

Submission to the Ministry of Transport on the Discussion Document Road Safety Strategy to 2020

NCWNZ is an umbrella organisation representing 50 nationally organised societies and national members. It has 26 branches throughout the country attended by representatives of those societies and some 150 other societies as well as individual members. The Council's functions are to serve women, the family and the community at local, national and international levels through research, study, discussion and action.

NCWNZ welcomes the opportunity to consider the Road Safety Strategy Discussion Document. The response has been prepared by the Public Issues Standing Committee following circulation of the questions to NCWNZ members. NCWNZ members were provided with 35 questions relating to twelve areas of concern. Reducing the impact of high-risk drivers was considered well covered by the earlier questions and the issue was not addressed separately. Most responders answered some but not all questions.

A Reducing alcohol/drug impaired driving

Q. 1. Do you support lowering of the legal adult Blood Alcohol Content (BAC) limit from BAC 0.08 to BAC 0.05?

Most NCWNZ members agreed to the reduction or zero tolerance as in Sweden, but many qualified their answers. They did not think that it would stop repeat offenders and said that society's moral outlook/attitude needed to change. They commented that advertising has a major effect. However, it was agreed that the important thing is to adhere to significant penalties. It was pointed out that in some countries drunk driving or speeding convictions mean insurance costs increased significantly. While some young people may drive uninsured vehicles, it was also pointed out that adults who have expensive cars, which they do insure, are also guilty of drunk driving.

One person who spoke against the change commented that where the primary factor is alcohol, there is a lack of evidence that people with a BAC between 0.05 and 0.08 cause accidents. It is the people with a BAC level well over 0.08 who are causing accidents. Lowering the limit will not stop these irresponsible people from driving after drinking and causing accidents.

Some noted that although the questions appear to target illegal drugs, there are many 'prescribed' and 'over the counter sales' of pharmaceuticals which can impair driving ability. While this is often shown in fine print, they suggested that pharmacists should point this out when selling these drugs.

Q. 2 How could rural communities be better empowered to address drink driving?

The following suggestions were made: Actively and positively encourage sober driver practice in rural communities, have more police on the roads, particularly have police blitz raids in country areas to ensure publicans do not serve minors or inebriated drivers, and encourage good role modelling by the older generation. Other suggestions included having

community watchdogs, empowering the influence of kaumatua and disassociating sport with liquor.

One respondent commented that many towns have memorials to young men who have lost their lives at war. Perhaps there needs to be public recognition of those who have lost their lives because of drink driving. There should also be prominent posters at service stations, stores, community meetings and events. The issue was also tied to good parenting and to examples of medical help and education.

Q. 3 Do you have other ideas for how we can reduce drink driving?

It was suggested that the person who gives the driver the drink, including pub owners, should be penalised and there should be more ad hoc roadside tests for excess alcohol levels. Current laws need to be enforced rigidly. The price of alcohol should be increased.

Another suggestion was that there should be some form of readily available alcohol level test in bars, so that people could test themselves before driving home. Perhaps supermarkets could sell BAC testing kits so that even people out at parties or functions could test their BAC before leaving.

Above all, society must continue advocating until such time as everyone accepts that if you drink you do not drive – the change in attitude will take time as it did with smoking.

A variety of role models should be publicized and more publicity about the values and benefits of being alcohol free and how to have fun celebrations without drink.

Research into Human Stress has shown that becoming drunk is a stress coping response, as is addiction itself.

Q. 4 Do you think we should introduce random roadside drug testing for the presence of illegal drugs, as technology allows?

There was a strong affirmative response to this question because drugs are as dangerous as alcohol in their impact. However to ensure public goodwill, the tests should be quick and effective. Too much disruption of urgent travel could turn the electorate against the political side of the policy.

Q. 5 Do you have other ideas for how we can reduce drug impaired driving?

Make defensive driving courses available at affordable cost, maybe through schools (it is done to some extent but not enough). Increase punishments such as increasing demerit points, confiscating and impounding cars. Introduce police supervised driving practice and make the learner licence period 12 months. Third party insurance should be compulsory. Good drivers should be encouraged to do in erratic drivers.

Above all, there should be more media coverage and education in schools. Young people should be involved in designing publicity advertisements and have them appear/pop up on e.g. Facebook and Bebo.

Improve public transport.

B Increasing the Safety of Young Drivers

Q. 6 Which of the suggested initiatives to increase the safety of young drivers do you support and which do you think is most important?

Many supported raising the age to 16 (17 would be even better), extending the learner licence period to 12 months, more driver education, tougher licence testing, compulsory third party insurance – with drivers having an understanding of what responsibilities they have in these cases, compulsory vehicle restrictions and increasing the benefit of professional driver training which should be mandatory.

All initiatives as above in Q.5.

Q. 7. Do you support raising the minimum driving age? If so at what age should young people start learning to drive -16 or 17?

