

**Submission  
No 30**

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

**Organisation:** Wollongong City Council

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The Chair  
Staysafe Committee  
Parliament House  
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Dear Sir/Madam

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

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Staysafe Committee regarding the inquiry into support for rural and regional learner drivers.

The attached response relates to the learner driver experience and opportunities in the Wollongong Local Government Area LGA.

Wollongong City Council looks forward to the outcome of this inquiry into learner drivers. If you require further information or clarification please contact Melanie Lausz, Road Safety Officer.

**This letter is authorised by**

**Trish McClure**  
**Manager Infrastructure and Planning**

## WOLLONGONG CITY COUNCIL SUBMISSION INQUIRY INTO SUPPORT FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL LEARNER DRIVERS

The required 120 hours for NSW learner drivers is helping to equip our youngest and most at risk road users with the skills and experience to help them confidently progress to their Provisional Licence. This is also helping to reduce road trauma, casualty and fatality crashes for a road user group who are overrepresented in the NSW road toll.

The following relates to the learner driver experience and opportunities in the Wollongong Local Government Area LGA.

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

Community groups and individuals can have difficulty meeting the requirements to get a driver licence. This impacts access to employment, education, training, health care, family, community support and cultural activities. This is, but not limited to the following, not necessarily experienced in the Wollongong LGA.

#### Geographical / Limited Access

- Qualified service providers for professional instructor driver training.
- The safer driver course can be accessed in rural areas but based on demand. Cancellations are common due to lack of interest.
- Mentoring services.
- Service NSW locations.
- Understanding what services, if any, are available.
- Mixed driving conditions: including metropolitan driving, heavy/ light traffic volumes, traffic signals, multi lane roundabouts, motorway and highway driving. Driving hours can quickly accumulate due to extensive distances travelled, but the variety of driving conditions remains limited. The opposite is faced by metropolitan learner drivers, limited access to sharing the road with B doubles, road trains, farming equipment and harvesters, including less interaction with wildlife (kangaroos, wombats) and livestock.

**Recommendation:** Five hours mandatory log book driving time in either metropolitan or rural locations dependant on their location of residence.

#### Family / Lifestyle

- Family hardship and lack of direct parental support, including mental health; sickness; disability; single parent lifestyles, including aging parents and carers.
- Financial hardship.
- Limited access to a vehicle or no vehicle in the family.

- Same aged siblings ie, twins, triplets. Challenging to schedule adequate time for all to obtain their 120 hours. Multiple siblings and large families have conflicting work, school and lifestyle priorities.
- Poor quality of training from appointed supervisor, ie, family member. Common for bad habits to be passed on and inherited. Only required to hold Class C licence to be suitable to supervise. Driving offences not considered.
- Learner licence can be held for maximum five (5) years and a minimum one (1) year. To obtain a Provisional licence after the first year requires approximately 2 – 3 hours of practical driving per week to obtain 120 hours within that one year time frame. Challenging to dedicate this amount of time for supervised driving practice.

### **Wollongong LGA Specific Issues**

#### **Limited Access to Locations to Learn and Practice**

- Quiet streets in the initial stages of learning to drive, for example first 15 hours.
- Sharing the road with B doubles, road trains, farming equipment and harvesters including less interaction with wildlife (kangaroos, wombats) and livestock.
- Varying weather conditions, including fog and snow.
- Varying road environments including extended winding roads, substandard road pavement conditions, tree lined narrow roads with blind corners.

#### **School and University Commitments**

- It is not just the disadvantaged that have limited access to and challenges in obtaining their required driving hours. Youth who attend boarding school have limited options to regularly maintain skills through weekly practice. Common for boarders to only visit home during school holiday periods.
- Equally, for people who have moved from their parental home for tertiary studies, ie, University of Wollongong, access to vehicles and unpaid supervision is restricted.

#### **Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Communities**

Many new Australians in Wollongong have never held a licence in their birth country and are over the age of 25 years. The safer driver course is only available for learners under 25 years. Whilst learners over 25 years are not required to log 120 hours of driving, the safer driver course would be beneficial to those who have never held a licence. It would help with confidence and understanding of driving in Australia. This needs to be made readily available for all learners and not dependant on age.

It is important to address the physical and developmental challenges faced by young drivers when learning the complex task of driving. With their inexperience, they also face a higher risk of danger and have higher crash risks due to:

- The nature of adolescent development which affects a young person's cognitive and perceptual skills.
- Poor ability to anticipate, perceive, identify and, therefore, react to hazards.
- Failure to recognise/assess risk and a propensity to take intentional risks.
- Propensity to be over-confident and over-estimate their driving ability.

- External influences, peers, relationships and social media.
- Risk behaviours due to stages of brain development particularly in young males.

