

**Submission
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DRIVER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND ROAD SAFETY

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The Staysafe Committee
Road Safety Review
cc Melinda Pavey (Minister for Roads)

Submission from Gary Cook

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To whom it may concern

I have been a licensed driver on Australian roads since 1971, during which time I have not recorded a traffic infringement, nor have I been involved in a motor vehicle accident caused by myself. I have however, been the victim of a road accident whereby a P plate driver failed to give way to me on my motorbike whilst commuting from work.

I consider myself a very good student of driving and a more than capable driver, having mainly travelled country roads most of my driving life (many of which were unsealed). I have also done my fair share of city driving, as well as self-driving through countries like Ireland and New Zealand. I have also travelled many roads through Europe, and while most of these were on a coach, I observed with a keen eye the road rules and driver behaviour throughout the different countries.

Given my length and range of experience I feel I can offer solid and informed advice to the committee and ask that you consider the following points (which are not necessarily in any order of priority).

Line markings: many of our roads are poorly marked in relation to where overtaking is or isn't permitted. Often the road ahead is not clearly visible but with a broken line present drivers will attempt to overtake. This is of great concern where the length of broken centre line only runs for a few hundred metres (or less)....there is no way one can overtake without putting others and themselves at risk as it often requires considerably increased speed and haste to do so, and this is often in an area where increased speed and haste is a high risk. It would be much safer to have more unbroken centre lines replacing some of the sections of broken lines we have now. Further to this, all roads should have line markings on the left edge to assist with visibility in poor weather and low light.

Car lights: most new cars have daytime driving (LED) lights which is great. Many drivers without these will turn on their headlights, while some will turn on their fog lights. It is the latter which is subject to a very "dumb" road rule and that is, it is not legal to drive with fog lights on when fog is not present. I have not seen any fog lights that are blindingly bright and a danger to other drivers. In fact, I would have thought that the use of any light option (excluding high beam) to make a vehicle more visible would be a good thing. Surely this law needs to be changed and all furthermore all drivers be encouraged to use lights (fog or otherwise) all the time on non-urban roads.

Overtaking and merging lanes: Many drivers do not know that we have two sets of rules (and line markings) that cover merging traffic. One where the line marking separating the two lanes extends to the very end of the lane from which traffic is merging and one where the line marking ends

several metres from the end of the merging lane (this is best seen in the diagrams in the Road Rules under Lanes/Merging Lanes).

One of these rules requires the traffic in the merging lane to give way to all traffic in the other lane. Where this rule fails is when traffic is travelling at a speed greater than 50-60kpm. If there are 2 same direction lanes and I'm travelling at 95kpm in the left lane and it is about to end (merge) I have to give way to all traffic in the right hand lane which may mean I come to a complete standstill, as does any other car behind me. I, and those behind me, legally have to wait for a suitable break in traffic and if this is not forthcoming a build-up will occur.....aka holiday periods where this is a major cause of gridlock and driver frustration. This situation in turn encourages many drivers to push in or accelerate into a small gap in an attempt to merge.

Where the inadequacy of this particular merging give way rule is highlighted is every day in the city where roads merging onto motorways and major arterial roads come to a standstill, due mainly to drivers on the arterial road/s not moving over to allow access into the left lane for the merging vehicle (and under the law, this behaviour is acceptable). In multiple laned roads there are also the drivers in the far right lane who do not allow drivers on their inside to merge thus preventing the driver on the inside lane from moving over. Coupled with this is the problem of drivers being too close to the vehicle in front and not leaving sufficient gap for merging or emergency stopping (see more on this below).

The second of the merging rules is a much better option for most circumstances and having observed this option in New Zealand recently, it is a far more efficient and safer method of keeping traffic flowing and giving every driver an equal chance to proceed. With this option the line marking finishes well back and there is signage "merge like a zip". This is a common sense courteous approach to driving giving all drivers equal rights as the ending of the line marking early which in effect makes the 2 merging lanes into one wider lane that tapers to that of a normal width lane.

