

**Submission  
No 16**

## **SUPPORT FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL LEARNER DRIVERS**

**Organisation:** Eurobodalla Shire Council

**Date Received:** 12 May 2021

Partially  
Confidential

**Submission to Parliament of New South Wales  
Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety  
Support for rural and regional learner drivers**

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Date: 12 May 2021

The Chair  
Staysafe Committee  
Parliament House  
Macquarie Street  
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Submitted by:  
Eurobodalla Shire Council  
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## **Executive Summary**

The Eurobodalla Shire Council submits this information to the Committee as highly engaged advocates for learner drivers in rural and regional areas and as a service provider supporting disadvantaged learner drivers to achieve their 'P' plates via the successful Y drive program.

No doubt there are a number of challenges for learner drivers in our region. This submission includes reference to the impacts of socio-economic and family status, large distances between the shire's towns and villages, affordability, program availability and technology. The submission addresses four of the terms of reference and gives recommendations at the end of each section.

The submission has also given detail about the Y drive program that Council has run very successfully over the past four years from a pilot program to recently receiving 5 years funding from Transport for NSW and the NSW Government's Stronger Country Communities Program to collectively support a further 140 learners to achieve their licence. Our shire is very grateful for this project and funding as many of the issues outlined in this submission will be experienced in other shires for some time. The surety of the current funding means for our learners, many of these challenges have been removed as the program will supply support, vehicles, insurance, petrol, professional lessons and Safer Driver education.

Gaining a licence for many of the past participants of Y drive has been life-changing for them. Included in this submission are several highlighted case-studies to demonstrate the value of the program. The importance of reducing the challenges of getting a licence and improving a person's life chances as a result cannot be understated. The benefits include not only improved driver ability and road safety, but improved opportunities to be independent, participate in education and employment and increased access to everyday life activities (shopping, health appointments, social events).

The Eurobodalla Shire Council values the inquiry by the Committee and will be available if further information is required.

## Eurobodalla Snapshot

The Eurobodalla shire is located on the South Coast of New South Wales, between 280 and 360 kilometres south of the Sydney CBD and between 150 to 220 kilometres south-east of the Canberra CBD. It runs along a narrow stretch of coastline which is 110km long and is predominately a rural community.

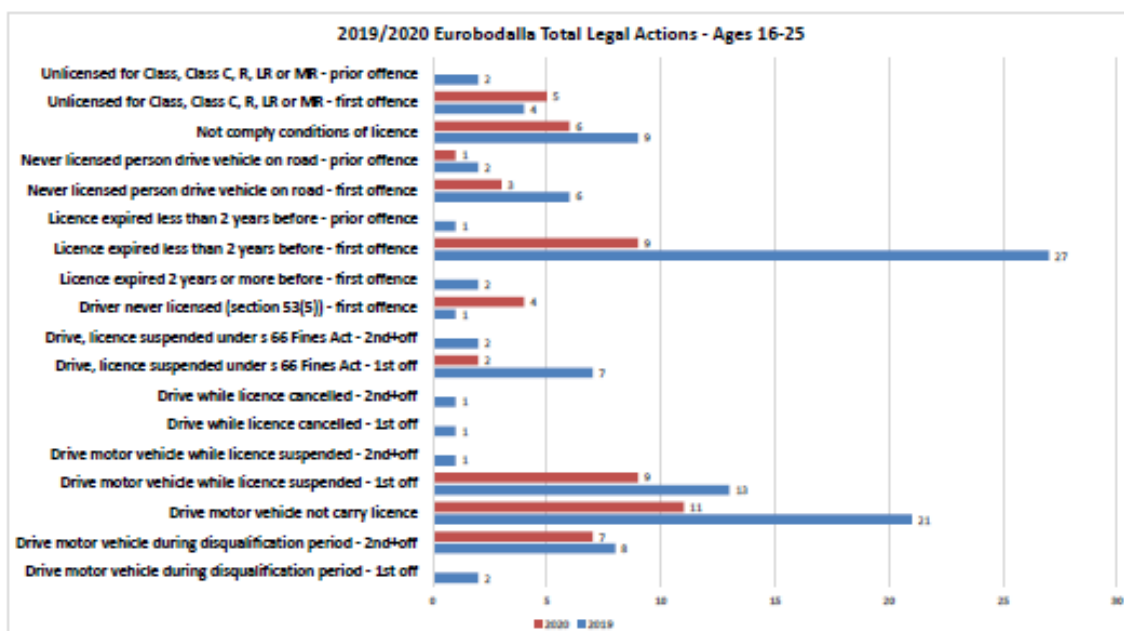
We have a low socio-economic community with high unemployment and higher than average percentage of Aboriginal young people living in our area. The proportion of young people unemployed in the Eurobodalla is 7.1% which is higher than the national average.