## **b) Options for rural and regional learners to access driver training opportunities**

Access to learner driver support training and mentoring can be limited in the Wollongong LGA, but not in comparison to south western NSW regional and rural locations. Agencies are available that support disadvantage, vulnerable and minority groups, however, a broader approach is needed to address improved, affordable driver training access for all at risk individuals. The support provided in the Wollongong LGA that the writers of this submission are aware of includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- SCARF - L2P Driver mentor program addresses these barriers by supporting people from refugee backgrounds to become independent, safe and informed drivers.  
<https://www.scarfsupport.org.au/driving/>
- Salvation Army - Provides a mentoring service that is not available in the Wollongong LGA but is in neighbouring Campbelltown LGA. <https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/need-help/learn-to-drive/>
- Illawarra Multicultural Services - Supports learner drivers through the refugee women specific driving program. <https://www.ims.org.au/2021/01/15/womens-driving-program/>
- NRMA DriveTime Program - Helps people on humanitarian visas gain confidence behind the wheel. The program provides English driving support and driving practice with volunteer mentors, for learner drivers to help them obtain their NSW driving licences. This course is offered in Wollongong and supported by Wollongong City Council's Road Safety Officer. <https://www.mynrma.com.au/community/initiatives/programs/refugee-learner-driver-program>
- Keys2drive - Allows every learner and their supervisor one free government subsidised professional driving instructor lesson. <https://www.keys2drive.com.au/>
- Safer Driver Course - The Safer Drivers Course is a combined theory and practical course for learner drivers under 25 years of age. The course targets training on speed management, gap selection, hazard awareness and safe following distances, and prepares learners for solo driving. <https://www.service.nsw.gov.au/transaction/find-safer-drivers-course-provider>
- PCYC - Provider of the safer driver course.
- Youthsafe - Provides training for mentor programs, safer driver course instructor training and steering young drivers road safety sessions. <https://youthsafe.org/>
- Professional Driving Schools – Over 15 driving schools in the Wollongong LGA including the NRMA driver training program.

Mentor programs are advantageous, however, have limited capacity to provide support to the wider community. Courses, at times, only offer support for a minimum of five (5) to a maximum of 25 participants annually. Not for profit organisations that provide this valuable experience for learners rely heavily on inconsistent volunteer support, financial assistance, as well as the achievement of objectives and successful implementation of strategies.

### Online Resources

- GEARED - TfNSW youth based driver training site  
<https://roads-waterways.transport.nsw.gov.au/geared/index.html>
- ON THE MOVE - TfNSW has developed these resources for road safety education in classroom content up to Year 11 and 12. It is common for schools not to address road safety in any of their syllabus from Year 11 and 12. <https://onthemove.nsw.edu.au/>
- YOUTH SAFE - Youthsafe has developed useful infographics including youth injury facts and tips to keep young people safe. Youthsafe works collaboratively with Government, community groups and others to develop innovative road safety initiatives to address youth road safety. <https://youthsafe.org/>

### **c) Support for rural and regional learner drivers in other jurisdictions**

Outlined below are government agencies that provide learner driver support.

- TfNSW - Provides the Driver Licencing Access Program (DLAP) for disadvantaged communities and individuals. Since 2015, 7,500 people have been successful in the program. The program targets, aboriginal communities, refugee and resettlement communities, communities who have limited access to transport options or who are geographically disadvantaged, vulnerable young people and other people facing social and economic hardship.
- Wollongong City Council - Helping Learner Drivers Become Safer Drivers (HLDBSD) is the TfNSW learner driver funded program delivered by Council's Road Safety Officer. This is part of the Local Government Road Safety Program (LGRSP).  
<https://www.wollongong.nsw.gov.au/whats-on/events/events/learner-driver-log-book-run-may-2021>
  - Learn Safe - Annually, four free parent, carer and supervisor workshops.
  - Log Book Run - Annually, four free practical driving workshops for learners and their supervisors.
- TAFE NSW - Offers the course Foundation Skills for Learner Drivers - National Course Code: 10748NAT. This course, if suitable, can be provided for free or a subsidised amount, however, does not offer practical driving time. <https://www.tafensw.edu.au/course/-/c/c/10748NAT-01/Foundation-Skills-for-Learner-Drivers> This is available at Kempsey, Loftus, Port Macquarie and Wyong, but not Wollongong.

### **d) The use of driver simulators and other technology to assist rural and regional learners**

This is a debatable topic and will vary between individual submissions, therefore, the following is subjective and based on online search results. The disadvantages for simulator assistance include:

- Unrealistic driving behaviours.
- Perceived false sense of safety relating to the gamification effect of the simulator.

- Real consequences and dangers are not experienced in real time results in the responsibility of actions being dismissed by participants.
- Motion sickness can be an issue in older aged participants. This also undermines the training's effectiveness.
- Simulators can be costly in which the cost outweighs the benefit.