I have asked many friends if they know of the 2 different kinds of merging lane markings and am yet to find one who does. Multiply this across the driving fraternity and you have a significantly increased problem and lack of understanding of this road rule. (Note: a possible advertising topic).

Merging traffic in general (as touched on above) is one of the key causes of traffic gridlock, most of which is caused by those drivers who are not content to wait or are not prepared to be courteous to other drivers. Having travelled the M1 over Christmas it was scary observing many instances of rule breaking or rule ignorance, particularly in relation to lane travelling.

Another example of poor lane merging driver behaviour is where you see a sign that indicates that the left lane ends in 500 metres (there are many instances on the Pacific Highway in and out of the northern suburbs of Sydney). Such a sign should be a prompt and maybe a legal requirement for drivers to begin to merge at that point and for drivers in the next lane/s to allow for this to happen (like a zip). As the latter is rare, drivers either choose or are forced to continue in the left lane until they run out of road and then either force their way in or come to a stop.....both of which significantly impact continual smooth traffic flow. Maybe where a lane is signposted to end, drivers' are allowed to merge (like a zip) up to a point (say 200 metres from the lane end), after which they must give way. This might just stop the idiots who ignore the lane ends sign and fly up the inside and push in right at the end, breaching the give way rule relative to this "merging" option.

Slow drivers: It is this that is probably one of the most dangerous of road situations. You get a driver doing 8-10ks (or more) under the speed limit and an ever increasing line of traffic building up behind them not able to overtake. This creates frustration and leads to road rage and driver behaviour where someone will overtake (or attempt to overtake) with considerable risk present (I've seen it hundreds of times.....many near misses). Even more frustrating is when the slow driver increases their speed to that of the speed limit as soon as they get to an overtaking lane. This prevents following vehicles from legally overtaking, but many do and have to exceed the speed limit to do so. In some countries (e.g. Ireland) slow drivers are encouraged to move over using their hazard lights to indicate this and the overtaking driver also signals "thanks" using their hazard lights as they overtake. In South Australia there are "lay bys" where the road is wide enough for the slow vehicle to safely pull over to allow others to overtake, but also allowing the slow vehicle to come back onto the main lane without slowing or stopping.

If a person is not competent enough to drive at or near the speed limit maybe their ability to drive safely is in question. Understandably, if they are older or a conservative person then the rules need to be addressed with scope to encourage or even enforce compliance of not impeding other traffic. For example, the rule could be that a driver who is causing a build up of traffic must pull over at the next opportunity and allow following traffic to overtake. The intention to overtake could be as it is in many European countries where the following driver flashes their lights and the car in front moves to the left.....I can say this works extremely well having driven under these conditions on the Autobarn in Germany.

Maximum speed limit: Let me start this point by saying that I do not condone excessive speed.....while speed is blamed for many accidents the true reason is that the driver has not driven to the conditions or road environment. There are many roads where one could safely travel at 130kph but to do this on a local street or winding section of road would be totally irresponsible and dangerous.

Many of our roads are over-governed by speed limits that do not reflect the section of road. Slowing traffic down introduces both the frustration and fatigue elements of driving. The Germans proved a number of years ago that it was safer and fewer accidents resulted when speed limits on the Autobarn were increased.

Many of our roads are more than suitable for higher speed driving. Conversely, many of our roads carry the general speed limit and there are sections where lower speed limits should be in place. Changes in weather conditions or heavy traffic conditions are two examples of where the ability to change the speed limit would be a great option.

What should not be done is change a speed limit on a section of a road as a result of a minority event. That is, a single fatality or a small number of non-fatal incidents on a section of road where there has not been another fatality or the number of accidents as a percentage of the number of vehicles on that piece of road is very, very, low, should not be cause to change the standard speed limit. If there have been multiple accidents relative to the volume of traffic, then yes change it. As an example, the new Minister for Roads got it right in her objections and support of no change to speed limits on the Oxley Highway for motorcyclists.....100's of bikers travel this road every week and the percentage of accidents relative to the number of bikes using the road is minimal. Having travelled

this road many times there is more chance of an accident occurring as a result of an animal on the road, fallen rocks or fallen trees, regardless of the speed being travelled.

