

REDUCING TRAUMA ON LOCAL ROADS IN NSW

Name: Name suppressed

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Partially
Confidential

Dear Staysafe Committee;

I would like to add a second addendum to my previous comments on the inquiry into local road safety in NSW.

A new study has recently been released entitled *The Dynamics Of Motorcycle Crashes A Global Survey of 1578 Motorcyclists* by Elaine Hardy, Dimitri Margaritis, James V Ouellet and Martin Winkelbauer.

This study is unusual in being an in-depth investigation of each accident, including of events from a rider's or witnesses' (in the case of fatal accidents) perspective.

Unlike standard crash investigations it more thoroughly captures the causes and chain of events. In fact, the authors, all veteran researchers who understand motorcycling, take the regular investigatory blueprint to task, stating quite clearly that it is backwards and misses extremely important safety factors.

This is very much in line with my previous comments, where I pointed out that the normal procedure is far more likely to see 'speed' as a cause. Indeed, how many run off the road accidents are caused by the rider attempting to avoid a hazard (such as an animal) and losing control without colliding with said hazard? And is then attributed to 'speed'.

One of the conclusions of the study is startling and goes strongly against the Australian road safety research activists, such as those from MUARC, CARRS-Q, TARS and Adelaide University.

Above a low speed (about 40 km/h) there is *almost no relationship between crash speed and crash severity*.

Instead there are two far more important factors. The trajectory of the crashed rider, and what they run into.

As I pointed out previously, simple underrun protection on w-beam barriers will provide a far greater safety improvement than a 20 km/h speed limit reduction. This study proves the point clearly: how you crash and what you run into is far more important than how fast you crashed.

The councils and the government must stop with the band-aid solution of speed limit reductions and must remove as many roadside hazards from popular motorcycling roads as possible. A four-metre clear zone is the normally considered effective standard. This may sacrifice a few trees, but are they really more important than lives? Council-maintained roads are particularly poor on this front. Every hazardous tree, post and barrier must be removed. It will make a huge difference.

The second point I would like to make is about data collection and road safety audits.

Safety studies must account for every confounding factor. For example, we have seen the recent speed limit reduction on the Oxley Highway which has been devastating for motorcycle tourism.

Since then the Carrai East fire has led to the road being shut for long periods. Many dangerous trees have been removed, improving sightlines and making the road less hazardous if a rider does crash. Now we have the coronavirus outbreak that will nearly eliminate tourism for months. There have been other improvements such as installation of barrier protection. In short, accidents would have fallen even if the speed limit had not been reduced. The study period used in the safety (2012-16) audit saw (anecdotally) higher motorcycle traffic than previously. The high number of fatalities can largely be explained by random

variation – there was only one in the previous five-year period (2007-11) (when the speed limit change was first proposed) and has been one after the speed limit reduction. The change was not proportionate to traffic. None of the fatalities was proven to be exceeding 80 km/h when the rider was killed.

Since the reduction there has been a 50% fall in motorcycle numbers. There have been multiple closures of the road and other ongoing factors effecting traffic. In short there is nothing to prove that safety has been improved by the speed limit reduction, as there are too many confounding factors. Yet it is almost certain that any improvement in crash numbers will be attributed to the speed limit reduction entirely and exclusively. This is a fault of countless road safety studies and must be stopped.

I must also admonish habit of the government and councils using only accident numbers in these safety studies. They *must* account for the number of motorcycles. It is a simple mathematical effect that where there are more motorcycles, there will be more motorcycle crashes. The recreational value of motorcycling is extremely important to riders, and road safety actions must not unduly deter riders like they have on the Oxley. A per-rider improvement in safety is the only valid one. The gold standard is to reduce crashes without reducing rider numbers. Rider numbers must be measured.

Thirdly, I must address the use of willingness-to-pay values in road safety policy. When used in monetary terms they cannot accurately reflect the actual cost to society, unlike a pure cost-benefit analysis. They are merely reflection of their subjects' income. They are almost always downside-focussed and never consider the value that slightly more risk may bring to users' lives. This was raised by the Ulysses Club in the submission to the Senate Standing Committee of Rural and Regional Affairs and Transport in their inquiry into aspects of road safety in Australia at the start of the year. The non-financial costs, including wellbeing are not well accounted for. Motorcycles are a unique form of transport in being, in modern Australia, mainly recreational. Motorcyclists have a much higher willingness to pay in terms of physical risk, as the personal benefits of recreational riding are so great. This cannot be accounted for in conventional 'willingness to pay' studies.

The recreational value of motorcycling roads and motorcycling must be explicitly accounted for and given a high weight. I would suggest that researchers start with the Stephen Murphy, marketing researcher at the University of Essex. Although sometimes hard to understand his research explores the importance of motorcycling, especially at high speeds, in great depth and shows how genuinely important it can become to the rider's personal life. He is a rider himself.