About half the respondents opted for 16 years and half for 17 or 18. It was noted that this could be an issue in rural communities and where school leavers might need to drive to work in the absence of public transport.

It was suggested that this question could not be answered by guesswork but needed proper research.

Q. 8 Do you support extending the learner period by 6 months?

Most answered in the affirmative because then young people would be a little more mature. Those who disagreed commented that it is the ones who break the rules who are the problem and inadequate driver education would be just as effective as extending the time period – especially if there is focus on the risks and responsibilities of being a driver.

Q. 9 If the driving age was raised and the learner period extended - do you think there should be an exemption for rural youth who can demonstrate, via a practical test, that they have the skills and attitudes to drive safely and competently?

NCWNZ members were divided on this issue.

Q. 10 Do you support having compulsory third party insurance?

This was answered with a resounding YES.

Q. 11 Do you have other ideas for how we can increase the safety of young drivers?

Defensive driving courses should have a large component of practical instruction (e.g. skid training in cars, not virtually). This skill should be made compulsory for a full license. Young drivers could be required to have periodic education, as rules change over the years and refresher courses could be useful for all drivers.

Driver education should be compulsory for year 11 students as a short course, say 3-4 hours. This would also be of huge value to those who may not become drivers at this age, because they would learn how to keep themselves safe, and offer positive peer support to be responsible.

There should be a restriction on all learner and restricted drivers regarding the size (that is power of motor) of the vehicle they may drive. Another issue is the behaviour of bullies. A gun is a weapon, and so is a powerful car. Peer pressure should be encouraged to temper bad behaviour.

C Safer Roads and Roadsides

Q. 12 Which of the suggested initiatives to make our roads and roadsides safer do you support and which do you think is the most important ?

All of them deserve attention. Targeted programmes for high risk rural roads are most important.

Q. 13 Is there anything we have left out in our suggestions for making our roads and roadsides safer?

- Consideration of cyclists – educating motorists to be more aware of pedestrians and cyclists.
- Some passing lanes in rural areas are too short and often too close to a right hand turn at the end of the passing lane.

- Put ads in bus stops and on school buses.
- Parents need to take more responsibility when they encourage or enable their children to have cars, and pay for them. Parents need to know the risks and responsibilities of letting their children become drivers.
- Painting the speeds on the roads or having more frequent speed signs would be helpful. It is easy to forget. (The boxes which show the speed are great).
- Schools need to be stronger on teaching how to cross roads. For example on Stewart Drive, Newlands, in the mornings it is more usual to see school students running, skateboarding, or dawdling across the crossing without looking, than to see them walking with focus. This is dangerous, showing a lack of road safety knowledge and makes one wonder what sort of drivers they would be.

D Safer Speeds

Q. 14 Do you support the suggested initiatives to reduce speed-related crashes and which do you think is most important?

Most agreed with the suggested initiatives. There could be more road safety cameras and “Slow Down” signs with drivers’ speeds. Speed limits painted on the road surface are very effective. It can be hard to keep track of changing speed limits. More speed cameras are recommended as a great deterrent.

Make sure that signs at schools and school crossings are clearly visible.

Q. 15 What else could we do to reduce speed-related crashes?

Accidents are caused by excess speed and too slow a speed. Slow drivers (90km/hr in open road) should pull over and let traffic pass; the same applies on hills, regardless of speed.

The speed graduations need to be more gradual and painting on the roads more frequently as it is easy to forget.

Q. 16 Do you support having higher demerit points and lower fines for speed-related offences?

Many members thought that these were good suggestions especially as it was believed that many fines were not paid. However again this will only work with increased police presence on the roads to check drivers. Teaching young people the consequences is considered by members to be critical in driver education.

E Increasing the Safety of Motorcycling

Q. 17 Which of the suggested initiative to increase the safety of motorcyclists do you support?

Most members supported promoting high visibility and protective clothing and introducing a differential levy system based on engine size. Moped riders should be licensed and required to have a current warrant of fitness.

Q. 18 Which initiatives to increase the safety of motorcyclists is the most important to you?

Most important to members were high visibility and limiting the size of the ‘first motorcycles’ which people are permitted to drive. Some members noted that motorcyclists should drive with their lights on to improve visibility.

In addition, enforcing penalties for not wearing helmets, encouraging schools to run programmes on safety in motorcycling and rewarding good behaviour were mentioned.

Some commented that the Transport Ministry should introduce a differential levy system based on engine size.

Q. 19 Do you have other ideas for how we can increase the safety of motorcyclists?

None

F Improving the Safety of the Light Vehicle Fleet

Q. 20 Which of the suggested initiatives to help make our vehicle fleet safer do you support and which do you think is the most important?

Overall members supported all the suggested initiatives.

Q. 21 What else could we do to improve the safety of the light vehicle fleet?

No replies.

