

**Submission  
No 26**

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

**Organisation:** Snowy Monaro Regional Council

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10 May 2021

Dear Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety

**Submission: Support for rural and regional learner drivers**

Snowy Monaro Regional Council would like to commend the Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety for making an inquiry into opportunities to better support regional and rural learner drivers with reference to:

- a) *challenges faced by learner drivers in rural and regional areas to get the required training and experience to obtain a licence*
- b) *options for rural and regional learners to access driver training opportunities*
- c) *support for rural and regional learner drivers in other jurisdictions*
- d) *the use of driver simulators and other technology to assist rural and regional learners*
- e) *changes to driver training and testing in New South Wales since Staysafe's 2017 report into driver education, training and road safety, and*
- f) *any other related matters.*

The Snowy Monaro Regional Council is committed to embedding Road Safety into its business as usual and remains a member to the Local Government Road Safety Program which is delivered through fostering a safe systems approach onto our local roads and emphasising the role of safe people through a number of behavioral programs like Safer Learner Driver Workshops.<sup>1</sup>

Nationally, young drivers are over-represented in crashes and for regional communities this is evident with many country roads being less forgiving leading to a higher likelihood of a fatality. This loss of life of a young person can take a significant toll on regional communities as networks are smaller and trauma is likely to be felt by the entire community as opposed to particular families. Therefore, it's crucial we utilise opportunities like this inquiry to engage with learner drivers to foster systems that instill safer driving behaviours.

Local context

In the 2016 Census, there were 1,175 people aged 15-19 years of age in the Snowy Monaro Regional Council LGA, representing around 5.8% of the region.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, of those aged between 15-24 years, 22.5% were partially disengaged or completely

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<sup>1</sup> NSW Government. (2021). Local Government Road Safety Program Guidelines. Retrieved from <https://roads-waterways.transport.nsw.gov.au/business-industry/partners-suppliers/lgr/documents/local-gov-road-safety-program.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2016). 2016 Census Quick Stats: Snowy Monaro Regional A. Retrieve from [https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census\\_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/LGA17040?opendocument](https://quickstats.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2016/quickstat/LGA17040?opendocument)

disengaged in school which can limit their access to driver education programs and/or skills in reading and writing to undertake the theory test.<sup>3</sup>

In 2016, 60.7% of people were using a car as their method of travel to work in the region, demonstrating the lack of access to alternative forms of transport and importance of a licence in regional areas.<sup>4</sup> The median weekly personal income for people aged 15 years and over was \$675 while the family income was \$1,569 and household income was \$1,200 which sits well below that of urban areas.<sup>5</sup> The lower median income, continues to create barriers in accessing learner driver programs and learner driver lessons and can place strain on families to have to provide these hours without outside support. On top of this, with a region that spans 15,162km<sup>2</sup> travel to work is likely to be longer making it challenging for parents to provide opportunities to learn to drive after school or in daylight.<sup>6</sup>

### Challenges faced

It is well known those in regional and rural areas face many geographical barriers in accessing essential services such as education, healthcare, employment, sport and social events.<sup>7</sup> Due to the limited access to public transport and ride share options, it is crucial those in regional/rural areas can drive to ensure their ongoing access to these essential services. Without the ability to drive in such regions it is unlikely individuals will meet their basic needs and be able to obtain or remain in employment. This proves true for both young people accessing their licence and older people as they enter their final years of driving. For young people particularly, a licence can provide autonomy to get to sport, school, gain employment and can provide significant assistance to families who may be in housing stress.<sup>8</sup>

On top of all this, there are many other contextual barriers faced that provide support to learners drivers as they gain their licence and graduate to their P1, P2 and full licence. These can include the limited number of learner driver instructors available especially for those families who may not live in the major towns. For the Snowy Region, there are limited job opportunities for young people with seasonal workers taking many of these opportunities and the reality of many businesses closing during the hotter months. This can make it hard for young people to have the income to access learner driver lessons and/or purchase a car to learn on. There is also a significant lack of access for alternative transport when young people start to experiment with alcohol and drugs which can lead to drink and drug driving behaviours. Finally, there is a lack of visual enforcement like speed cameras as you start to get to the more remote areas of the region. This can lead to feelings of invincibility among young people.

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<sup>3</sup> ibid

<sup>4</sup> ibid

<sup>5</sup> ibid

<sup>6</sup> ibid

<sup>7</sup> Hinchclaff, R., et al. (2014). Barrier to obtaining a drivers licence in regional and remote areas of Western NSW. *Centre for Road Safety, Transport for NSW, Urbis and Five Grants Consulting*. Retrieved from [https://eprints.qut.edu.au/126814/1/full-paper\\_2121.pdf](https://eprints.qut.edu.au/126814/1/full-paper_2121.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Australian Institute of Housing Research Institute. (2019). Understanding the 30:40 indicator of housing affordability stress. Retrieved from <https://www.ahuri.edu.au/research/ahuri-briefs/3040-indicator>

Snowy Monaro Regional Council acknowledges the recent changes to the learner driver scheme which have made significant improvements in increasing the accessibility for regional learner drivers. However, there remains room to improve this scheme through education, technology and collaboration. Therefore, the Snowy Monaro Regional Council encourages the Joint Standing Committee for Road Safety to take on the following recommendations:

1. *Tailor the learner driver test for regional and rural areas, taking into consideration the unique geographical landscape including:*
  - a. *Weather conditions*
  - b. *Animals on the road*
  - c. *Fatigue*
  - d. *Car quality*
  - e. *Unsealed roads*
  - f. *Driving near Heavy Vehicles and Logging Trucks*
  - g. *Driving on one way roads at 100km/h and overtaking slower trucks*
  - h. *Poor quality roads*
2. *Look to ways to prepare learner drivers for when they enter cities with new road features they have never experienced including:*
  - a. *Freeways*
  - b. *High density/population*
  - c. *New signage and traffic features e.g. dual merging lanes, traffic lights*
3. *Create tailored online learning videos discussing the issues relevant to regional/rural areas which can count as additional hours to the Learner Driver Log Book.*
4. *Support the creation of driver training center's in local government areas like the Snowy Monaro Region. These centres benefit all road users especially learner drivers who can be exposed to job opportunities in the Transport industry. A great example of this is the Queanbeyan Sutton Road Training Centre.*
5. *Align the learner driver's scheme with the new National Road Safety Strategy.<sup>9</sup>*
6. *Partner with youth clubs, sporting organisations and art groups to deliver road safety education. Utilise, youth role models to deliver these messages e.g. a NRL football player.*
7. *Take into account the number of young people in regional/ rural areas who have previously driven some type of vehicle prior to retrieving their learner driver license and how this may impact their view of the road rules and/or levels of overconfidence. This could be addressed as a question (have you driven before).<sup>10</sup>*
8. *Consider the number of young people in regional and rural areas who have previous experience with heavy vehicles at home and how this may impact their road behavior.*

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<sup>9</sup> Office of Road Safety. (2021). Draft National Road Safety Strategy. Retrieved from <https://www.officeofroadsafety.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/draft-national-road-safety-strategy.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Harrison, W & Seymour, R. (2003). Learning to Drive in Rural Areas: Parents Perspectives on Issues and Solutions. *Eastern Professional Services Pty Ltd and Royal Automobile Club of Victoria*. Retrieved from <https://acrs.org.au/files/arsrpe/RS030074.pdf>

9. *Provide better support to learner drivers in the community as parents may have limited time to teach their learner drivers due to the conditions e.g. black ice heavy rainfall and driving at night with animals on the road.*
10. *Provide more opportunities for learner drivers to speak to motorcyclists, cyclists and truck drivers so they can understand the diverse needs of various road user groups in these regions.*
11. *Consider industry partnerships with local businesses and truck companies to engage with learner drivers.*
  - a. *Snowy Hydro provides a learner driver workshop each year. These programs can provide young people with exposure to job opportunities as well as increase their driver awareness.*
12. *Prioritise innovative technologies such as driving simulators to provide learner drivers with experience in diverse road conditions and allow them to build up hours through such programs.*
  - a. *In March 2021, various stakeholders came together to provide an opportunity for community engagement with a Heavy Vehicle Simulator owned by TAFE NSW. During this event, students from Cooma High school were invited to participate and use the simulator.*
13. *Target the NSW Safer Driver Course through the Department of Education at a subsidised rate to those in regional /rural areas as the median income is lower in regional/rural areas.*
14. *Consider a holistic approach to driving by resilience training to young drivers. In regional areas, there limited options to pull over safely and debrief after having a 'near miss' e.g. nearly hitting an animal.*
15. *Create learner driver routes for regional areas by working with learner driving companies. This could prepare them for different conditions based on how many hours they have achieved.*
16. *Liaise with a variety of groups as part of this inquiry including but not exclusive to schools, youth groups, community organisations, government agencies, learner driver businesses, the heavy vehicle industry and motorcycle groups.*
17. *Consider linking in with TAFE NSW and the role licenses have in increasing job opportunities. This could also extend to organisations taking on apprentices and supporting them to continue safe behaviours through their P1 and P2 licence. They could also be encouraged to achieve hours through their work.*
18. *Provide more support to young people who may have fines and are not eligible to apply for a licence to pay these back through voluntary work related to driving and or their offence.<sup>11</sup>*
19. *Subsidise some of the costs of private learner driver lessons in conjunction with learner driver businesses to better reflect the household income and limited job opportunities for young people in regional areas.*
20. *Provide more assistance for parents to deal with the stress associated with teaching a learner driver on less forgiving roads at high speeds. Parent/Guardian groups should have opportunities to share their experiences and concerns especially after experiencing community trauma.*

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<sup>11</sup> Hinchclaff, R., et al. (2014). Barrier to obtaining a drivers licence in regional and remote areas of Western NSW. *Centre for Road Safety, Transport for NSW, Urbis and Five Grants Consulting*. Retrieved from [https://eprints.qut.edu.au/126814/1/full-paper\\_2121.pdf](https://eprints.qut.edu.au/126814/1/full-paper_2121.pdf)

21. *Consider developing community-based volunteer mentor programs for learner drivers. Rotary and many other community groups can provide valuable insight and assistance for families with limited resources.*
22. *Provide support for those who may have lower proficiency in literacy and numeracy to complete the theory tests.*
23. *Consider the needs of Aboriginal young people in retrieving a licence and the challenges associated with proof of identity. Likewise, better involving elders to support learner drivers to create safe driving behaviors as this may relate to kinship.*
24. *Encourage the promotion of various learner driver log book apps more widely as promoted on the RMS website.<sup>12</sup>*
25. *Consider a holistic approach to the learner driver scheme with increasing rates of mental illness among young people and how mental illnesses like anxiety and depression may impact gaining a licence and/or how medication may impact access. This could be done through working with organisations like headspace to provide information on 'obtaining your licence with anxiety'.*

Thank you for taking the time to read this submission and we look forward to working with the Joint Standing Committee for Road Safety in future. If you have any questions relating to this submission please contact Snowy Monaro Regional Council's Road Safety Officer. \_\_\_\_\_

Yours Sincerely,

Peter Bascomb  
Chief Executive Officer

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<sup>12</sup> Transport for NSW. (2021). Digital learner driver log book apps. Retrieved from <https://roads-waterways.transport.nsw.gov.au/roads/licence/driver/learner/logbook/digital-logbook.html>