In 2016, 14.2% of 15 to 24-year old's in Eurobodalla Shire were disengaged with employment and education, compared to 11.8% in Regional NSW.

In Eurobodalla, 29.4% of are listed as low-income. Median weekly income for Eurobodalla is \$939 (NSW average \$1486). There are 703 families that live in social housing within the shire. Eurobodalla SEIFA score is 938 with several pockets showing higher levels of disadvantage and is ranked 40 on the NSW rank of disadvantage.

The table below demonstrates an overall reduction in offences for the 16-25-year cohort from 2019 to 2020 for the Eurobodalla.

### LICENCE RELATED OFFENCES



Source: Far South Coast Local Area Command infringement data 2020

Of note, disadvantage in 2021 for the Eurobodalla will be much higher than compared to 2016 as the Black Summer Fires of 2019/20 saw our shire lose over 500 homes and 80% of the shire burnt with many of the population traumatised impacting on families, housing, environment and economy.

### Council's Y drive Program

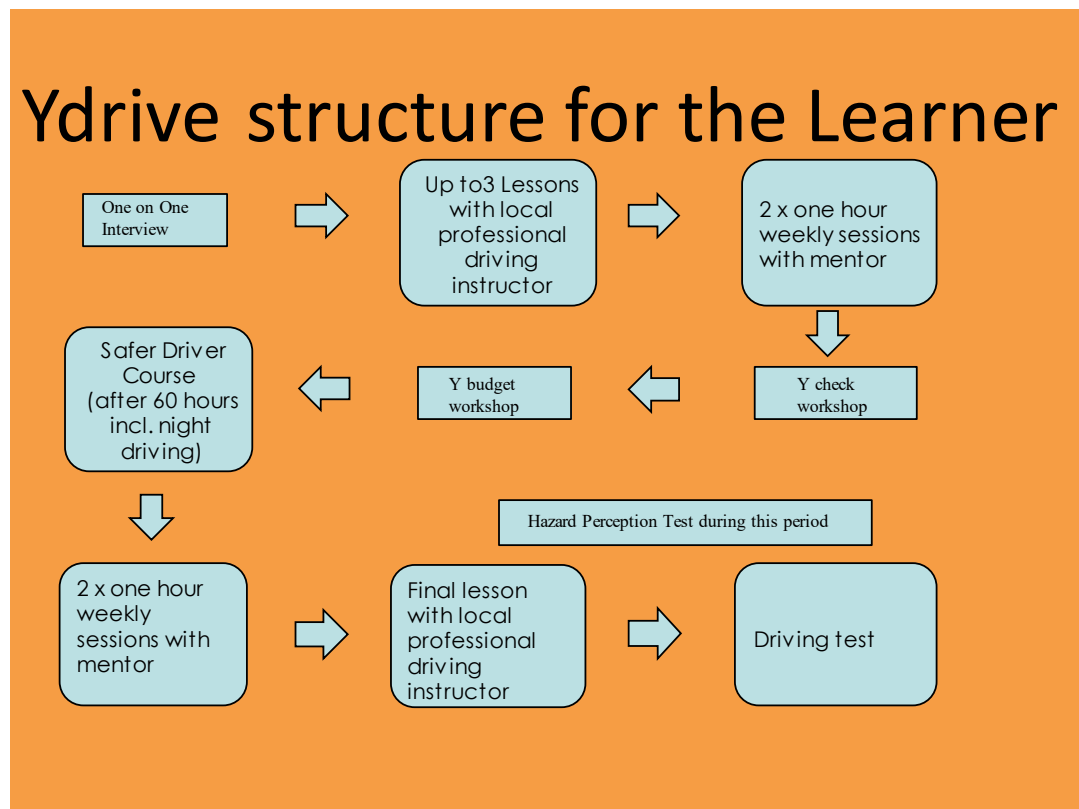
Council received \$20,000 funding from the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet for a pilot learner driver program in 2017. This project enabled the development of the Y drive framework and achievement of 36 learners successfully gaining their P plates. The Council has continued to apply for and attract external government funding with the program currently being supported by a 5-year funding program via the Transport for NSW Driver Licensing Access program.