There is a lack of universal study to determine whether skills learned through a simulator are actually transferred to the real road environment.

Telematics are an in-vehicle system that collects driving data and are sometimes paired with a system to provide real-time and/or post-drive feedback to the driver. This has the potential to provide valuable feedback to improve safety outcomes and driving performance for young, novice drivers. Once again, devices of this nature can be costly which can outweigh the benefit.

**e) Changes to driver training and testing in New South Wales since Staysafe's 2017 report into driver education, training and road safety**

Many of the recommendations from the 2017 Staysafe report outlines actions and recommendations for TfNSW to address.

The below is what members of Council's Traffic and Transport team are aware of:

- Section 2.39 of the 2017 Staysafe report - Completion of the Hazard Perception Test (HPT) is now a requirement when transitioning from L's to Red P1. Previously it was Red P1 to Green P2. The HPT supports helping to develop low risk driving behaviours earlier in one's driving career. The test has not been modernised in any way since the 2017 stay safe report.
- Section 2.40 of the 2017 Staysafe report - Outlines that Safety Town is the online interactive resource for children. This has been developed by TfNSW specifically for primary schools. The secondary school road safety online TfNSW resource is called, On the Move (see section (b)). Unfortunately, the Year 11 and 12 school curriculum syllabus does not include a mandatory road safety and driving component.
- Section 2.70 of the 2017 Staysafe report Value of the log book - Regarding completion of the log book and its value in recording accurate log book hours and experience. The log book is supportive educational material that can assist the supervisor in developing low risk driving techniques for their learner.

Upon conducting multiple learner driver parent workshops across ten years, Council's Road Safety Officer has identified, on multiple occasions, that supervisors do not read the log book. This is issued to a learner at the time they obtain their learner permit. Supervisors have admitted to not reading the educational material in the front of the booklet, even though their learners had logged over 60 hours driving time. This component assists the

teaching process with a stepped approach to lesson planning and the progression of driving tasks, as well as important driving manoeuvres.

Each task and manoeuvre require the supervisor to sign and acknowledge their competency. This topic is always brought up in the Road Safety Council Learner Workshops and many supervisors are grateful for the advice.

**Recommendation:** Improved awareness by staff at Service NSW of the value of the log book for supervisors. It should be a requirement of Service NSW testing instructor staff to better inform parents/carers/supervisors at point of obtainment of their child's learner permit.

- The Road User Handbook is the required reading for individuals to study for the learner driver online test. This has been updated since 2017 Staysafe report and reflects better the understanding of sharing the road with motorcyclists, heavy vehicles and bike riders. Unfortunately, it has failed to update the image relating to pedestrian crossings. Included in the handbook is an image of a four lane pedestrian crossing. TfNSW does not permit pedestrian crossing on roads with two or more marked travel lanes – see page 117 of the handbook  
[https://roads\\_waterways.transport.nsw.gov.au/documents/roads/licence/road-user-handbook-interactive.pdf](https://roads_waterways.transport.nsw.gov.au/documents/roads/licence/road-user-handbook-interactive.pdf)

#### f) Other Related Matters

Points for consideration:

- The justice reinvestment model that includes pathways to address intergenerational poverty and prevent crime through free assistance for obtaining identity documents for attaining a learner permit, and free learner driver support.

Support to obtain a licence is a great early intervention and crime prevention action. This has been successful in Bourke, NSW: <https://www.justreinvest.org.au/justice-reinvestment-in-bourke/>

- In 2020 Road Safety Officers in the southern region inquired to TfNSW if a safer driver course prize could be used as an incentive for learners and supervisors to participate in Council's Learner Driver Workshops. The response from TfNSW was that this course is heavily subsidised to being available at \$140 and they cannot double up subsidy by providing additional funding for prize incentives.

The Helping Learner Drivers Become Safer Drivers; parent /carer supervisor workshop, which are conducted by Council's Road Safety Officer, supports increasing awareness of low risk driving techniques. The evaluation of this course has identified that it is fundamental in helping to increase confidence and knowledge for those teaching our youngest road users the fundamentals of learning to drive. Attendance at each workshop can range from 10 - 50



participants. Participants will always leave feeling confident, less anxious about the process of supporting their learner to drive. Providing a prize valued at \$140 may help equip a learner who may not otherwise be given the opportunity to participate in the safer driver course. The WCC Road Safety Officer conducts a maximum of eight learner driver workshops annually

- The Provisional Licence on road driving test is 45 minutes. As time permits, some components of the test may not be conducted. The road safety officer has been informed on occasions that time has not permitted for reverse parking to be tested. A reverse park is not a manoeuvre that will save a life, however, is fundamental to the skills required to be a competent driver. Therefore, it is suggested that consideration of two practical driving tests and one online assessment as follows:
  - Test One: On Road Training Park - Practical skills such as parking, reverse parking, U turns, three point turns.
  - Test Two: On Road Driving - Hazard perception, merging, gap selection, roundabouts, changing lanes.
  - Test Three: On-Line - To include basic mechanics of a vehicle, such as inflating tyres, changing tyres, how to change oil, top up water. The understanding of these components contributes to the safety of the drive and journey, helping to prevent breakdowns, flat tyres and unroadworthy vehicles. The test to be combined with assessment of knowledge regarding hooning, speeding, fatigue, and drink/drug driving.

