Should a maximum age for public passenger vehicles be removed?
Discussion paper
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Introduction

A vast road network means a wide range of transport options for community members and tourists. Exploring Queensland may mean you hop on a bus, tourist vehicle, take an airport transfer to get around. Transport and Main Roads’ role is to ensure there is regulation to make sure this activity is both safe for passengers as well as viable for operators.

In June 2015, the Queensland Government approved the public release of this discussion paper to obtain feedback from Queenslanders on age limits for these vehicles. The aim is to use this feedback to reduce restrictions for industry and improve transport safety outcomes for the community.

This discussion paper sets out what the current policy is, what information there is for and against, and what changes are being proposed. Thank you for your time and input into shaping this Queensland policy.

Meanings of terms used in this paper

<table>
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<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Australian Design Rules</td>
<td>Australia’s national standards for vehicle safety, anti-theft and emissions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bus</td>
<td>A motor vehicle with seating capacity for 9 or more passengers (excluding the driver).</td>
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<tr>
<td>Forward-control passenger vehicle</td>
<td>A passenger vehicle, not being an off-road passenger vehicle, having up to 9 seating positions, including that of the driver, and in which the centre of the steering wheel is in the forward quarter of the vehicle’s total length.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Light bus</td>
<td>A bus with a gross vehicle mass of not more than 5t.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Off-road passenger vehicle</td>
<td>A passenger vehicle having up to 9 seating positions, including that of the driver and being designed with special features for off-road operation.</td>
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<td>Passenger car</td>
<td>A passenger vehicle, other than an off-road passenger vehicle or a forward-control passenger vehicle, having up to 9 seating positions, including the driver’s position.</td>
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Purpose of this discussion paper

The purpose of this discussion paper is to seek feedback from Queenslanders on possible changes to:

- the maximum age limits of passenger vehicles (forward-control and off-road) used to provide public passenger services; and
- the requirement that a light bus must be less than 15 years old when first introduced into service by an operator.

The proposed changes are not intended to apply to forward-control and off-road passenger vehicles operated as licensed taxis or limousines. Separate age limits apply to taxi and limousines.

The proposed changes have been developed by reviewing the current requirements and considering vehicle design and safety standards, passenger comfort and expectations, and the benefits and disadvantages of imposing maximum age limits.

The proposal outlined in this paper is not government policy and is provided for consultation purposes only.

Queenslanders are invited to review the discussion paper and complete the online survey to show whether they support or do not support the proposal. They are also able to provide extra comments or skip questions they do not wish to answer. No personal information will be collected.
The changes being considered
This discussion paper considers:

- the removal of prescribed maximum age limits on forward-control and off-road passenger vehicles used to provide public passenger services other than taxi or limousine services;
- the removal of the requirement that a light bus must be less than 15 years old when first introduced into service by an operator.

No changes to maximum age limits on buses are being considered.

Maximum age limits for forward-control and off-road passenger vehicles
The Transport Operations (Passenger Transport) Standard 2010 (the Standard) prescribes maximum age limits on forward-control and off-road passenger vehicles used by accredited operators providing public passenger services (other than taxi or limousine services) in Queensland.

The maximum vehicle age for forward-control and off-road passenger vehicles is 10 years. This means a passenger vehicle used today can only be as old as a 2005 model.

Maximum age limits on forward-control and off-road passenger vehicles benefit the community and industry by potentially ensuring services used to provide services have higher standards of comfort and safety.

Some of the other benefits for using models capped at a ten year life-span include:

- The introduction of safer and more comfortable vehicles when older vehicles are retired from use, having reached the maximum vehicle age. The Australian Design Rules are under continuous review and improved safety features are progressively applied to forward-control and off-road passenger vehicles.
- The passenger transport industry enjoys a reputation of providing services in a newer fleet that is constantly refreshed.
- Reduced risk of major breakdowns of vehicles, a particularly important benefit in remote areas.
- An enhanced reputation of the Queensland’s tourist industry through the provision of modern vehicles and efficient transport services to tourists.
- Lower operational costs associated with fuel and maintenance of younger vehicles and lower emissions produced by these vehicles.