The Y drive project is a community support project to assist disadvantaged and at-risk young people to attain their required hours of driving experience required to comply with the Graduated Licensing Scheme (GLS). The project is supported by a range of community stakeholders who refer learners and provide guidance over time on the development and improvement of the program.

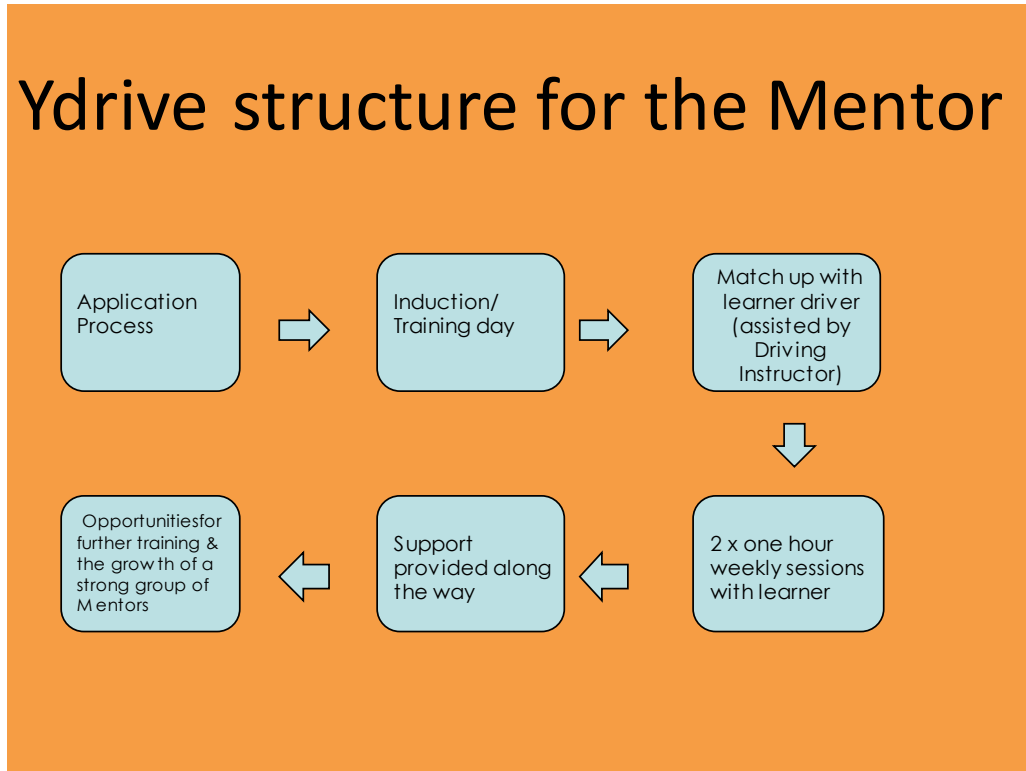
Following a comprehensive intake process young people are assisted to obtain their L plates by helping with ID, form filling, test preparation, referring to training programs as required and accompanying them to get their L plates.