G Safer Walking and Cycling and Pedestrians

Q. 22 Which of the suggested initiatives do you support and which do you think is the most important?

Members supported all of the initiatives but most important was anything that would make motorists cater for the safety needs of pedestrians and cyclists. NZ needs to study the practices of other countries where cycling is common. In France cyclists are relatively safe because penalties for motorists who injure cyclists are so severe.

Q. 23 What else could we do to make walking and cycling safe?

Members suggested the following:

- Stop motorists parking cars across footpaths.
- Insist on better maintenance of footpaths.
- Make it mandatory for cyclists and athletes to wear bright, highly visible clothing/safety vests especially at night and not cover the vests with a dark pack.
- Enforce penalties for not wearing helmets.
- Encourage schools to run programmes on safety in cycling and reward good behaviour when young children learn safe cycling.
- Do not allow trucks to travel in convoys.
- Crack down on tailgating. It was pointed out that in some overseas situations if there are more than 3 (or some similar number) of cars following, a driver must pull over at the first opportunity to let them pass.
- Many cyclists have minimum lights and better rules perhaps could help here. Bells or similar devices should be mandatory on all cycles.
- Road safety education must teach the risks and responsibilities of being a pedestrian so we all have life skills for respecting the road.
- More education is needed particularly near crossings and in urban areas where people often cross to a sound without looking to see which set of lights is signalled as safe to cross.

H Improving the safety of Heavy Vehicles

Q. 24 Which of the suggested initiatives do you support and which do you think is most important?

There are a whole range of issues that affect the safety of the driver of heavy transport. One that needs emphasising is the management practices of the employer. Misguided attempts by management to improve performance by applying harsher penalties for poor performance can cause stress, and the early stages of burnout that cause loss of the control of impulses and can cause accidents.

Q. 25 Do you have other ideas for how we can increase the safety of heavy vehicle?

No.

I Reducing the Impact of Fatigue

Q. 26 Which of the suggested initiatives do you support and which do you think is most important?

The provision of more attractive road side stopping places, and the promotion and use of such road side stopping places. Education via TV is perhaps the best initiative plus regular roadside reminders.

Q. 27 Do you have other ideas for how we can reduce the impact of fatigue?

Rumble strips are extremely effective and should be more widely used. In addition to more stopping places, there should be more passing lanes.

J Addressing Distraction

Q. 28 Do you have other ideas for how we can reduce the impact of distraction?

People should be educated by TV ads about kinds of distraction.

K Increasing the Level of Restraint Use

Q. 29 Do you support aligning our requirements for child restraints with international best practice?

Most members supported this strongly.

L Reducing the impact of High Risk Drivers

All the penalties outlined above, with targeted education could lead to some improvement.

M Increasing the safety of Older Drivers

Q. 30 Which of the initiatives do you support and which do you think is most important?

Members supported all of the initiatives. In particular they support a free 'Safe with Age' refresher course for older people to update skills but noted that The Ministry of Transport recently withdrew funding for the Safe with Age programme. Several members also commented that doctors should be more diligent in cancelling licences of impaired drivers.

Q. 31 Do you have other ideas about how to improve road safety for older New Zealanders?

- Older people should be encouraged to drive to their abilities e.g. to take safer routes, such as to avoiding right turns across an intersection by going another route.
- Vehicles should be appropriately set up for older drivers e.g. mirrors are available which give a wider vision for older people who find it hard to turn their heads when

looking behind. Some suggested that older people may need a licence to restrict what they can do e.g. hours of driving permitted and distance limited to 10km from home.

- It was pointed out that a number of accidents are caused by drivers in the early stages of Alzheimer's Disease who have not been diagnosed.
- Two other suggestions included restoring funding for Safe With Age programme and improving public transport for the elderly. Some members suggested that there should be a return to the previous system whereby drivers 80 years of age had to sit a practical driving test every two years. While many older drivers recognize their limitations and voluntarily give up driving, there are some who do not and are a danger to themselves and to other road users.

Q. 32 Do you have other ideas for how we can improve road safety for older New Zealanders?

The left hand lane rule should be enforced on motorways unless overtaking, so that other drivers do not become impatient with slow drivers sitting in the right hand lane(s).

Q. 33 Are we putting enough emphasis on road safety education? What would you change?

The carriage way is not only for cars - educate people to realise this and educate people that the left hand lane rule should be enforced on motorways unless overtaking.

Q. 34 Does our current road safety advertising work well? What would you change?

Some members argued for more instructive advertising rather than the shock/horror sort.

Road safety propaganda should be sent out regularly to superannuitants or those over 70.

Q. 35 How can we better link our education efforts with other road safety initiatives?

- Regarding school buses; enforce speed of 20kmh when passing stationary bus. Some members liked the US system of flashing signs on stationary school buses, and the rule that it is illegal to pass a stationary school bus.
- Regular road education at school – involving parents and grandparents too.
- Exchange students should not be able to drive in New Zealand.

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