

Economy and Infrastructure Committee,
Legislative Council
Victoria

Safer Road Use

Submission from a motorist with decades of driving experience and a preference for arriving safely.

In my view the vast majority of drivers and riders are courteous and considerate. I also think pedestrians on the whole comply with the requirements for their safety.

Risk

Road use presents risk. Casualties including deaths are critical data in researching safer road use. However, is that enough?

Imagine the cliff - fence or emergency response? A cliff presents a possible hazard. The level of risk might be mitigated by an adequate fence at the top. The consequences of exposure to risk might be addressed by an ambulance at the bottom. Which is better - prevention or cure? This concept questions exclusive focus on the specific data from serious injuries or deaths. (The illustration suggests a hearse at the bottom of the cliff...!)

Data

All collisions have something to say.

Collection of road collision data and its interpretation is crucial. The opinions and submissions of expert witnesses must weigh heavily in reaching decisions. In that regard I will substantially support the views of the RACV. (That body focussed on fatal crashes, which however are proportionally far less common than they were.)

In (workplace) safety generally the notion of the "near miss" is considered significant. Reports of near miss events can contribute to the control of risk. Many "prangs" happen and should be seen as "near misses" in terms of potential casualties on the road.

An investigation of road safety issues needs the most possible data and a set of graduated recommendations. The recommendations also need precinct specific application. So, for example, it may be desirable to reduce all road speed limits. However, it is strongly recommended that speed limits on secondary roads are reduced. Enforcement following change needs to be given extra priority in relevant precincts. Apart from Police reports, one source of data should be the insurance industry. The collisions which happen with uninsured vehicles, and with no Police involvement, might be quantified through the motor vehicle repair industry.

Funding

Unfortunately, the 2020 state of the economy probably means that many desirable improvements may have to be deferred. Priorities need to be determined and funds allocated.

I am puzzled at the huge expenditure on level crossing removal at the expense of increasing road safety. Yes, I do observe hazardous driver behaviour on level crossings. Yes, I feel sorry for train drivers (and for tram and bus drivers). Yes, LXR is promoted as in the interests of road safety but I have seen no data to support the program.

Other jurisdictions

It is very evident that different jurisdictions have differing approaches to road safety, despite the attempts to create consistency across the nation. Having twice migrated across the Murray River, I am directly aware of some of the variations.

What are the anomalies?

How can the better approach be determined?

How can more useful data be acquired?

Supporting Road Safety

What is critical to road safety?

Safety rules and requirements

Any observer will note drivers who seem to flout (or be ignorant) of the "Rules of the Road".

I frequently observe drivers:

- using mobile devices - this is widespread. (Any effective means to disable such devices whilst moving would be beneficial.)
- routinely doing u-turns on across the unbroken continuous line and obstructing traffic;
- doing U-turns across the tram (even a tram travelling from the vehicle's rear)
- stopped in the intersection when traffic lights change;
- stopped beyond the stop line, if actually stopped;
- stopped on pedestrian crossings, even semi-trailers;
- stopped across railway crossings;
- making turns without indicating or indicating very late;
- apparently oblivious of lane markings and direction arrows
- using their horn to clear their path ahead

Cyclists: Many evenings after the street lights come on I see cyclists in dark clothing without lights on busy roads. If Public Safety Officers (on overtime rates) were stationed in some randomised pattern at major intersections they could intercept these offenders. Cyclists without helmets are all too frequent.

Car defects: Not one night passes but I see cars driving with serious defects: one headlight working, and even some with a tail light out. Universal routine road-worthy certificate testing would reduce that problem.

Vehicle loads: Flag requirements on projecting loads is either unknown or ignored.

Hazard lights: Rotating beacons are allowed to be operational for no apparent reason.

All of these issues would require active policing to make any beneficial change. I very, very seldom observe Police Officers on the road doing traffic duty. Changing this involves greater numbers of Police officers or some alternative.

Focussed (area targeted) policing may offer a more economical alternative. For example, a campaign in one Region with extra resources from neighbouring Regions.

Perhaps there is a role for a "Traffic Officer", akin to the Protective Service Officer now observed on public transport. Evidently such officers are less expensive. The Traffic Officer would have similar powers to the Police Officer in relation to road use.

Driver Capacity

Ability to safely operate a vehicle depends on training and capacity. Capacities change over time. A general requirement for driver assessment by a registered medical practitioner is rational. Admittedly the only line that can be drawn is an arbitrary one of age. Nonetheless, is it not worth that kind of discrimination to increase safety for all?

My observations are particularly of the Coburg locality with Sydney Rd and Bell St as a focus. In this locality it is not hard to observe drivers who show signs of confusion and uncertainty.

Driver quality

If the media reports are at all to be believed, we have a rash of unqualified and unlicensed and even convicted banned persons operating motor vehicles, sometimes unregistered. Such persons lack the appropriate quality to be using our roads. Can anything other than active policing change this?

Sobriety is crucial to road safety. This applies to other drugs and to alcohol.

Additional active policing may reduce the impact of people who ought not to be driving or are in no condition to drive. That is to be preferred to Police engagement after a collision.

I suggest concentrated policing campaigns in randomly selected areas, with greater emphasis given (frequency and extent) according to collision data of an area.

Information and comprehension

Is it wise that newly qualified drivers aged over 25 years and with no particular level of experience are immediately granted 12 month Provisional Licences under the "Green P"?

Do drivers from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds really understand and retain the Road Rules?

Do drivers transferring from other States receive information on Victorian Road rules? (I think not.)

How are all drivers reminded of the critical requirements to ensure safety for others and themselves?

In a bygone era of regular mailed registration and licence documentation, reminders, information and updates could be routinely sent to drivers. What happens in 2020? Perhaps VicRoads conducts education campaigns in popular media, using community languages? Using multiple Channels, it is time for a campaign: "Dumb Ways to Drive" (with apologies to PTV).

Prosecutions

Perhaps the "Road Safety Cameras" (modified if necessary) could provide data for prosecutions on these issues? Greater random presence of Police on the roads would have a deterrent effect as well as obtaining prosecutions.

The Australian Capital Territory authorities have a system of using specially camera equipped vehicles parked in selected locations. "Your speed has been checked" they say. I presume images collected can be used in prosecutions and the operation of the mobile road safety cameras has a deterrent effect. Obviously there is a cost but the system is a method of multiplying the impact of enforcement personnel.

I wish the Committee well and hope your findings and recommendations produce good results.


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