Once the young people have their L's they are then supported with a series of professional driving lessons, pair them with a volunteer mentor driver who will use one of our dedicated vehicles to assist them to attain the 120 hours driving experience to achieve their P plates. Participants will also participate in a Safer Driver course to support accumulation of required hours.

Mentors will then assist the young people to prepare for the driver knowledge test (DKT) and hazard perception test (HPT), accompany and support them through their test and refer to further training and education when required. This will enable them to successfully obtain their P's which has the long-term benefit of increasing work and further education opportunities and builds community connectedness which leads to better health outcomes. It also reduces the need to drive unlicensed, reduces car theft and improves road safety and confidence leading to fewer road fatalities.



# Ydrive structure for the Mentor



**Y Budget Workshop** is offered to Y drive participants and supported by an independent Financial Counsellor. Learners are taught about all the costs involved in buying and running a vehicle, how to obtain a car loan and variety of loans on offer and their pros and cons.

**Y Check Workshop** is offered to Y drive participants and run by staff at Council depot workshops. Learners and mentors are taught the differences between vehicles, how to change a tyre and oil and general car maintenance.

Social events are coordinated for mentors and learners to connect and share throughout the year. In addition, the service provides regular communications and tools to support bookings, events and celebrations.

## Three Y drive case studies

### Case Study One:

17year old Aboriginal Male, living on a rural property with a single mother and younger sibling. No one within the family had a driving licence and both siblings were driving illegally to get access into town and employment. Even though he started the program with zero logbook hours, with professional lessons (4) along with a dedicated Mentor, he successfully obtained his Provisional licence first go within seven months.

The pride of being able to legally drive was shown when his comment of obtaining his Provisional Licence was "I am going straight home, so I can drive Mum into town to do the shopping for the first time - legally."

When starting the program, he was gifted a second-hand car by a friend which he kept under cover and would polish weekly. He had a strict rule not to drive that vehicle until he was legally able. The

afternoon of getting his provisional licence he took the cover of that car and drove his mum into town to go shopping.

Through his positive experience, his younger sibling signed up to the Y drive program and also obtained her Provisional licence within nine months of starting the course.

Both Learners attended Safer Driving courses and had professional lessons both at the start and end of their Y drive experience which means they have held onto their licences and are safe drivers. Learner Driver One now travels up to the Northern Territory to help on Country with remote aboriginal communities.

The connection to their Mentors is also ongoing as both are also active in the community and when they see their Mentors, they update on how they are doing with employment and love showing off the car they are still driving.

#### **Case Study Two:**

19year old Aboriginal Female, single mother of a 18month old baby.

Living between five households with only two family members 30 minutes away with full licences was a major restriction in obtaining her licence. Both licenced family members worked full time and were unable to provide much driving support. Due to being a female her interest in driving was ignored as gaining driving experience for her brothers was more important (she had six brothers).

Through the Y drive program she completed her full 120 hours along with 4 professional driving lessons and passed her Provisional test with a score of 99% within six months. Her Provisional Driving test was the first test she passed first time in her life with a score over 60%.

The freedom of being able to drive her daughter to pre-school allowed her to start working part time. As a couple of the households had physical abuse issues, her driving licence also enabled her to quickly and safely remove herself and her daughter when those moments occurred.

Two years on, she is still in contact with her Mentor and along with long term employment and living in her own unit, she is counting down the days to when she obtains her full driving licence and is talking about becoming a Mentor with Y drive herself.

#### **Case Study Three:**

32year old male. Suffered agoraphobia for 12 years.

The condition meant he had not left his house in since finishing school. His mother who is fully licenced is unable to help him drive due to herself undertaking intensive cancer treatment. One year after obtaining treatment for his agoraphobia, he applied for the Y drive program in February 2021. Just attending the interview, which was held close to his home, was a difficult step for him along with expectation of meeting new people. He recently was hospitalised overnight due to a panic attack.

