

**Submission  
No 26**

## **DRIVER EDUCATION, TRAINING AND ROAD SAFETY**

**Name:** Mr Nigel Withers  
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## **Driver Education, Training and Road Safety Committee**

I make reference to the following points in the terms of reference:

*b) Evaluating current driver training, including the effectiveness of refresher training and skills updating, and adaptation to changing vehicle technology*

*e) The needs of metropolitan, rural and regional drivers*

*f) The needs and expectations of passengers and other road users*

*i) Other related matters.*

I am submitting this document from the point of view of a cyclist. I have been driving for over 30 years, and my experience includes 5 years as a truck driver in the Army Reserve. I estimate I have driven over 500,000 kms since I started driving in 1984, and cycled over 50,000 kms - primarily commuting to work in the Sydney CBD.

### **Evaluating current driver training**

Apart from the basic driver training required to gain my civilian license, I have also undertaken the following courses:

1. Two week introductory driver training, conducted by the Australian Army
2. Advanced off road driver training, conducted by the Australian Army
3. Motorcycle "Stay Upright" course
4. Ian Luff "Drive to Survive" course

In the past two years, I have instructed three teenagers who have been logging their required hours of supervised driving.

Compared to the training provided by the Army, Ian Luff and the Stay Upright group, the training provided to learner drivers in NSW is utterly rubbish. It is not worth the time and effort that is put into teaching learners how to drive. Worst of all, it concentrates narrowly on certain technical skills, and does nothing to teach temperament or behaviour. The worst traits a driver can have are:

1. arrogance
2. impatience
3. entitlement
4. technical incompetence

The training and testing regime only covers the last point. The best feature of the Army driver training

course was that the instructors failed pupils who showed any of the first three traits, and unit commanders would subsequently summarily terminate the license of a driver who showed these traits after graduation.

The first component of the Army driver training consisted of 7 days of instruction in a safe driving area - a training area away from the public roads. All trainee drivers had to pass a test on the safe driving area before being allowed to graduate to training on public roads.

This should be introduced in NSW.

We are still operating as if the roads are as free of traffic as they were 75 years ago, when my father was issued his license. On his 17th birthday, he walked into the Police station in Bunbury and asked to do his test. The Constable at the counter was about to conduct the test when the duty sergeant told him not to bother - "He's been driving his father's car since he was 13. In fact, he drove it here today on his own. I saw him park it out the front. I've seen him driving around town - he's ok. Give him his license". Back then, vehicle traffic was so sparse, and so slow, all public roads were safe driving areas. That has not been the case for at least 30 years, but we still act like it is.

From my cycling experience, I would estimate that 5% of current drivers exhibit one or all of these traits in spades, and they make driving a car, truck or bus - or riding a motorcycle or bicycle - an absolute misery for the rest of us. They think they own the road, and the rest of us have to get out of their way.

Cyclists are the most vulnerable road users, and being bullied by this 5% is sadly a very common experience. I doubt you can train people to not be bullies when behind the wheel - many people take on a radically different "Mr Toad" personality when they turn the ignition key. One key aim of driver training must be to identify these people, and ensure they are never given a license. If they can't control themselves when they are behind the wheel, they can take the bus. Driving is not a right - it is a privilege - and it should not be granted to those who bully other road users in the most cowardly fashion. Anyone describing another human as a "road toad" for instance lacks empathy for other humans and should not be licensed to drive.

If you want to reduce the road toll, you need to remove emotionally unstable drivers from the road. People who lack emotional and mental maturity should not be able to pass a driving test. Some people might not pass until they are 30. Some might never pass. Adults who throw tantrums and act like spoilt children when they don't get what they want should not be licensed to operate dangerous, heavy machinery.

If parliament is willing to confiscate firearms from emotionally unstable people who commit domestic violence, it should have no problems confiscating from emotionally unstable drivers the right to use a weapon that kills and injures far more Australians every year.