We also have many varying speed limits with no consistency.... e.g. 100, 70, 50 or 100, 90, 60, 50 or 100, 80, 50. Also of concern with these varying speed zones is where they are applied. e.g. one section of a road into the heart of Port Macquarie is 60kph yet it is surrounded by 50kph speeds. This piece of roadway is one of, if not the most trafficked road in and around the Port Macquarie CBD.

Furthermore, speed limit signage sometimes is not obvious or often enough and all these varying speed zones require the driver to be on continual lookout for the legal speed, in turn reducing their actual on road driver concentration..

One speed zone change that is frustrating is on our motorways where the speed limit changes from 110 to 100.....the purported reason often being that there is a number of side roads in the area and accidents have occurred (e.g. the Pacific Highway north of Raymond Terrace). "How many accidents relative to the volume of traffic" have occurred seems to be a question that is never answered when such changes are implemented. Truth is, more traffic, which has become very noticeable with each improvement of the Pacific Highway, equals more chance and furthermore, but sorry to say, 10kph at these speeds is not going to make much difference. A change in speed limit will not change poor driver behaviour which is the real cause of an accident in the first place.

When it is all said and done, no amount of laws or speed directions will remove the "idiot" factor. People have been failing to drive to the conditions/environment since the car was invented; fortunately these are in the minority and therefore maybe heavier penalties for individuals who breach the rules rather than add hoc rule changes that impact the law abiding drivers.

As a further example of poor driver behaviour, I travel a piece of dual carriageway every Tuesday and it slows to 60kph approaching a roundabout with a 60ks ahead sign before the actual 60ks sign, and every week cars do not slow until they reach the actual 60kph speed zone. That is, they don't slow until they get to the 60k zone which means they are travelling greater than 60kph inside the 60kph zone. Put up a speed camera.....that might get the message across to those who break the law and not impact those who abide by the law. I have seen this behaviour around road works as well.

Aged drivers: this is a very sensitive area....I know from the experience of my late grandmother and my now ageing parents. The idea of a reverse provisional driving option is well worth looking at, where they go from a full licence through a small range of restricted categories before they lose their licence completely. One huge area of concern for the elderly is the loss of their licence and in turn their loss of independence, but sadly it has to happen at some time.

Another concern, and this is paramount in the case of my parents and that is, being residents in a rural community, access to alternative (or public) transport is extremely limited. What are they to do when they have to travel 2-4 hours for medical treatment if their licence is taken from them overnight?

Things like a provisional and/or local licence might be a viable option going forward. Maybe an elderly provisional licence that still allows them to drive but at a lesser maximum speed of say 80kph on open roads is the first option, followed by some sort of local licence, and then maybe no licence.

To simply take a licence away after many years is an insult and in many ways an admission that there is a flaw in the licensing system whereby someone is deemed legally capable one day, but not the next. At least with the elderly, it will generally not be speed that causes an accident, unlike many young drivers.

Distances between vehicles: Way too many drivers travel far too close to the vehicle in front. Our rules suggest the distance be measured in seconds.....some people count 1, 2, 3 while others count slower 1., 2., 3.... A second difference could be critical. There is too much room for inconsistency. Would it not be better to use actual estimates of distance or line of sight. For example, if I am pulled up at lights I allow myself to be able to see the rear wheels (i.e. the actual rubber of the tyre) of the car in front of me (which is close to a car length between me and the car in front). When driving in an urban area (with restricted speed limits 40, 50, 60) I sit at least 10 metres (over a car length) behind the car in front. This gives sufficient room for me to pull out around the car in front if I need to, but more importantly it gives me room in front in the event of another car running into the back of me and therefore not being shunted into the car in front resulting in a multiple car pile-up.