Within three months of starting the Y drive program with a very supportive driving instructor and mentor, he is now aiming for his licence. "The target for earning my P's is around August as that's when Mum should be finished with all of her treatment and I've discussed with a few people now that my first job might involve driving because driving has been something genuinely interesting to me".

All three learner drivers were punctual and positive attendees of all sessions provided by Y drive which has led to references of support helping with employment opportunities.

### Past Participant Graduates Survey responses:

Now holding their Green P's – 85.71%

Now holding their Red P's – 14.29%

Have you had any traffic fines? No 83.33% Yes – 16.67%

Have you had your licence cancelled or suspended since passing your Ps test? No –100% Yes 0%

Do you own your own car? No 0% Yes 100%

How did you get your car? Gift 16.7% Saving 16.7% Bank Loan 33.3% Other 33.3%

Since completing the Y drive program have you?

Gained employment 66.67%

Increased independence 100%

Accessed education/new learning opportunities 83.3%

Increased social connections 83.3%

Improved relationships with your family/friends 66.67%

Attended more sporting/musical/art events 66.67%

Improved your personal health 66.67%

Further Comments on the Y drive program:

- “It helped me in more ways than I could imagine.”
- “The Y drive program is the reason why I’m now completely independent. I now hold a full-time job as a support worker that requires me to hold a driver’s licence.”
- “Helped gain my confidence of driving on the road and understanding everything in the car as well.”
- “I am very grateful for all the help I received form the Y drive program and to my Mentor Ray who has a lot of patience and skills to teach me and others. Without this program I would have been lost. Thank you so much.”

Link to website for EOI forms and Y drive media video:

[Y drive learner driver program | Eurobodalla Shire Council \(nsw.gov.au\)](https://www.eurobodalla.nsw.gov.au/y-drive-learner-driver-program)

[https://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/community/community-and-family-services/youth/Y drive-learner-driver-program](https://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/community/community-and-family-services/youth/Y-drive-learner-driver-program)

## TERMS OF REFERENCE RESPONSES

### **1. Challenges faced by learner drivers in rural and regional areas to get the required training and experience to obtain a licence.**

#### **The tyranny of distance**

Given the length of the shire (110km) there is a limited choice of driving schools with only three operating. Professional driving lessons are a high cost to income limited families resulting in young people from less fortunate families not opting for professional lessons as they are too far away to access or are generally unaffordable. Professional lessons are an important experience for the learner. They provide a formal and independent structure for lessons and give experience for formal testing situations.

Many people and families move to the far south coast for lifestyle, often leaving behind family and friendship networks. Again, the distance between towns and lack of public transport means that there is less of a support network locally for young people to tap into for driving experience support from familiar or trusted licenced (and willing) adults.

Given the shire's socio-economic status and higher than NSW average of Aboriginal population many families financial situations can be very limited resulting in petrol money being prioritised for work and health purposes.

Young people in the shire have limited exposure to a range of road types to learn on. In general, our roads are characterised by:

- More highway driving at higher speeds and less low speed options.
- Highways are generally single lane each way with intermittent dual lanes for overtaking
- Local towns have low numbers of streets with minimal traffic
- High numbers of animals at dusk/night on roads (kangaroos, possums etc)
- High number of dirt roads
- Low occasions of traffic lights or exit routes
- Low occasions of dense traffic negotiation and merge requirements
- Long distances for majority of driving - very tiring for a learner
- Limited opportunities to practice overtaking whilst under supervision.

The above characteristics reduce the range of driving conditions, opportunities and situations to experience that metropolitan counterparts will have whilst learning to drive.

The Eurobodalla shire has a lack of public transport between and within towns and villages. Local public transport is either limited to restricted hours or non-existent. Bus routes have remained static for decades. The local coach service can be booked to take you from one end of the shire to the other with the return fare being around \$40.

