

Queensland Youth: On the road and in control

Facilitator Report of Community Discussion Forums

Forum Number: 9
Number of Participants

Location: Sunshine Coast
Estimated 65

Forum Panel Members:

Hon Lindy Nelson-Carr MP, Parliamentary Secretary for Transport
Mr Tony Kursius, Executive Director, Land Transport and Safety Division
Dr. Barry Watson, Senior Lecturer, CARRSQ, QUT.
Inspector Rod Frain, Traffic Coordinator, North Coast Region, Queensland Police
Joel Tucker, Research Advisor, Royal Automobile Club of Queensland
Ashlea White, Youth representative

General Description

The forum was held in the Innovation Centre, University of Sunshine Coast, Sippy Downs Drive, Sippy Downs.

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 Parliamentary Secretary who provided a brief and informative summary of the current level of safety surrounding young novice drivers in Queensland.

Key Issues highlighted by the Parliamentary Secretary

- 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

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 were enthusiastically involved in discussion about this package of initiatives.

The intent of the package was embraced

Despite these feelings, there were concerns which most participants felt had to be addressed if the concept was to be successful. These included:

- That the total of 120 hours may not be achievable and that there were practical difficulties to be overcome. Concerns were expressed that parents may not be willing to give the time and effort required. Ideas to help included the provision of practice sessions in schools as an elective which could be an adaptation of existing electives and the concept of instructor hours counting for a multiple of hours towards the 120.
- The need to advise, train and encourage parents in the role of supervisors of practice.
- The need to ensure that young drivers were exposed to a variety of different experiences during the practice. Participants endorsed suggestions that a range of experiences should be outlined, or perhaps even required, but doubted that without encouragement all parents would provide the time and their vehicles for wet weather driving, freeway driving, unsealed road driving, urban traffic, late night, into setting sun driving and other situations which would be met regularly as a provisional sole licensed driver.
- The need to establish mechanisms to prevent or limit the potential of fraudulent preparation of the log book.

Some innovative approaches were raised during discussion. One participant suggested adding activity to be undertaken by the young driver as a form of compulsory homework when moving through different stages of log book experience.

There were no concerns about the minimum period of 12 months for holding the learner permit but some participants were worried about commencing the learner permit process at age 16. They felt individuals may be too immature at this age even in the situation of supervised driving which was being proposed.

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

There was no discussion of this initiative.

Review current Q-SAFE practical driving assessment

In discussion on this idea young people felt the current approach led to people concentrating on passing the test and not being encouraged to develop the wider skills and capabilities seen as important for safe driving.

Most participants supported the improvement in the test, especially for it to be linked with the expected experiences associated with 120 hours practice. The difficulty of testing for all these experiences was acknowledged, but there was a call for the test to be wider in its approach. Others felt there was a need to implement a system to reduce the inconsistencies between application of the test from one location to another.

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

Participants supported the need for an approach which helped those people subject to 'exam nerves' who didn't produce their best under the current system, even when their instructors felt they were competent.

There were calls for additional training or education to be built into the system at this point with individuals looking for a combination of some skills development, hazard perception training, a focus on safe behaviour patterns and seeking an objective psychological response amongst drivers to the driving task.

Provisional Licence Initiatives

Peer passenger restrictions

While the crash benefits of this initiative were noted, many participants remained cautious about its implementation and were concerned about a number of practical issues which they felt would be difficult to overcome.

Issues raised included:

- A high level of inconvenience was foreshadowed by some young participants who felt it was 'unfair' and required further reliance on parents for return journeys. Not all parents would be able to provide this level of support.
- Existing car pooling and designated driver arrangements undertaken by groups of young people would be threatened
- Expected difficulties with enforcement associated with identifying those people subject to the provisions and those who were not.
- 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 many areas where other transport options did not exist or were very intermittent.

There was a strong call from one participant for the issue to be handled through educational means to achieve a restriction on passenger numbers rather than through a legislative ban.

Another participant felt there should be an attempt to combine rewards with penalties as an approach to encouraging voluntary control of passenger numbers.

