

**Submission
No 31**

INQUIRY INTO SPEED ZONING AND ITS IMPACT ON THE DEMERIT POINTS SCHEME

Name: Mr E Robert Y Smith

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10 March 2014

Mr Bjarne Nordin
Enquiry Manager
Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety
Parliament of New South Wales
Macquarie Street Sydney NSW 2000

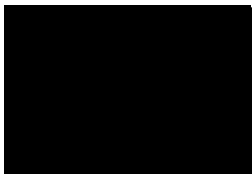
Dear Mr Nordin,

Thank you for your letter dated 3 March 2014 and your offer to accept a submission to your committee on Road Speed even though the closing date has passed. I am pleased to enclose such a submission and I have taken the liberty of addressing additional issues which I believe are a low-cost means of improving road safety in New South Wales.

Yours sincerely



E Robert Y Smith



10 March, 2014

The Chairman
Staysafe Committee
Parliament of NSW
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Chair,

Speed Limits

Recently I heard David Leyonhjelm, the Senator-elect from the Liberal Democratic Party, speaking on speed limits. I know he will get criticism from our "experts" but they have had a long time trying to improve road safety, with only limited success, and surely it is time to keep an open mind and at least consider alternative methods. This is particularly so if they are based on successful practices in other countries.

David had a valid point which was that motorists can be in the best position to determine a safe speed. This can improve road safety, but unfortunately it cannot work in Australia because motorists are not educated or even encouraged to learn what is a safe speed for them under various conditions. The whole emphasis is solely on obeying the law and the only instruction for motorists is to watch the speed signs and watch the speedometer.

We pretend that one mandated speed limit will be safe for all types of drivers in all types of cars under all conditions of road, traffic and weather which is blatantly absurd. In other countries such as UK the situation is very different and because of education and training most drivers are able to determine what is a safe speed for them under particular conditions. Furthermore, they are given the opportunity to exercise that knowledge which is a major factor in improving road safety.

The only messages I hear from the RMS are framed as threats – more regulations, more penalties and the police are out to get you. Frankly that just turns me off as I am sure it does most people. I never hear the word courtesy mentioned and most people would respond if given encouragement. Courtesy is catching and is very good for road safety.

I would like to compare the Australian system with the one in UK. Over there they certainly have maximum speed limits in their rules but these are rarely displayed and the emphasis is on training and encouraging drivers to travel at the speed which is safe for them under the prevailing conditions. When leaving a town which has reduced speed limits the only sign usually displayed is the de-restricting sign which means the general limits apply, but more importantly it implies that drivers should maintain a speed which is safe for them under the prevailing conditions. Police in UK see their primary function as keeping traffic moving and this makes them friendly and appreciated. (They will certainly stop people who are driving dangerously, which is not necessarily too fast). By contrast Australian police clearly see their primary function as revenue collecting and therefore they are the opposite of friendly. (I regularly travel on the Hume Highway to the Southern Highlands and I often see a police car hiding at the bottom of a steep hill heading north near Mittagong. Even a car on cruise control can speed up down the hill and on a clear fine day with little traffic there is little point in braking which would disconnect the cruise control). I sometimes joke that the greatest hazards on our roads are the men in blue and I'm sure many people have a similar feeling.

As I have indicated, the Australian emphasis on obeying speed signs is not good for road safety. One problem is the need to continually watch the speedometer instead of the road in front. However a more serious problem is that because of the sole emphasis on a posted speed limit people think they must travel at the displayed limit to avoid the risk of suffering road rage from a driver behind. Some people therefore travel faster than they should, and if a driver does travel below the speed limit many people behind certainly get frustrated, which is bad for road safety. In the UK there is not the same emphasis on just obeying the law and the limit is not constantly displayed. There is therefore no pressure to travel at a particular speed and if someone wants to travel faster than the car in front they simply overtake without any bad feeling.

I realise our system is better for collecting revenue than the UK system and I appreciate that our Government has a great need for additional revenue. However a decision has to be made on whether revenue or safety is more important and if we wish to reduce the road toll then surely revenue should be collected by an additional tax, not in a way which endangers lives.

Additional ways to improve safety

I realise this is a submission on speed but while I am writing to you I would like to mention a few simple ways in which Road safety could be improved.

Unnecessary delays and Congestion

The RMS does not seem to appreciate the extent to which unnecessary congestion and delays reduce road safety by causing irritation, frustration and even road rage. There are many ways in which drivers could be educated to minimise these delays but as I have mentioned the RMS does no advertising to achieve an improvement. Sometime back I suggested to the RTA, as they were then called, that they should advertise the correct way to turn right at intersections controlled by traffic lights since few people in NSW know how and they cause unnecessary delays. The response I received was that it is not necessary to advertise the correct method since it is in the road rules. Yes, I finally found it there on page 92. (I realise the road rules make riveting reading but I am not sure how many people would make it through to page 92. I doubt also whether many instructors make it as there are lots of P plate drivers who do not know how to turn right at traffic lights)

I recently heard a road safety representative explaining traffic rules on the radio. She correctly pointed out the need to give way to traffic already in a roundabout but most people in Australia think the only rule is to give way to the right. This not only produces dangerous situations but also increased delays and therefore frustration. Driver education could improve the situation and I would be pleased to speak to you about these and similar things at any convenient time.

Superelevation

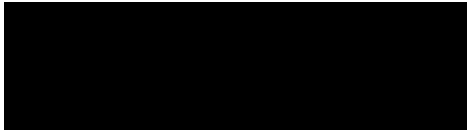
I have communicated and discussed with the Road Authority in New South Wales over many decades the benefits of superelevation (banking) of curves. During my lifetime I have must have travelled close to 2,000,000 km in many countries of the world and in the USA I have experienced the safety and comfort which is achieved by adequate banking on curves. I have spoken to a number of traffic engineers who have agreed with me that there is insufficient banking in Australia, but the Authorities have refused to accept the need for change and I have received a large number of reasons (excuses) over the years. The only reason which I believe to be correct is that many years ago, possibly early last century, it was decided that to make the corners safe would encourage speeding and they therefore decided to leave them as dangerous. Today the effect would be to encourage drivers to maintain a steady speed, especially with cruise control, which is the safest way to drive, as well as the least tiring. The RMS expects drivers to disconnect their cruise control on every curve, slowdown, then speed up and reconnect the control. It seems they want to make driving as tiring as possible!

I recently had a letter published in the Journal of engineers Australia pointing out the benefits of banking. I used the word camber as I found many people, even

engineers in other disciplines, do not understand the word superelevation and I only use superelevation therefore when speaking to engineers in the road design departments. There was a response to my letter from a design engineer in the traffic Department who allocated his complete letter to rubbishing my credentials because I used the word camber instead of superelevation. He did not address even one of the technical points in my letter. I asked the journal editor to contact the respondent and ask him if he would give me his phone or e-mail address so we could discuss the technical aspects of the issue. The editor did so but the respondent refused to discuss the subject. This demonstrates the attitude of road design engineers who, I suspect, are embarrassed by their practice but are determined to retain the status quo at all costs, even if it means lives being lost unnecessarily.

I repeat my offer to speak to you on this and other matters at any convenient time.

Yours Sincerely



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