

Queensland Youth: On the road and in control

Facilitator Report of Community Discussion Forums

Forum Number: 4 *Location:* Townsville

Number of Participants Estimated 50

Forum Panel Members:

Hon Paul Lucas, Minister for Transport and Main Roads
Hon Lindy Nelson-Carr, Parliamentary Secretary for Transport
Mr Tony Kursius, Executive Director, Land Transport and Safety Division
Dr. Ron Christie
Inspector Brian Richardson, Traffic Coordinator, Central Region, Queensland Police
Gary Fites, Royal Automobile Club of Queensland
Nick Benjamin, young Queenslander with direct crash experience

General Description

The forum was held in the PCYC, Wellington St, Aitkenvale.

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 have 2.5 times the crash rate of experienced drivers
- Is there support for greater parental involvement?
- Queensland has had a 40+% reduction in fatalities, and 20+% reduction in young road user fatalities over the last decade
- Government can't deliver road safety on its own. The community must practice and participate to improve road safety
- The major young driver issue is Inexperience (learning something for the first time), Year 1 as a provisional licensee is a critical risk period. As well some young drivers add to their inexperience risk with other behaviour. (i.e. Night driving, travelling with more than 2 passengers, speeding, using mobile phones while driving, being unable to deal with other distractions, drink driving, hooning and picking up bad habits from other drivers)
- Young Drivers are safe as Learners!!!
- In Queensland there is a need to consider the special circumstances of rural youth.

Major Viewpoints

Pre-Learner Phase Initiatives

Pre Learner Education Package

The group supported this concept in principle however there was little discussion and the idea did not receive the same level of attention as other initiatives. Some participants made the suggestion that there was a need to include facing young people with the consequences of crashes at this stage so that it would help with attitude formation.

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 lower priority.

Learner Licence Initiatives

A package of measures, including 120 Hours of driving experience with a logbook, Education for learner drivers, supervisors and parents, holding the learner licence for at least 12 months and reducing the licence age to 16 years.

Participants determined that this would increase the level of experience during the period when young drivers are safest. While supporting the approach, there were concerns that the total of 120 hours may not be able to be achieved and that there were practical difficulties to be overcome..

Issues raised which they felt would need to be addressed included;

- The need to advise, train and encourage parents in the role of supervisors of practice
- The need to provide information to ensure that young drivers experienced a variety of different experiences during the practice.
- The need to establish mechanisms to prevent or limit the potential of fraudulent preparation of the log book. One participant felt that the licence inspectors would be able to easily identify those who claimed substantial practice and had not done so.
- The need to put in place special arrangements to ensure opportunities for access to vehicles and licensed drivers were available for disadvantaged, remote and unsupported indigenous youth

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

Many participants spoke on this issue. There was a concern that extending existing penalty regimes to an offending learner driver may work to undo the good work being undertaken to extend their supervised practice with the 120 hours package. It was also expressed that the novice has learner status at this time and it would not be appropriate to deal with them as if they were a fully licensed driver.

An interesting approach was raised suggesting that as the novice was being supervised at the time, if a penalty was deemed appropriate it should be taken by the supervising driver.

There was some support for penalties which would be designed to extend the supervised learning period of novice drivers rather than traditional fines. Novice drivers themselves felt such an approach would be 'fair enough'.

Review current Q-SAFE practical driving assessment

This issue was addressed in some detail. Many participants who were experienced driving instructors spoke enthusiastically supporting the need for an upgraded system. Defensive driving concepts were supported by some participants and others felt a first aid test of some type might be appropriate at this point in the process. A wide variety of content for the tests was raised including issues related to vehicle maintenance, tyre pressures and braking techniques. During this discussion it was noted that inspectors did undertake a vehicle inspection prior to the test and would refuse to undertake a test in an unroadworthy vehicle.

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

This initiative was also a popular one for discussion. The concept of establishing a more standardised learning regime was seen to be beneficial; however it was unclear whether participants generally supported the notion of progressive assessment resulting in endorsed instructors issuing the provisional licence. Some participants felt this approach should be integrated into a method resulting in endorsement for different licence types, or licensing for specialist vehicles.