On the open road the distance could be measured by the number of guide posts between you and the car in front. I have taken considerable notice of guide post distances recently and most are similarly spaced at a distance which is sufficient to allow for reaction to an adverse event in front. Maybe random sections of roadways could be marked with suggested spacing distances relative to the speed of that piece of road. As a minimum, it will show people just how much distance they should leave between vehicles.

If we can get better control over spacing distances, there will be fewer road incidents. One example is the need to stop cars, when they overtake and then merge back in, from doing so until the car they have overtaken is visible in their rear view mirror. This is a common frustration of mine when travelling the highway (at the legal speed) and keeping about 70-80 metres between me and the car in front and then be overtaken and the overtaking vehicle cuts in front reducing my safety zone. I then have to slow to create the desired safety zone otherwise I could be seen as tailgating the vehicle in front when in fact the problem was created by the overtaking driver who is obviously travelling at a speed above the legal limit if I am on the limit.

I strongly feel that more defined rules and in turn more policing of distances between vehicles will reduce the number of accidents. Particularly where there is considerable traffic as it only takes one failure to impact many as they are all too close to each other. (Note: another advertising topic)

Multiple Laned Roads: Every time I travel the M1 I find it easier and safer to remain in the left lane, and funnily enough, regardless of what speed I travel at, which may be the maximum of 110kph or more often a bit slower, I still seem to be close to all those who spend their time lane changing. One of the biggest problems on this road are the drivers who sit under the speed limit and in the middle lane and do not/will not move into the left hand lane. I often find myself cruising at a legal speed in the left lane and in turn pass a car which is in the centre lane. These drivers cruise along at slower or varying speeds in the middle lane less than that of drivers who are in the left lane. If the slower vehicle was in the left lane and not the middle lane, I could more easily move from the left lane to the centre lane and back and not have to enter the right lane where the faster drivers are. It is far riskier to cross multiple lanes and then back again to overtake the slower vehicle which is in the wrong lane. If a driver wishes to travel 5-10ks (or more) under the speed limit, then the driver

behind should be able to flash their lights, requiring the slower driver to move left, particularly if they are in the centre lane. Better still, slow or conservative drivers should be reminded of their obligations and should be “encouraged” to move over. (Note: another advertising topic)

Speaking of the M1, I find this the most dangerous piece of road in Australia due mainly to the desire of motorists to travel at varying speeds in the wrong lane (as mentioned above) or those drivers who just want to pass everything in front of them, be it on the left or right. Apart from encouraging drivers to keep left more often, a suggestion based on experience would be that in times of peak traffic and holiday periods when the risk of accidents and congestion is much higher, the maximum speed limit on the M1 should be reduced to 90kph between Sydney and the Hawksbury River (of course this would be dependent on time of day and volume of traffic). The slower speed should be a mitigating option for the current “potential” higher speed accidents. Also, where it merges from 3 to 2 lanes, maybe look at some form of controlled traffic merging or effective publicised road rules (like a zip) thus preventing traffic from coming to a standstill (e.g a police officer or RMS official actually on site monitoring and directing traffic).

Roundabouts: While these have been in existence for many years, every day, every roundabout, someone fails to follow driving laws. Just maybe, as I have touched on above and below, educating or re-educating people might just change some driver behaviour. Any positive change in behaviour would be a bonus! When communicating we should also be aware of the medium used.....my folks and in-laws do not have the internet, as don't many others of their age.

Driver Testing: Is it time to introduce compulsory regular testing for all drivers? While I try and remain abreast of rule changes, there are probably instances where I may fail. I for one would not object to being forced to undergo a driving test and rule examination every 5 years, regardless of my age. If an acceptable fee was introduced, maybe built into one's Licence cost, it, along with (hopefully) less accidents and in turn the cost accidents place on society, there may not be an overall increase in operating costs to implement and run this.

