

These notes are provided by the facilitator of the Toowoomba Young Driver Forum and do not represent the view of Queensland Transport nor do they suggest future government policy

Queensland Youth: On the road and in control

Facilitator Report of Community Discussion Forums

Forum Number: 1 *Location:* Toowoomba

Number of Participants Estimated 50

Forum Panel Members:

Hon Paul Lucas, Minister for Transport and Main Roads
Mr Tony Kursius, Executive Director, Land Transport and Safety Division
Dr. Ron Christie
Inspector Wayne Woods, Regional Traffic Coordinator, Southern Region, Queensland Police
Gary Fites, Royal Automobile Club of Queensland

General Description

The forum was held in the Cathedral Centre, Neil St, Toowoomba.

The forum operated as an iterative exchange between participants and the panel using data show slides to remind participants of the key initiatives within the discussion paper. The forum was opened by the Minister who provided a brief and informative summary of the current level of safety surrounding young novice drivers in Queensland.

Key Issues highlighted by the Minister

- Novices 2.5 times others crash rate
- Is there support for greater parental involvement?
- Queensland 40+% reduction, and 20+% reduction young road users, last decade
- Minister – Government can't deliver road safety on its own, community must practice and participate to improve road safety
- Young Drivers – Inexperience (learning something for the first time), Year 1 critical, some risk taking, other behaviours add to inexperience. (ie. Night driving, passengers, speeding, mobiles and other distractions, drink driving, hooning)
- Young Drivers are safe as Learners!!!
- Need to consider the special circumstances of rural youth.

Major Viewpoints

Pre-Learner Phase Initiatives

Pre Learner Education Package

There was extensive discussion about the nature and need for pre-learner educational experiences. The group while supporting the concept in principle were mindful of the need for education to be targeted at the time of greatest readiness. There were concerns that such a program before young people had the right to drive might "fall on deaf ears".

First Aid Training

Participants acknowledged the intent of this initiative to establish a greater level of safety awareness amongst young people before getting behind a wheel. However the general view expressed was this should be *a low priority* and was not a central initiative likely to reduce young driver trauma substantially.

Learner Licence Initiatives

120 Hours of driving experience with a logbook

Participants determined that this would increase the level of experience during the period when young drivers are safest. There were concerns that not all parents are supportive in providing opportunities for practice, and some young people are in circumstances without ready access to vehicles for practice.

The group felt that some identification or certification that the 120 hours had been undertaken. There were concerns that some people would falsify log book records to meet the requirements of the letter of the law and there was a suggestion that commercial driving instructors could be used in some way in the certification process.

While people recognised that it was likely to be only a minority of the community who might engage in falsification, there was a view expressed that a system should not be designed which allows falsification to be undertaken easily.

Education for learner drivers, supervisors and parents

Participants considered that *information and advice* about what experiences they should be providing, and at what time in the learning process these should be presented, *was very important*. There was evidence provided that there are differences between the advice of driving instructors and parents in some circumstances and participants noted that authoritative, easily read information would help to reduce these circumstances.

Hold a Learner licence for at least 12 months

Participants considered this initiative would enable the time required for 120 hours of practice to be undertaken during the learner period.

Reduce the learner licence age to 16 years

Participants considered that this initiative would allow for extended practice under the safest circumstances of supervised driving. In some respects this initiative was seen

much like the minimum 12 months period for an L plate, as a mechanism to enable sufficient time for the experience to be undertaken.

There were some concerns expressed that safety levels may be compromised by the increased number of 16 year olds behind the wheel, albeit in a supervised capacity.

Evidence was presented to show that injury reductions had been experienced in countries which had instituted such a system.

Review of penalties and sanctions for learner drivers who break the law

Participants considered it would be better to have penalty arrangements which continued the learning experience of young people, rather than those which placed them outside the system because of an offence while driving under supervision.

While there were few young people in the group, those present did not express any concern about being required to extend the period as an L plate driver as a penalty for an offence.

The suggestion was made that the licensed supervising driver could also be subject to a penalty given the role they are undertaking in supervising the learners practice.

Review current Q-SAFE practical driving assessment

Participants involved in professional driver training put forward a number of ideas about this initiative.

Introduce competency based training and assessment (CBTA) for learner drivers

Some participants, predominantly driving instructors, were very enthusiastic about the competency based training and assessment, although some recognised that this would be unsuitable for the role parents may be asked to undertake in providing practical driving experiences.

Provisional Licence Initiatives

Peer passenger restrictions

There was an extensive and constructive discussion around this initiative. The potential of good injury reductions being achieved was noted. There was concern that the concept be held to peers only and that those with family or similar responsibilities must be able to complete those responsibilities through an exemption scheme.

There was concern that the proposal would increase the number of young people driving vehicles, and such an approach could add considerable administrative complexity which would need to be considered.

The period for application of the restrictions was seen as most appropriate for the first 12 months of the Provisional licence, with perhaps some special arrangements being put in place for older (over 25) learners whose crash profile appears to be a little different.

