

The Executive Officer
Road Safety Committee
Parliament House
EAST MELBOURNE VIC 3002



Submission No. # 25
Received
Road Safety Committee

Dear Ms Jenkins and Road Safety Committee

With regard to the call for submissions published in the Herald Sun newspaper on June 11, 2011, I offer the following views and opinions:

As a long time recreational motorcyclist, and co-founder of a thriving sports-bike motorcycle club, I have a keen interest in how motorcycling is viewed by the general population, as well as the government's policy and governing of how motorcyclists are treated. The pertinent objective of the Road Safety Committee is obviously to a) reduce the road toll with respect to motorcyclists, and b) to also reduce the number and severity of injuries involving motorcyclists in road crashes.

There are 2 key components to having a positive effect on reducing rider injuries and fatalities:

1- Decrease the risk through better equipment and better road environments

2- Increase the level of rider skill and defensive attitude to using public roads

Decreasing Risk:

Many factors present an issue to motorcyclists where they would otherwise not affect or be less influential to other road users, such as bumpy and uneven road surface, changes in levels of grip due to gravel, water, or other foreign materials, high winds, sun glare and oncoming lights, etc. Factors such as these need to be taken in to account in the very beginning of the road design stage in order to make the environment as safe as possible for motorcyclists as well as other road users. Further safety devices and initiatives also need to be evaluated for effect on motorcyclists' safety – a prime example of this would be the seemingly sprawling 'wire rope barrier' that whilst effective in stopping most vehicles from leaving the roadway, presents an even further safety risk for motorcyclists, and is aptly referred to as "cheese grater" fencing because of its potential detriment to motorcyclists.

Whilst roads cannot be expressly designed to cater for motorcyclists, especially given they represent a minority in the vehicular transport breakdown, road design and construction can be undertaken in a manner to avoid known hazards to motorcyclists, especially as the number of scooters and small motorcycles increases as people look to cheaper and more efficient means of transport. Consideration of a 'motorcycle only' lane on major freeways would dramatically reduce the risk of riders 'lane splitting' to move through traffic. Such design does not require the space or expense that a regular lane would, and could in most cases be incorporated into existing right hand 'emergency stopping lanes'.

Whilst there is an abundance of excellent safety gear available, and enormous developments in motorcycle design and safety features, neither have very high levels of mandatory requirement / enforcement and are driven primarily by market forces. Introducing a minimal requirement in riding attire coupled with minimal safety requirements for new motorcycles would certainly aid in achieving safer riding and reduced likelihood of incidents and injuries. Incentives such as reduced insurance rates for more safety-equipped motorcycles, as well as discounted safety apparel would greatly benefit the long term cost of road trauma.

Increasing Skill:

Despite rigorous overhauls of the driver licensing requirements for car learner drivers in recent decades, extending probation first from 1yr to 3yrs, and now 1yr+3yrs, with other minimum requirements, motorcycle licenses have not followed suit in stepping up the level of skill required before being 'let out' onto public roads alone. Unlike a car where the learner has a fully licensed driver or instructor next to them to guide and instruct, motorcyclists are on their own after just a short basic control skills test. There is little scope for assessing a riders ability to deal with hazards, make decisions under pressure, or avoid potential incidents. Such skills are crucial in developing a riders skill to a level they are ready to venture onto public roads, yet there is no mandatory requirement for further training or development. There are limited 'courses' available through private companies but these vary dramatically in content and cost.

There is a need to develop firstly a program of training to increase rider skills before they venture onto public roads, and furthermore a range of suitable facilities where this training can be undertaken on a closed facility without inherent risks like traffic , trees, and other fixed objects. At present most courses are undertaken at existing race circuits which do not necessarily reflect road conditions, but are at least safer with plenty of run-off area. However, the need to compete with other commercial entities drives costs up and thereby puts many out of financial reach for the average rider. Rider training facilities could easily be established in such a manner like car companies have their 'proving grounds' with a minimal requirement to satisfactorily complete an accredited training course that gives the new rider skills as mentioned earlier.

Uniquely, and perhaps most importantly as suggested by recent statistics, there is a definite need to require and also provide returning riders with a 'refresher training' to bring their skills up to speed. Unlike cars, where once a person is licensed they invariably drive continuously throughout their life, motorcyclists often have an extended period of absence from riding, often whilst they raise their family, and then return to riding in later years. Statistics suggest that this group is perhaps the most at risk, given that not only their skills are not up to scratch, but the development of motorcycle technology means they are riding lighter, much more powerful machines than they were accustomed to. A simple requirement to undertake 'refresher training' when a rider has been licensed but not had a motorcycle registered for a period of years would help reduce this groups representation in crash statistics.

Finally, whilst motorcyclists represent a minority road user group, they also represent a cleaner, more viable transport option for the future, and reduced road congestion due to the smaller road space needed. A government that looks to the favourable aspects of motorcycling and aims to support these will be helping to benefit all road users in the long run.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide these opinions, and I hope that many positive actions and policies result from this inquiry.

Yours Sincerely

Mark Nicholas

Co-Founder

Hangmore Motorcycle Club Inc.