Police visibility: When the Police are visible on our roads, driver behaviour seems pretty good. Probably because drivers are more inclined to avoid rule breaches when the chance of being caught is more frequently visible. Unfortunately there are too few Police patrols to cover our vast road network. Bad driver behaviour is evident either in times of low Police visibility or on roads where Police presence is known to be infrequent. While Police “hide” along our roads they are mostly not totally hidden from view, or other drivers warn of their presence which lowers the chance of capturing bad driver behaviour. When the Police sit on the roadside with radar.....once the Police are seen drivers slow then accelerate again (this is also a failing of fixed speed cameras). Maybe the Police should have cars in groups of two or three a few kilometres apart catching those who slow then accelerate. If a car detects a speeding driver then they could relay a message to a car further up the road to intercept the offending driver, thus allowing the first car to stay in place and detect more offenders. However, as I mentioned initially in this point, Police travelling our roads are a far better deterrent and they are much more likely to observe bad behaviour than those waiting in what are commonly known as “fishing spots”.

Mobile Phones: While I don't like people who use non hands free phones while driving, particularly those who text, there is an anomaly that should at least be discussed. Emergency service, Council, and electricity company vehicles, to name a few, are all fitted with two way radios which require the

driver (in most cases) to pick up and communicate while driving. You also have vehicles such as Semi Trailers, some Grey Nomads, who have CB radios fitted. What then is the difference between the use of these by a driver and someone holding and talking on a mobile phone? None whatsoever!!

We will never beat the desire of a driver to use their phone particularly when there are anomalies like that mentioned above. Furthermore, any drive to ban people talking on phones because it's distracting doesn't hold water.....what about a driver talking with other passengers in the same car? This is just as distracting to the driver as talking to someone on the phone. I used to travel regularly between Port Macquarie and Bathurst and use of my in car hands free phone was a great way to combat boredom and fatigue if I was travelling alone.

Again I point out that the use of phones in cars is something that needs serious attention as it is certainly a high risk when they are held in the hand, particularly messaging and checking email.

Cyclists: There were changes relating to cyclists introduced last year, however, there is one change that was not made. At this point I should point out that I am a recreational cyclist for fitness purposes only. It amazes me at the number of cyclists who do not have lights fitted and I see how easy it would be for them to be hit because they were not seen. It should be mandatory for all bicycles to be fitted with both a front and rear light and be turned on at all times (lights could be attached or built into a helmet as an alternative). I never ride without my lights being on.

On general road rules relating to cyclists, this is another area that most drivers do not know much, if anything, about. I have been abused and threatened, simply for being on the edge of the road where a cycleway is not present. On the odd occasion the abuser when approached did not know the road rules and they humbly apologise. Again, this is an area of the road rules that has been overlooked from a publicity point of view with many drivers unaware of rules relating to cyclists. With an increase in cyclists and an increase in accidents between cars and bicycles in recent years, a bit of road rule knowledge sharing and advertising would not go astray. And yes, there are the idiot cyclists out there too.

Education: I strongly believe that driving and road rules should be a compulsory component of our education platform in schools. Even if people are not old enough or are yet to get their licence or do not intend to get a licence, a knowledge of road rules is essential to everyday living as the rules also apply to other road users such as pedestrians and cyclists. If road rule education was introduced into the curriculum for year 10 and/or year 11 it would provide a uniform and consistent delivery method, it would provide an advanced warning platform for targeting driver behaviour, it would provide a platform for children to remind or inform their parents of road rules they may have forgotten or do not know about.....how many parents, who have not undertaken a rule refresher for years, teach their children to drive? It would also provide a captured audience for one off promotions such as advanced driver skills awareness/training, by having on site demonstrations delivered by trained professionals. Most young drivers believe they have good skills.....see how good they are under a controlled environment before they hit the road. As an example, students could be put in the passenger seats of a car driven by a trainer and some simple wet road or stopping drills undertaken to show just how much different this is in reality. School education has enormous potential and could even be taken to a next step with basic education delivered in kindergarten (I will touch on this in the school zone point below).