Late night driving restrictions

The group considered that such an approach was contradictory to the aims of the extended experience supported in the L plate period and that young people would see it that way. Evidence was provided by Gary Fites from the RACQ surveys that currently both parents and their children did not support the idea.

There was also concern that an extensive level of exemptions may be required for those undertaking part-time or shift work.

Split Provisional phase (P1 and P2)

Participants considered that splitting the Provisional Licence is a necessary outcome of support for the passenger restrictions during part of the period.

Evidence was presented to show the system appeared to be operating well in an administrative capacity in NSW and some people even felt the shift from one coloured P plate to another may be seen by some young drivers as a step in graduation of a 'badge of honour' in the learner driving process.

P Plates

Participants acknowledged the advice from Inspector Woods that for effective and efficient enforcement of provisions which distinguish between Provisional drivers and others there would need to be a reintroduction of P plates. There was acknowledgement that this would have to happen and little concern was expressed should this occur.

The group put forward the need for a publicity campaign to explain the changes and the reasons behind them to the community.

Screen based Hazard Perception test (HPT)

Dr Christie explained the nature and operation of a hazard perception test. In response to a question relating to motorcycling Dr Christie advised that a separate test would need to be constructed for riders but that no jurisdiction had seen the need to establish one to date given the relatively small number of riders compared to drivers in the system.

While some people indicated an interest in such a test, the majority of participants felt a smooth automatic progression from P1 to P2 should apply provided the driving had been offence free over the period.

Working with driving instructors after changes to the GLS

Assistance for instructors to amend their learning programs to take account of any changes was supported, and while not discussed in detail, the general view was that the costs associated with the training should be borne across the whole community through taxpayer funds.

Develop an education and media campaign on driver distraction

Participants noted the influence of distractions and agreed with the implementation of a campaign targeting the whole community on the issue

Prohibit all mobile phone use for learner and provisional drivers when driving

There were strong views expressed by participants in relation to mobile phones. Many felt that a ban on usage was totally justified and should apply not only to young drivers but to all drivers. Others were concerned that additional distractions such as CB radio operation and taxi schedulers could have similar effects and should also be subject to greater control in their usage.

One participant felt that a differential ban on mobiles was not justified because similar levels of distraction could be generated by passengers. While this appears reasonable on the face of it, there is a need for clearer advice about the research on distractions and the differences, if any, noted by different forms of distraction.

Review of penalties and sanctions for provisional drivers who break the law.

Participants agreed with the need for a review of penalties and sanctions, as raised in discussions on numerous occasions during the evening, however were no detailed discussions about the nature of penalties or the extent of revisions which might be acceptable.

Incentive and reward options for provisional drivers

This issue was addressed late in the evening and consequently did not generate extensive discussion. The view was expressed that banks (presumably as vehicle financiers) and insurers could be more innovative in supporting those safe young drivers.

Gary Fites felt that there were existing in-built incentives for safe driving in the system (no fines, no claim bonuses faster, cheaper insurance etc), however others in the community suggested that young people could well respond positively to the immediacy of a clearly identified incentive (i.e the cash back concept used in marketing).

Education and Training support for provisional drivers

This issue generated extensive discussion right throughout the evening. Some participants felt that specific technical driving skills were not taught and should be, others countered that these skills were taught, but differently to what they were in the past.

Advice was provided on the importance of cognitive skills (thinking, reasoning, anticipating etc.) to safe driving and the poor record of technical skills based courses on safety performance.

While participants noted the intensity of views in the discussion and acknowledged the general inability world wide to establish novice driver training which results in unequivocal safety benefits, there was a general view that something needs to be done in this area. In this context, future forums might benefit by a brief explanation of what is planned in the national novice driver education program.

Restricting the cars that provisional drivers may drive

Participants gave several different views on this issue. Some strongly held views were expressed that the vehicle was not the problem, and that even low powered vehicles could be driven at speeds and in a manner to endanger the community. Those supporting this view felt the action should be taken in respect of those with unsafe attitudes.

Others, however, noted a penchant for many young males to drive high powered vehicles if they could do so, and the high level of power which was available to drivers in modern vehicles. These participants felt that if some system could be devised which discouraged these actions then it should be implemented.

There was insufficient time to discuss the experience of other states currently operating power restrictions or of the wider implications in one vehicle families where the only vehicle is of the high powered variety.

Speed limit restrictions

Participants noted the research evidence suggesting such an approach was counter productive, and many raised anecdotes relating to the likelihood of tailgating heavy vehicles leading to worry and fear amongst novices.

Other

During the discussion on initiatives which might be undertaken in the Pre-Learner phases some innovative ideas were expressed. These included:

- Exposing groups of young pre drivers to accident victims to highlight the potential problems and issues which can arise from unsafe road behaviour
- Parents providing commentary while they are driving on hazards and issues they note and the actions they have taken as experienced drivers to avoid problems.



Ray Taylor
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