

INQUIRY INTO ROAD TRANSPORT AMENDMENT (MOBILE PHONE DETECTION) BILL 2019

Organisation: Transport and Road Safety (TARS) Research Centre, University
of NSW

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24 October 2019

Hon Robert Borsak
Chair, Parliamentary Portfolio Committee No. 5 – Legal Affairs
Legislative Assembly
Parliament House
Macquarie Street
Sydney NSW 2000

Dear Hon Robert Borsak

Inquiry into the Road Transport Amendment (Mobile Phone Detection) Bill 2019

Thank you for your invitation to Transport and Road Safety (TARS) Research Centre at The University of New South Wales regarding this inquiry, to which I respond on behalf of TARS. We are a multi-disciplinary research group dedicated entirely to conducting road and transport safety research based on the safe system principle that focuses on Safer Roads, Safer Vehicles, and Safer People.

The relationship between mobile phone use while driving and crash involvement has been difficult to establish due to the limitations of police crash data and the under-reporting of mobile phone use during crashes. However, there is evidence of a strong causal association between texting and crashes (Oviedo-Trespalacios et al, 2016). There is also a general consensus that all activities that require drivers to take their eyes off the road result in higher likelihood of crashes (Hickman and Hanowski, 2012).

While the majority of road users recognise a certain level of increased crash risk associated with mobile phone use while driving, a significant proportion of drivers admit to recently performing the behaviour (Petroulias, 2001). As with other risky driving behaviours (e.g., speeding and drink driving), legislation and enforcement are powerful tools to reduce inappropriate behaviour and improve road safety. Despite current enforcement efforts, mobile phone use while driving continues. This is partly due to the difficulties and limitations of current enforcement efforts by the police (Nevin et al, 2017).

The use of automated enforcement using cameras would address the limitations of current enforcement practices of mobile phone use while driving. While TARS members support in principle the proposed Road Transport Amendment (Mobile Phone Detection) Bill, there are a number of issues that need to be addressed to support the effectiveness of these changes.

Far reaching public education campaigns are needed to inform the public of the exact nature of legislative changes related to mobile phone use while driving. Research is also needed to examine the level of public knowledge of these changes.

To our knowledge, mobile phone detection cameras were not used in combination with warning signs during the recently implemented trial in NSW (although speed cameras are routinely used in combination with warning signs). The use of cameras to detect mobile phone use while driving should be, at least during the first stages of the implementation, coupled with the use of warning signs. Research in the area of speed control has shown that the use of warning signs to raise the visibility of enforcement activities is effective in reducing speeding as well as increasing public awareness of the issue (Wilmots, 2016).

To date, there are no comprehensive evaluations to assess the effectiveness of mobile phone legislation and enforcement in Australia. There is a need to evaluate the implementation of the proposed amendment to the Road Transport Act in relation to mobile phone detection in order to gain public support for and trust in the legislation.

References

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Sincerely

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