Public transport is limited in majority of rural and regional areas and can add anxiety to younger people taking public transport due to the other uses or the time between being able to return home when using public transport. Example: when attending TAFE in Moruya from Batemans Bay, a young mother had to leave home to catch the TAFE bus at 7.30am for class at 9am then wait until 5pm to return even though her classes finished at 3.30pm. If the class finished early or was cancelled, she would still have over 1 hour wait before being able to start the 1hr journey home. If the Express bus was not available, the bus trip takes 1hour and 50 min one way.



In a car, the trip is 35 min which again is a 1 hour round trip for any licenced adult to support the student attending TAFE out of their own town.

The distance between locations to gain access to a vehicle either to learn in or to then purchase is a restriction and must be factored into when providing Learning to Drive options. Driving programs that can travel to the Learner, no matter their location, is needed. Along with education on how to purchase a first vehicle when limited by a rural location.

Provisional Licence restrictions on time curfews has a big impact on learners due to distance between locations and availability of a licenced person to collect and transport others. Thus, corners are cut, and Learners or Provisional drivers take multiple passengers during the night for both social and employment reasons.

#### Recommendations:

- Introduce further subsidies for disadvantaged learners to access professional driving tuition
- Continued support and ongoing funding for community-based services that provide vetted and regular driving supervisors and safe vehicles
- Programs need to respond to the disadvantage of the learner and be able to go to the learner and include value-added education content e.g. maintenance, budgeting.
- Introduce pilot project/s to test and improve public transport use and new routes
- Trial bus routes that increase access to jobs and skills opportunities with earlier worker buses
- Introduce regional/rural youth travel card for subsidising fares that supports all young people not just students or disadvantaged.

#### **Family status and housing**

Young people in the shire have diverse living arrangements such as:

- Couch surfing, getting limited help from friends or extended family
- Living with elderly relatives
- Refuge/Motel (basically homeless)
- Constantly moving between multiple households of the extended family

These issues make it extremely difficult for regular driving experience to be brokered by the young person. Driving experience opportunities become very sporadic and lose efficacy over time if experience is not developed regularly/consistently. A coordinated program like Y drive enables engagement and support of the participant wherever they are in the shire.

The shire's demographic shows a larger majority of over 55's and the median weekly income being \$939 and lower qualification and education levels. A large number of the community including young people and parents have literacy issues. This is often a barrier for testing and engagement in requirements of logbooks, applications etc.

Participants in Council's Y drive program that have reported that they have been the first person in their family, for generations, to achieve a driver's licence. Other family members have then participated in the program reducing the reliance on others or hitch-hiking to achieve transport requirements.

Furthermore, many low-socio-economic families do not own a car which increases the likelihood of learning to drive being put off until much later in life - if at all.

Forging logbooks by learners and parents is prevalent due to the high number of driving hours required and indeed availability of or apathy for support for those. This has been a topic of discussion with groups of local young people providing feedback on learning to drive and obtaining 120 hours of experience.

A number of young people find themselves living with grandparents or just one parent who don't have the confidence, patience or ability to teach driving confidently or being supportive of driving at night.

Depending upon family circumstance, the person teaching the learner to drive may have multiple driving offences. This can result in risky driving behaviour being transferred to the learner or less effective driving supervision due to lack of regard or knowledge for road rules and safety.

Often the experience of learning to drive with a parent can be fraught which impacts on motivation for, quality and duration of driving practice.

#### Recommendations:

- Support literacy and support programs for learner drivers and their supervisors or offer alternate testing/application approaches to achieve licence
- Supervisors of learner drivers should be required to possess a good driving record
- Continued support of community-based driving programs like Y drive or ones similar to the Victorian governments 'L2P' program that provide quality, consistent and accountable driver supervision and preparation programs.
- Fund and support education programs for those intending to teach a learner to drive and promote best practice and skills to reinforce GLS rules.

#### **Affordability**

The rising cost of petrol in all rural/regional areas is a challenge to support the number of kms and hours required. For disadvantaged youth this is a large barrier.