Just back to the point on parents teaching their kids to drive.....in the absence of a 5 year licence refresher as I mentioned, maybe anyone who is sitting beside a Learner must have a RMS certification which could be as simple as the completion of a rule refresher.

It costs the Government many millions a year in road safety management, a lot of which is post road accidents. IT also costs the general public and business many millions, particularly in the event of an accident or accidents. If we could turn this around and channel post-accident resources into pre-road user education it might be the pro-active catalyst that is missing from every other past "initiative".

School Zones: These have been a great innovation however, there are a couple of serious concerns that should be addressed. Where and how are children informed of what a school zone means and what they are required to do, not only within it, but outside it; Whose responsibility is it to educate children about school zones and when does/should this education begin; The actual zone is often too big and this varies from school to school, i.e. there are inconsistencies and they often stretch for many metres either side of the school and may foster a sense of false wellbeing, not just within the zones, but outside them as well.

I have observed children crossing the road outside a school zone while appearing to be under the protective guise that they are covered by school zone rules. And while all pedestrians should be carefully observed, they have obligations as well.

If my memory serves me correctly, school zones in South Australia are very small and awareness by students and drivers seems far greater as a result. In NSW, many zones are much larger and stretch well away from the school gate and in some cases (Lake Cathie Public School, Richmond High School) the school is set back well off the road and pedestrian traffic is either zero (Lake Cathie) or on a footpath (Richmond) which is many metres from the nearest roadway. Yet in both cases there are speed restrictions in place on the closest road even though there is no pedestrian traffic.

As mentioned above, what protocols exist to deliver school zone and other road awareness in our schools, particularly with the very young children. We should be teaching them awareness and understanding in stages as they go through their schooling/growing years and school is by far and away the best environment for this.

Heavy Vehicles: The significant increase in road freight and in turn larger, higher powered vehicles has reached a point whereby road safety is being compromised. Many of our roads (or lanes on roads) are only just wide enough for a car, let alone a semi trailer. The slightest shift by one of these vehicles is a considerable risk to other road users. Should semi's/B Doubles be restricted to driving at night?

There are a couple of observations I have made overseas that could well be trialled in Australia. The first is that of Europe where "lorries" are restricted to the right hand lane (the left hand lane in Australia) unless they are overtaking a slower vehicle, and a maximum speed of 95kph. Many of our semi's travel at the maximum speed limit of 100kph or 110kph....this is OK on some roads, but not many sections of the Pacific Highway for example (even some of the dual carriageway bits are not suitable for trucks travelling at these speeds; the section of road near Brooklyn where the recent truck inferno occurred is a classic example of where a truck speed restriction should be in place).

The second observation is that of Dubai where “lorries” of a certain size are not allowed in the city limits between 6am and 6pm. While traffic congestion still exists, it moves better as it is not hampered by abnormal sized vehicles. Moving articulated vehicles off major roads in Sydney during times of peak traffic would improve traffic flow immensely. e.g. between 7am and 9.30 am and 3pm to 6.30pm.

Road Corridors: Many serious accidents on country roads are the result of vehicles colliding with trees on the edge of the road (the reasons are many.....speed, fatigue, etc). Why is it that large trees are not cleared to a distance of 20 metres either side of the roadway and the edge of roads designed in such a way to allow not only for the errant driver, but just as importantly, to also allow room for a car to pull over to (for example) repair a flat tyre or a mum to attend to a car sick child? Wider shoulders also allow access for emergency vehicles in the event of an accident.

As you can see I have put considerable effort into my submission and hope that you find it useful. There is more I could add, but at this stage I feel I have covered each point sufficiently to provide a base for discussion. As a recent early retiree I am now able to spend more time analysing and developing thoughts that I hope can be utilised by those who either seek to ask or allow me to offer.

Kind Regards

Gary Cook

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