There is evidence that over the years, new vehicles have become safer and less polluting. Examples of advances in the last 10 years are:

- Seatbelts – this standard has undergone three revisions. The standards for seatbelts continue to evolve and seatbelts on new vehicles are considered to be of a higher integrity than their predecessors.
- Electronic Stability Control System – this safety feature is considered the most significant life-saving safety feature since the introduction of seatbelts in the 1970s. This feature helps a driver maintain control during emergency manoeuvres and on slippery roads.
- Dynamic side impact occupant protection – this feature improves occupant safety and survival when hit by another vehicle or stationary object in a side-on collision.
- Offset frontal impact occupant protection – this feature improves occupant safety and survival when hit by another vehicle in an offset collision. This type of collision is the most common.
- Engine emission control – tighter emission control requirements.
• Noise emission – tighter noise emission control requirements.

In addition to the mandatory standards above, the vehicle manufacturing industry has also introduced several safety features voluntarily in the last decade. These include features such as: anti-lock braking systems, rear-vision cameras, seatbelt reminders to rear passengers, and speed and collision warning systems.

It could be asserted that maximum age limits have ensured that public passenger vehicles are updated and, as a result, customers have benefited from services being provided in newer vehicles. However it is considered a similar outcome would, for the most part, still be achieved if maximum age limits were removed. It is thought that operators would continue to maintain and replace their vehicles to ensure they are not commercially disadvantaged in such a competitive market.

Operators of vehicles providing public passenger services are required to maintain a current Certificate of Inspection at all times. The Certificate of Inspection process involves a check of the major safety components of a vehicle and for public passenger vehicles this must occur every six months. The removal of maximum age limits for forward-control and off-road passenger vehicles would allow operators to continue to use these vehicles provided that a current Certificate of Inspection was held for the vehicle.

The guidelines governing the Certificate of Inspection process are as applicable to the inspection of a 40 year old vehicle as they are to a 2 year old vehicle. That is, for any vehicle being inspected, regardless of age, the normal Certificate of Inspection process would apply to ensure the safety of the vehicle at the time of the inspection.

If the maximum age limits were removed for forward-control and off-road passenger vehicles, as long as the Certificate of Inspection process was maintained, no additional inspection process would be required to confirm the safety or soundness of a vehicle.

Why should there be change to maximum age limits?

A review of maximum vehicle age limits found there was no significant benefit to be gained from maintaining age restrictions on forward-control and off-road passenger vehicles. The review found age restrictions on these vehicles imposed an unnecessary regulatory burden on operators and restricted commercial decisions by operators in a competitive market.

The removal of prescribed age limits will effectively give passenger transport operators using forward-control and off-road passenger vehicles greater freedom in making business decisions about the choice of vehicles used to provide services. Operators will be free to use forward-control passenger vehicles and off-road passenger vehicles of any age as long as they maintain a current Certificate of Inspection.

It is worth nothing that passenger cars do not have a prescribed maximum age limit, however, these vehicles are restricted through legislation and can only be used to provide specific types of services. The removal of prescribed age limits for forward-control and off-road passenger vehicles would align with the approach taken for passenger cars and create a consistent outcome for operators.

Maximum 15 year age limit on light buses being first introduced to services

The Standard requires a light bus must be less than 15 years old when first introduced into service. This requirement is within the scope of this review.

A 20 year maximum age limit applies to the use of light buses, similar to the 10 year maximum age limit on the use of forward-control and off-road passenger vehicles, however this is not being considered for review at this time.

It is understood that the entry age requirement was introduced in the 1990s. The rationale for this requirement is no longer clear. It is thought this requirement was introduced to prevent passenger transport operators from using cheap imported light buses that did not meet Australian Design Rules requirements. At the time, an exemption from Australian Design Rules requirements had applied to vehicles that were at least 15 years old. However, this exemption no longer applies to vehicles manufactured from 1989. As a 20 year age limit applies to the use of light
buses, buses built prior to 1989 can no longer be used by operators and consequently there is no longer a concern about Australian Design Rules compliance.

Proposed change

It is proposed to remove the prescribed maximum age limits on forward-control and off-road passenger vehicles used to provide public passenger services (other than taxi or limousine service) and remove the requirement that a light bus must be less than 15 years old when first introduced to service by a passenger transport operator. It is believed there is no compelling reason for maintaining these restrictions.