This is completely unlike the normal attitudinal surveys which are superficial and often have loaded questions to paint riders as irresponsible. This is an unfortunate side-effect of the fact that almost all road safety experts don't ride. They know the numbers, but they do not understand riding at all.

As a matter of fact, I would recommend that any road safety study or policy from a non-rider should be treated with great scepticism. Policy should be made by people who understand, rather than merely knowing. Recreational motorcycling is entirely about the act of motorcycling itself, not about going between locations. Arguments about their only being a small amount of time lost due to speed limit reduction are completely invalid. It is not about going from A to B, it is about the journey itself and the physical act and attaining certain sensations, something explored so well by Murphy

Then, there should be developed a proper measure to include the recreational value of a road. Popular motorcycle roads should indeed be considered recreational areas. There is little point in making a road 'safe' if no one wants to ride it.

The main factors will be rider numbers, speed limits and the character of the road (geometry, number of corners and so on). Observations of rider numbers show that speed must be given a big weight. A doubling per ten km/h is a good rule. This would dictate that the Oxley highway lost 75% of its speed amenity when the speed limit was reduced by 20 km/h.

Combined with a high value for its unaffected geometrical character, this would accurately reflect the 50% fall in motorcycle traffic since the speed limit reduction.

This must be given a high weight when safety strategy on popular recreational routes is considered. Authorities must consider how much they are reducing the recreational amenity of the road. This must be given genuine consideration, not given lip-service to. The gold standard is to implement the policies that have the biggest safety improvement for the smallest impact on recreation. Reducing speed limits should be last resort, for if all else fails, and then done by the smallest possible degree (10 km/h at a time). It must not be the first action taken and not the amounts used. Previous cuts should be reversed. The lack of reduction in state-wide fatalities and injuries shows they have not had a positive effect.

Lastly, I would like to again address the nature in which road safety policy is implemented. This has become increasingly technocratic and dictatorial, driven by activist 'experts' who often do not even value personal transport, let alone have the ability to understand the experience of motorcycling, and engineers who often do not understand motorcyclists' needs. Speed limit reduction and speed enforcement are focussed on to the exclusion of all else on country roads. This is abetted by the police, who have a clear conflict of interest in speed limit reductions.

The results speak for themselves, there has barely been an improvement in road safety in ten years of 'Vision Zero', unlike in the decades prior.

The one group that is left out is those directly affected, and those who pay the taxes and rates that fund the police, RMS, the local councils, the expert's salaries and so on.

Road safety policy is too important an issue to be left to a small, isolated group of experts who often do not understand the user group they are researching and making road policy for. Indeed they are sometimes antagonistic, especially when it comes to motorcycles.

It is time for road safety to become more community and user-group oriented. Experience should be valued and experts should prove they have practical experience. Motorcycling experts should ride motorcycles.

All literature used in road safety policy should be open access, especially as much of it is taxpayer funded. If it is not open access, it cannot be used.

Whenever a policy change on a road is proposed, all engineering assessments and safety record audits and meeting minutes should be public. Anything that is relevant must be made public.

The public, and especially targeted user groups must be allowed to voice their opinions, and these should carry real, indeed, primary weight. No action should be taken unless it has support.

It is time for a change from technocracy to democracy.

P.S.

There is a desperate need for low cost motorsport venues in NSW. Sydney Motorsport Park is too expensive, especially for young, vulnerable motorcyclists who would most benefit from such opportunities. Wakefield Park is now operating reduced hours due to noise complaints. There needs to be a motorcycle-specific track like at Broadford in Victoria, that needs few staff and can provide low-cost track days and racing (\$180 or less, as opposed to \$335 for SMSP for a ride day, and \$300 or less for racing, as opposed to \$590 at SMSP). There need

tfor more venues. New South wales only has two full-sized racetracks between 8 million people, New Zealand has eight between five million. 26 years ago, there were four between six million. Two fell victim to real estate development. Since then has been a string of broken promises and dashed dreams. There were two proposed recently, one near Lake Macquarie and a motorcycle track near Nowra. The NSW Government did not lift a finger to help them, indeed they obstructed the Central Coast one and let greedy environmentalists kill the one near Nowra. The latter is a blow motorcycle racing in NSW might never recover from.

The government should commit to completing two others aside from Bathurst by 2025. One must be reserved only for motorcyclists. There need to also be more drag strips. So often the police, local councils, politicians and government advisors make the admonition that motorcyclists need to 'take it to the track'. Then *please* build tracks for us to use. We can't 'take it to the track' if we don't have any to use. Motorcycle sport needs a home, but the NSW Government is refusing to provide one.