The behaviour, not the driving ability, contribute to youth aged 17 – 25 being overrepresented in the NSW road toll.

- The NSW road toll has improved, yet young drivers aged 17 – 25 are still overrepresented. The community is key in helping to contribute to the towards zero goal. However, the next step should be a direct campaign and change for younger drivers. Unless there are major changes to training, testing and instruction, there is a risk they will always be overrepresented in the road toll. Something more is required with education, training and assessment. We should not become complacent and we should not accept they will always be overrepresented.

Section 2.44 2017 Staysafe Report - The report recommended an investigation into the role of the Road Safety Officer. It is recommended that a review of the Service NSW Provisional testing process should be the next inquiry the Staysafe committee investigates.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Mandatory re-testing for supervisors of Learner Drivers. The on-road driving assessment tests the skill and not the behaviour. Bad habits develop over time, along with differing attitudes to sharing the road with bicycle riders, motorcyclists and heavy vehicles. Suggestion also to include mandatory assessment for drivers who want to be a supervisor of a learner driver who have accrued a certain number of demerits points.

- Streamlined rules for each state for Graduated Licencing Scheme (GLS). For example, maximum speed limit allowed to travel and passenger restrictions. NSW is leading the way with its advanced stepped approach to the GLS.
- Safer driver courses also taught through schools and TAFE.
- Mandatory road safety in Year 11 and 12 curriculums, including development of improved driving education regarding the separation of drink and driving. The WCC Road Safety Officer is aware from family experience that for teens living in rural areas, it is common for them to use breathalysers at parties before driving home.
- Changes to the safer driver course, allowing it to be accessible to all. Learners could pay the \$140 and obtain an additional 20 hours for the log book or, alternatively, receive the course for free without the additional hours - to be mandated for all learners
- It is an offence to not correctly display L and P plates and enforceable by NSW Police. It carries a \$272 fine and two (2) demerit points. The fine is the incentive to display them correctly. Plates can be displayed using multiple devices including; brackets, magnetic plates, clips, and cable ties. These are all acceptable as long as the whole letter is visible and as close to the registration plate as possible.

Purpose built brackets or clips available for free at Service NSW should be investigated. This could help improve compliance in displaying them correctly. Better education via a poster at Service NSW about the importance of displaying them correctly to be included. Council's Road Safety Officer regularly has discussions with parents of learners who are unaware of the fine and innocently wedge the plate behind the registration obscuring the letter L or P.

- Review of the age one can obtain their motorbike Learner's permit. It is dangerous and worrying for other road users that a person 16 years and 9 months can have a motorbike licence and ride solo yet are not yet qualified to drive a vehicle solo. Motorbike riders are also an overrepresented road user group in NSW road toll and Council believes the riders should have passed their on-road driving test before being approved for a motorbike licence. It is suggested that the motorbike licencing timeline and age should be aligned.  
<https://roadswaterways.transport.nsw.gov.au/roads/licence/rider/index.html>

Wollongong City Council is committed to raising the profile of road safety for all road users in the Wollongong LGA. Ongoing commitment to the community through ongoing strategies, campaigns and infrastructure delivery include:

- Employment of a Road Safety Officer through the TfNSW Local Government Road Safety Program.

- Targeting school zone safety with the development of the Safer Routes to School Working Group.
- Dedicated staff commitment to the Walking Cycling and Access Mobility Reference Group.
- Development of the Cycling Strategy 2030. Council was recently awarded the Bike City Label by the international governing body Union Cyclist Internationale in anticipation of the World Cycling Championships to be held in Wollongong in September 2022.
- Direct alignment in encouraging the increased take up of active transport options through the construction of pop-up cycleways in five suburbs. This includes the conversion of a two-way street to one way to allow for a separated cycleway connecting the Wollongong CBD with the coastal cycleway network. Wollongong will strive to break down those barriers between bike riders and drivers through interactive campaigns, events and education. Having direct access to different driving environments for learners helps highlight, in real time and real scenarios, that it is possible to share the road with vulnerable road users, which is paramount to ongoing improved road safety
- In 2022 Helensburgh will be the first town in the LGA to participate in an innovative approach to trialling 30 km speed zones.

Our newest drivers are the generation of change - let's make it work for them.