If you have any doubts about this, I suggest you spend a few hours reading through the comments on sites like "Name and Shame bad drivers, Australia". Alternatively, I have hours of video to show from my bicycle you might like to watch.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/1540927116125309/>

### **The needs of metropolitan, rural and regional drivers**

The biggest failing in current driver training is teaching drivers how to overtake safely on single lane roads. In the past, the only time most drivers ever had to overtake on a single lane road was when driving in the country. However, with the introduction of rules 144-1 and 144-2 (NSW rule: keeping a safe distance when passing bicycle rider), it is clear that a very large number of drivers have no clue when it comes to overtaking safely - whether overtaking bicycles in the city, or cars and trucks in the country.

When driving in the country, I have been run off the road twice by drivers coming the other way who have undertaken unsafe overtakes. If you spend some time watching dashcam footage on "Dash Cam Owners Australia", you'll see that I am not alone.

<https://www.facebook.com/DashCamOwnersAustralia/>

Overtaking requires a combination of a number of unconscious skills:

1. Estimating the speed of the approaching vehicle
2. Estimating the distance of the approaching vehicle
3. Knowledge of the impact of the gradient on the acceleration performance of your vehicle
4. Knowledge of the acceleration characteristics of your vehicle from any given speed, adjusted for any load that is being carried

All these combine to form a judgement as to whether it is safe to overtake or not. The tragic evidence of head on collisions along single lane stretches of the Pacific Highway and other country roads clearly shows that a proportion of drivers lack this skill, are out of practice, or allow impatience, arrogance and entitlement to override their better judgement.

This skill is not taught or tested for, yet the lack of this skill leads to many avoidable deaths and serious injuries on our country roads every year. I presume it is not taught because it is just "too hard". It's too hard to take a learner driver from metropolitan Sydney out to a single lane country road to teach this skill - and because they are limited to 80km/h, they can't practice overtaking anyway. We leave it up to the driver to teach themselves the skill once they pass their license test, and tragically, many are unaware it is a skill they need to learn. The only way they find out they don't have the skill is when they smash head on into another vehicle at over 100 km/h, killing or maiming all involved.

That is not a sensible way to test whether a driver is sufficiently skilled or not.

This has been driven home to me over the past few years when cycling in the inner west. I have lost count of the times when drivers have overtaken me and nearly ended up having a head on collision with a car or truck coming the other way because:

1. They have overtaken into the sun
2. They have overtaken on a crest
3. They have overtaken on a blind corner
4. They have completely underestimated the distance of an approaching car, and the closing speed, even in 50km/h zones
5. They have done all of the above at once

If drivers lack the competence to overtake small, slow moving cyclists in urban areas, then they certainly lack the skill to overtake large, fast moving road trains in country areas.

### **The needs and expectations of passengers and other road users**

As a cyclist, I expect anyone who gets a license to understand the following:

1. Cyclists are entitled to use the road
2. Cyclists are entitled to ride two abreast
3. Vehicle registration does not pay for roads, or road usage
4. Insurance does not pay for roads (it's amazing how many people seem to think CTP somehow pays for roads)
5. The requirements of rule 144-1
6. Using a vehicle to menace vulnerable road users is a cowardly act of bullying
7. A license is not required to operate a bicycle
8. That the largest component of vehicle "registration" is in fact a weight tax
9. Fees, fines and taxes collected by the RMS are "administered revenue", and are passed on to Treasury and not used by the RMS for building or repairing roads

Driver training must include a component where drivers feel like cyclists. This is the only way to ram home the importance of rule 144-1.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zT74IMdBi3I>



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SVHNLEBCts4>

### **Other related matters.**

Improved driver training, and emotional screening, is required because once a driver is licensed, they can menace and bully cyclists with impunity. Unfortunately, the NSW Police Service shows no interest in enforcing the laws that have been passed to keep cyclists safe. Drivers are essentially being given a free pass to intimidate and harass cyclists by the Police.

This is a glaring road safety failing, and should be the matter of a further inquiry by the Staysafe committee.

### *Understanding of rule 144-2.*

The driver of a motor vehicle driving past to the right of a bicycle that is travelling on a road in the same direction as the motor vehicle may, if it is necessary in order to comply with rule 144-1 while passing the bicycle, do any of the following but only if the driver can do so safely and has a clear view of any approaching traffic