Another view expressed was that the vehicle for many young males was a status object and that the urge to show it off to mates was very strong and would make either an educational approach or even a legislative ban difficult to achieve

Late night driving restrictions

Similar comments were made in respect of this initiative as were received in relation to the passenger restrictions. In addition, a number of participants were concerned that it may add to the personal safety risk of young people, especially young women, late at night.

Many participants felt that alcohol was a key problem at this time, together with fatigue, but there was understanding that the intent of the initiative was to limit the level of risk faced by young provisional drivers both from their own driving but also from that of others on the road at the higher risk night period.

Work requirements were described as particularly important in this case with many young people working shifts late into the night and early morning. Despite these concerns there was a view that a limited application of both the passenger restrictions and the late night restrictions might be implemented, especially during those first few months of very high risk which faced provisional drivers. It should be noted that some young forum participants encouraged this view from the group.

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

Participants supported this idea but many felt it was not without some problems.

There was concern that the plate may result in provisional drivers becoming a target for the poor behaviour of other road users and that if this occurred it would encourage provisional drivers not to wear the plate.

An accompanying educational campaign for all drivers to explain the meaning of the plates and to encourage supportive on-road behaviour towards young drivers was seen as an important component.

The idea of building in some rewards and penalties approach with respect to the administration of the p plate arrangements was also raised as a mechanism to try to keep people 'in the system' while they are still, in effect, learning .

Screen based Hazard Perception test (HPT)

Comments raised included that the approach should be viable, it was a valuable component of the process and the issue of hazard recognition was a key factor in safe driving.

There were questions about where the test might be most effectively employed. People recognised the rationale for the suggestion that it be placed at the end of the P1 period to act as a check of progress prior to moving on the P2. Others felt it should be applied earlier in the licensing process perhaps even as entry tests prior to receiving the learners permit.

There was also support for some form of additional training or education to accompany the shift from P1 to P2, perhaps using computer based simulation activities for this in addition to using computers for testing.

Participants were opposed to any automatic progress of drivers from the P1 to P2 phase.

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.

The youth representative identified both use of phones and in particular texting as problems. She felt however that few young people had hands free kits and that the current ban on hand held phone use should be effective.

Police explained some enforcement difficulties but still felt able to discriminate between phone use and other in vehicle activities which are not currently subject to direct legislative control.

A wide range of other distractions, both in the vehicle and outside the vehicle were highlighted during discussion as needing to be addressed in a campaign. The degree of distraction caused by roadside memorials for crash victims was also spoken about in this context, but the limited research activity surrounding these prevented any conclusive assessment of whether they were a problem.

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

Education and Training support for provisional drivers

Participants felt strongly there was a place for some education and training for provisional drivers. Most supported the concept of defensive driving or off-road training programs featuring some skills development linked to 'reading the road and traffic' capabilities.

During discussion on a number of initiatives, individual participants spoke very supportively about their experiences with defensive driving and advanced driving programs with a call for key local or regional initiatives to be subject to scientific evaluation

Information about the very robust international research on the lack of overall safety benefits in the form of lower crash rates from drivers undertaking these courses compared to those not taking the courses was provided. This served to frustrate the views of many participants who felt their own personal experience was very rewarding and could not accept that a similar effect would not apply to others.

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

A vehicle limitation was seen as a good idea by some, based on some power to weight assessment, with the additional need to get some change in the nature of advertising for motor cars which currently glorified vehicle speed and power.

Others were concerned with the ease of vehicle modifications which could make such a program unreliable and the difficulties for enforcement of vehicle restrictions were acknowledged, with the police advice that this would appear to be more difficult than any of the other initiatives discussed.

There was a view that speed limitations applying to provisional drivers was not a good idea and that it would subject them to tailgating and other forms of road rage in addition to perhaps even adding to crash risk.

Pre-Learner Phase Initiatives

Pre Learner Education Package

There was no discussion of this initiative specifically, however during discussions on the nature of education programs suitable for provisional licence drivers a number of participants felt there was a need for some introductory information, probably delivered through schools, before young people were able to drive on roads

First Aid Training

There was no discussion of this initiative

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ray Taylor', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ray Taylor
March 7 2006