or elevated roads that separate heavy vehicular traffic from where people live and work. Many of Sydney’s “major” roads have evolved from horse and cart days to carry many thousands of vehicles a day past houses, shops, schools, etc. These roads have driving limits that are odds with the urban communities which they traverse. The result is a myriad of ever changing speed limits, traffic signals, etc.

Consequently, many of these thoroughfares are not people friendly. They are hostile to pedestrians and cyclists and they separate neighbour from neighbour on opposite sides of the same street. Because people are not comfortable walking or interacting on the streets, there is little pedestrian traffic - conversation is difficult because of the roar of traffic; it is not pleasant to sit outside cafes. This is opposite to the way of life in many cities and towns in Europe and Asia.

The Roads & Traffic Authority, which controls most road conditions and driver licensing, works in the interest of the motorist only. The RTA has evolved to ensure that drivers travel to their destination at not less than the maximum allowed speed. They do this by declaring clearways, no stopping zones and discouraging (even prohibiting) legitimate use of existing driveways.

Drivers need to recognise that their use of roads where people live, work and socialise is a privilege, not a right and they need to be at all times aware of this and cognisant of pedestrians about. It requires a paradigm shift, but a start should be made for the good of society.

- **People as priority not cars**

RTA has over time granted precedence to cars over people by setting speed limits that are at odds with the needs and amenity of people. In doing this, they have made Sydney a “Pedestrians Beware” zone.

- **One single speed limit in the metropolitan area**

Set a blanket driving limit for all roads where people live, work or socialise in cities and towns.

A single metropolitan driving limit (say 50 kph) throughout all urban areas in NSW would provide drivers with certainty and make compliance easier. The attention needed to observe a myriad of ever changing and sometimes, variable, signs could be devoted to safer driving. The driving limit could eventually match that at school zones (say 45 kph)

and eliminate the need for signage around schools and for drivers to have a knowledge of school hours and term times.

- **Clearways on city and urban roads**

The amenity of people who live and work on RTA roads should be a priority. Driving limits should mirror those on local roads. Clearways encourage speeding and make it dangerous for cars turning into or out of driveways. The place for speed is on the motorway not the urban road.

- **Motorways**

It should be recognised that many cars are built for speed. Motorways should be designed to cater for this. The speed limit on Australian motorways appears to be designed to take “revenue” advantage of speeding drivers. It is low, relative to other countries. Highway patrol officers would be better employed on city streets,

- **Cars as an extension of home**

The increasing use of cars as an extension of the lounge room – mobile phones, music players, DVD players, GPS systems, drink stations is hardly conducive to road safety. These accoutrements in cars convey the impression that strict observance of the road is not a priority. Manufacturers should be reminded to keep safety in mind when designing gadgets to put in vehicles.

- **Australian driving culture**

An example of the “pedestrian beware” mindset is the practice of painting warning signs on footpaths in Sydney directing pedestrians to “*beware of cars, look right/left*”. In the Leichhardt area, for example, some footpath messages read: “*Step back from the edge for safety*” This is on a public footpath in a high pedestrian area and people are being warned that cars may mount the footpath!. Clearly not a culture that values its pedestrians. The onus should to be placed firmly on the licensed driver to not endanger pedestrians either on or off the footpath. If this type of danger to pedestrians exist, then cars should not be using the thoroughfare.

- **Pedestrians crossing**

Walk signals at traffic lights should always be accompanied by a red arrow so that pedestrians crossing with a “Walk” signal do not have to rely on the good grace of the turning driver to cross the road.

In some countries all traffic signals at an intersection change to red at the same time and pedestrians can cross in any direction without having to compete with vehicles.

In Sydney, using the walk facility at traffic signals can be the most dangerous place to cross the road as turning traffic competes with pedestrians for use of the road. Vehicles making a right turn against a walk sign will sometimes attempt to do so before the pedestrians step out.

Most Sydneysiders are know that the most dangerous place to cross a busy road is at traffic lights or pedestrian crossings. However, newcomers, visitors and children are not and so are at greater risk.

- **Messages for learner drivers**

Learner drivers should be taught to give way pedestrians at stops signs. Many drivers are so focussed on the distant traffic that they fail to see what's immediately in front of them and that is usually a cyclist or pedestrian! The message that their use of roads where people live, work and socialise is a privilege and not a right needs to be enforced at the learner stage.

- **RTA exercise control over DA consents**

The RTA, in commenting on new developments on road they control, discourage and aim to prohibit the use of *existing* driveways, presumably in the belief that the flow of traffic should not be interrupted by traffic entering or exiting these sites. The flow of traffic into and out of a site should be regarded as normal use of the road and drivers educated to behave accordingly. If the interruption slows the traffic speed, then so be it.