

Submission

No 30

DRIVER AND ROAD USER DISTRACTION

Organisation: Transport Workers' Union of New South Wales

Name: Mr Nick McIntosh

Position: Chief Adviser

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Standing Committee on Road Safety,
“Staysafe”, on Inquiry into Driver and
Road User Distraction.

Transport Workers' Union of New
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Introduction

The Transport Workers' Union of New South Wales (**TWU**) represents over 30, 000 members across this state in roughly thirteen industries. The bulk of our membership is derived from professional drivers.

These drivers are generally either employee drivers or self-employed individuals working for major and minor transport companies.

This submission will focus upon the terms of reference provided and seek to advocate for the issues of concern, our members both employee and owner drivers would have with proposed legalisation surrounding road safety and driver distraction.

Undoubtedly this is an issue of road safety and should be treated as one first and foremost, but additionally it is a matter of occupational health and safety due to the large number of professional drivers on NSW roads.

These drivers work on the roads for long hours and hence are most affected by any degree of unsafe road practises that take place. It thus becomes an imperative to ensure that proposed legalisation seeks to reflect their concerns.

This submission is outlined as follows;

- I. Nature and extent of distraction.
- II. Regulatory measures to address driver distraction.
- III. Technological Solutions.
- IV. Reducing information overload.
- V. Summary

Additionally, the TWU of NSW is prepared to provide witnesses from the industry to present evidence of this submission at subsequent hearings of the inquiry.

I. Nature and extent of distraction.

Undoubtedly the distraction of drivers from the task of driving is a seriously concerning issue.

Akin to other causes of road accidents, driver distraction, due to the ever increasing capacity of technological devices to fit into vehicles and the growing popularity of mobile phones and music, is an increasing feature of modern roadways.

In today's modern society the use of mobile phones and portable music devices has become commonplace. These devices have become so popular that they are now often used at the expense of our attention on other activities, namely that of driving.

The use of mobile phones and other portable electronic devices by any road user is of exceptionally concern to the Transport Worker's Union, and we see this as one of the multiple causes, alongside prevalence of speeding and drink driving, that are at the heart of the high number of fatalities resulting from car accidents in New South Wales. In 2010, 405 people died in vehicle accidents, around 100 more than that of Victoria and 8 times higher than of the Northern Territory¹.

In not underestimating the extent upon which these devices are used by road users, it is important to note that there is no evidence to suggest that one type of road user is more to likely to use an electronic devices in a potentially dangerous way over that of another.

¹ Centre for Road Safety, Transport For NSW, Road traffic crashes in New South Wales: Statistcal statement for the end of the year ended 31 December 2011, Viewed 24 April 2012, www.rta.nsw.gov.au/roadsafety/downloads/crashstats2010.pdf

II. Regulatory measures to address driver distraction

In establishing that there is indeed a problem, it becomes apparent that some sort of government action is required. The union proposes that more funds be made available for systematic random checks of vehicles for such devices by designated enforcement officers.

III. Technological Solutions

The issue of technological solutions are of course an important developing means by which to regulate this behaviour for the sake of road safety.

The union feels this avenue is one that requires a great deal of exploration and development and one with reasonable potential for effectiveness. However, we stress the importance of maintaining current privacy laws, enacting solutions to a problem by breaching an aspect of the law that has reasonably been assured in this incidence, considered highly undesirable.

IV. Reducing information overload.

The union has for a period now advocated for the reduction in information overload. By increasing the amount of information regarding road use that a driver is required to absorb to abide the law, there is an increase in the likelihood of a failure to absorb all of it.

Amongst all road users the large number of speed restrictions across a small period of road is a point of general annoyance and unsafety. By reducing the number of speed restrictions such as to eliminate roads with varying speed limits, the government would be seeking to overall reduce the amount of information that a driver is required to absorb.

This method is considered exceptionally important by the union, as it is one that seeks to not only decrease the dangerous aspects of driver distraction, in the principal of harm minimisation but also seeks to provide a safer driving environment for all drivers.

V. Summary of submission

The Transport Workers' Union of New South Wales in representation of its members wishes to see additional government regulation with the aim of reducing the impact of driver distraction on unsafe road practises. This regulation must however as previously outlined not impart upon driver privacy or limit the operational capacity of professional drivers. Nor should regulation be unfairly targeted upon professional drivers who spend considerably more time on the roads.

Contact

This submission is the product of the Transport Workers' Union of New South Wales for the purposes of the NSW Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety and its Inquiry into Driver and Road User Distraction.

The union fully endorses the arguments and evidence provided in this submission and is willing to provide industry and union representatives as witnesses to this submission at subsequent public hearings regarding the inquiry.

For any additional information please contact;

Mr Nick McIntosh

Chief Adviser, TWU NSW

31 Cowper St, Parramatta, 2150

M: [REDACTED]

P: [REDACTED]