Insurance costs for Learner or Provisional drivers of vehicles are very high which can stop families from even starting the Learner driver process. This is also exacerbated by the prospect not being able to afford a safe or roadworthy vehicle.

As mentioned, professional driving lessons are expensive and out-of-reach for many – but are valuable in the process of teaching a learner to drive.

When moving onto a full licence, many disadvantaged young people will only pay for a one-year licence due to money constrains. Over three years this would be more expensive buying it one year at a time. A reward for holding provisional licences without fault, such as a discounted licence fee, may allow the learner driver to afford a 3-year or 5-year licence and encourage them to continue their good driving.

#### Recommendations:

- Support car insurance subsidies for disadvantaged learners
- Rewarding learner drivers with licence fee subsidies for good driving records

## **Learner driver support programs**

Where a successful learner driver pilot program has been initiated it has been difficult to attract ongoing support for the continuation of programs. There has been an ongoing reliance on external funding from a disparate range of sources. The stop-start nature of projects has been difficult due to brevity of funding for essentially a program that can take up to 12 months for one learner driver to gain all the hours required and meet the age requirement for undertaking the P plate test.

Disadvantaged youth have indicated wariness of signing up and committing to government and non-government (NGO) agency programs due to cultural or home background or previous experience. Agency support is limited and mostly will only offer to pay for some professional lessons only (if eligible) given the limited availability of support programs or options locally it is often difficult to gain alignment of convenient dates and availability of learner.

There is little awareness publicly regarding any processes in place to assess the quality of professional driving schools. Participants or services are reliant on word of mouth or company website information regardless of the accreditation process they have gone through to become a professional driving school.

For learner drivers in the Eurobodalla, travel to Canberra or Sydney is undertaken by those seeking further training on car safety or preferred timing for other ancillary programs.

The only Safer Driver course option available locally is the through 'Pro-Active' a Sydney-based company at a cost of \$140 per student. This course is run every 6 weeks in Narooma and monthly in Batemans Bay.

### Recommendations:

- Support community-based programs to be allocated funding over longer periods
- Introduce quality rating, standards or process for professional driving instructors to assist consumers with choice
- Support availability of local regional/rural provision of learner driver and road safety courses (Safer Driving, Upright Motorcycle, car safety) to improve access and participation rates

## **2. Options for rural and regional learners to access driver training opportunities**

Within the Eurobodalla Shire there are the following programmed or commercial options available:

- Y drive with caps on numbers per year eg, 25, and the program is reliant on available volunteer mentors
- Safer driving course cost \$140/p offered by a Sydney-based training organisation
- Driving schools: Three in our Shire with a range of Instructors with varying experience and knowledge
- Moruya TAFE preparation courses for doing L's licence and Drivers Knowledge Test twice per year when they can achieve more than 12 participants, otherwise the course is cancelled
- NGO programs for eligible learners only. Max Employment offer 3 paid driving lessons for eligible learners but only after they have 50 logged hours. Campbell Page offer some paid driving lessons but, on a case-by-case basis.

- Teensafe – a half day volunteer run workshop at the local racetrack providing practical off-road driving experience reacting to water, braking quickly, general road safety, car maintenance and hill starts. The program is limited to school holidays and volunteer numbers and costs \$80.
- Rotary Youth Driver Awareness (RYDA) currently running in Bega (neighbouring shire av 2 hours' drive) which is a large distance to travel from the shire. A full day workshop with talks and engagement about road safety for yr 10 and 11 students. The program is well suited for school students but can be distressing for youth from difficult backgrounds especially as they attend without family or friend support.
- Motorbike preparation Stay Upright course not available, limited options and expensive.
- Eurobodalla Shire is currently an undeclared area in attaining the pre-learner driving test and pre-provisional driving test for motorcyclists. Meaning that learner motorcycle riders do not have to complete a driving component prior to attaining their motorcycle licence.
- No local motorbike instructor courses. Interested participants need to travel out of the shire to Queanbeyan or Bomaderry for a two-day Stay Upright course at own expense.
- Keys2drive is offered in the shire providing one free professional driver lesson. Only two driving schools offer this in each town.