There was a strong view expressed by a senior driving instructor that such an approach was suitable for training courses developed and delivered to novice drivers after their provisional licence, rather than during the learner phase

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.

Concerns raised included the following:

- It would appear to cut across the operation of designated driver initiatives which young people felt were working well and were effective.
- There would be an increase in the number of young drivers on the road with a concern that this might increase the number of crashes.
- There was a need for exemptions for activities such as ferrying family members, work group arrangements, sports club group arrangements and the like. Many participants felt this would result in a complex system to administer.
- There would be difficulties in rural areas where other transport options did not exist and where the costs of increasing the number of vehicles going to a location would be increased substantially to meet with the requirements.

Additionally some participants felt personal safety might be compromised where group travel would not be permitted.

- The difficulties of enforcing the requirements were also raised and it was noted that such a regime would need to be accompanied by a system which identified the drivers subject to the provisions.
- There was also a call for an education campaign on safe passengering, rather than support for a legislative ban.

While the general group view was not to support the approach there was a general endorsement of applying such restrictions as a penalty to offending drivers.

Late night driving restrictions

The group were not keen about this initiative. Concerns raised included:

- the high level of inconvenience which many could see would be generated
- the need to deal with minorities and people with unusual circumstances.
- Concerns about personal safety
- The need to ensure that continued experience of night driving was undertaken
- The high level of complexity required to deal with exemptions
- The difficulty for people working shift hours and the need for them to seek exemptions
- The general lack of public transport to use as an alternative

As in the case of the passenger control initiatives there was little support for applying the idea 'across the board', but good support for applying it as a penalty condition for offending drivers.

Split Provisional phase (P1 and P2) incorporating the use of P plates

This idea was generally supported provided there was a community education campaign to explain the role of P plates and to encourage supportive on-road actions by other drivers.

Screen based Hazard Perception test (HPT)

There was some discussion of this initiative. Most participants supported the idea as a method to assess progress with safe driving. One participant felt the test should be applied earlier in the process as an entry test to the L plate provisions despite the research advice indicating a better fit after some period of driving experience. Participants did not support an automatic progression from P1 to P2 and felt a test of capability was an important step in the graduated licensing process being discussed.

Working with driving instructors after changes to the GLS

There was no discussion of this initiative

Initiatives aimed at driver distraction including an education and media campaign on driver distraction and prohibiting mobile phone use for L and P drivers.

There was little discussion of this initiative

Review of penalties and sanctions for provisional drivers who break the law and incentive and reward options for provisional drivers

There was no discussion of this initiative beyond the comments presented in looking at penalties for drivers during the learner phase presented earlier.

Education and Training support for provisional drivers

This initiative was the basis of much of the discussion on educational methods which occurred at different times throughout the evening. Many participants with strong driving instructor experience felt such an approach should be undertaken with support for defensive driving concepts as a basis to the program.

Evidence was presented showing that while defensive driving and advanced driving courses of different types did develop a range of improved skills and were often strongly supported by participants, there was a lack of scientific research linking the courses to improved safety and reductions in on-road crashes.

Strong opinions were expressed during vigorous debate on this issue. The commencement to a major trial of a training course coordinated by the Federal government in NSW and Victoria was noted. One participant felt that the key ingredient missing was the need to ensure concentration while driving and that consistent concentration was missing amongst all drivers.

Other provisional licence restrictions including restricting the cars that provisional drivers may drive and speed limit restrictions

Participants did not support the idea of vehicle restrictions. They felt they would be difficult to employ and would be subject to constant amendment with the development of vehicle engineering. There was also no support for differential speed limits to apply to P or L drivers. Many felt it might lead to apprehension amongst young drivers who would experience tailgating on key highways which might create unwanted pressure on their driving.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ray Taylor', with a stylized, cursive script.

Ray Taylor
February 26 2006