In the main, learner drivers in the Eurobodalla are largely reliant on parents or other adults (extended family/neighbours/friends) for support for the combination of hours and accredited programs to achieve the required 120 hours.

There are no digital simulation options on Far South Coast at all.

#### Recommendations:

- Increase availability to locally run courses for driver safety and pre-requisites for motorcycle licensing
- Better promotion and coordination of what courses and programs are available via a central hub to assist organisations to have full attendance and regular offerings, and learners to know what is available
- Investigate options to run and evaluate a pilot program to trial digital simulation options

### **3. The use of driver simulators and other technology to assist rural and regional learners.**

As a result of running Y drive since 2017, Council's project staff perspective would lean heavily towards preferring actual on-road experience with dependable mentors or supervisors. This provides the learner with real experience and context. The current balance of on-road experience and education component requirements for the GLS seem right.

However, there is benefit of having some engagement with technology to simulate some road conditions that are not usual in our area e.g. icy roads, heavy congestion, night driving, multiple lanes, traffic lights, etc. It is better that these experiences (if available), whilst helpful, should not be considered as hours towards licensing.

#### Recommendations:

- Maintain requirements for current GLS including on road hours
- Support options for trialling and evaluating effectiveness of digital simulation of road conditions programs.

## 4. Other related matters

It is important to note in this inquiry that the state of Victoria has a very successful program that Council's Y drive program has been modelled on and developed to suit the local context. Some interesting outcomes are listed here from the Victorian L2P program. This information was used by the Eurobodalla Shire Council to present at the Australasian Road Safety Conference in Adelaide in 2019.

In relation to the Victorian L2P program:

- Over the current four-year funding period it is estimated that the L2P program will result in 8 fewer fatal and serious injuries and 26 fewer casualty crashes. These results factor in that people have a probability of having a crash, just because they are driving on a road.
- The value of the crashes avoided as a result of the L2P program over the four-year funding period was calculated to be over \$15 million
- L2P participants demonstrate a higher perception of risk associated with driving behaviours (i.e. speeding) than the general population
- Increase equity of opportunity for all young Victorians to obtain a driver's licence
- It is estimated that approximately 8% of Victoria's 16-20 year old population are disadvantaged in some way by the GLS, and the L2P program currently services approximately 1% of the population
- The L2P program engages with more people from socio-economically disadvantaged areas relative to advantaged areas
- L2P program coordinators identified people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background, geographically isolated youths, transient youths and 21-25 year olds (e.g. single mums, new migrants) as groups who need the L2P program but cannot/do not currently access it.
- The L2P program improves mobility because it helps learner drivers get their licence
- 92% of surveyed past L2P participants agreed they accessed their licence due to the L2P program
- 52% of past L2P participants who gained their licence through the program drive every day
- Having a licence increases the ability of young people to access employment opportunities, education and encourages increased social and community engagement
- It is estimated that the L2P program will generate over \$6 million in wages as a result of learners gaining a licence and having greater access to employment and education
- Current and past participants in the L2P program reported higher levels of wellbeing than learners on a program waiting list, based on their responses to questions in a survey
- Current and past L2P participants had higher levels of bonding and bridging social capital relative to persons on an L2P waiting list
- There is evidence that the L2P program increases the life aspirations, confidence, social, and behavioural outcomes of learner drivers
- These benefits may arise due to a combination of factors including the mentoring relationship and the sense of achievement and independence gained through the attainment of 120 hours driving experience and a licence

- Mentors participating in the L2P program have reduced levels of social isolation, and 83% of L2P mentors agreed that the program provides mentors with an increased sense of self-worth
- Improved social capital and the associated quality of life gain for mentors participating in the program is valued at over \$445,000.

**ADDENDUM to**  
**Submission to Parliament of New South Wales**  
**Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety**  
**Support for rural and regional learner drivers**  
**Date: May 2021**



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