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The Secretary
Legislative Council Select Committee Rural Road Speed Limits
Parliament of Tasmania

Dear Sir/Madam

Reduction in rural road speed limits

I was listening to ABC radio this morning when the subject of the reduction in rural road speed limits and this Select Committee were raised and a guest said that there appeared to be very little objection to it at present but it was likely that people will object only when the speed limit signs were changed and it will be too late then.

Looking on your website I then realised that submissions close today so I have put together my quick thoughts on this matter.

I object to the blanket reduction from 100 to 90 km/h.

This blanket approach to road safety appears to be more like a bureaucratic way of saying we're doing something about road safety than a real attempt at legislation to improve road safety and allow sensible road users to get about their business without undue restriction.

There are many country roads in Tasmanian where it is quite safe to drive at 100 km/h. In fact it can well be safer, because of the lack of traffic, than driving on major roads where there are high traffic volumes. I am not advocating reducing the speed limit on major roads but it is overreaction by people who quite often don't drive very often on country roads to say let us reduce the speed limit on country roads to make it look like we are doing something more towards road safety without impacting on the vast majority of the population.

Major highways may be built to be safe at the speed limit for their whole length, however, it is wrong to restrict the maximum speed on a rural road to the speed at which every section of that road can be traversed. This would mean that you would have to drive along a straight wide section of road at the same speed as you have to go round the tightest narrow corner on that section of road. It is quite sensible that there are advisory signs on roads to suggest what speed is safe for a particular corner when it may not be obvious on approach.

People driving on rural roads generally travel longer distances and drowsiness and inattention will be bigger problems if people have to reduce their speed to 90. It is also distracting for the driver to have to focus on the speed to drive at an unnaturally low speed rather than concentrating on looking ahead and driving defensively to the conditions.

I believe that the current association of the word speed, which is simply the velocity that car is travelling at, with almost criminal activity is disappointing. "Excessive speed", when properly examined, is clearly part of the cause of some accidents.

However excessive speed depends on the road, car and driver condition and is not simply a number on the speedo or a road sign.

Road conditions are constantly improving.

The overall driveability of cars has increased. The maintenance of the car (particularly tyres) can be better addressed by greater policing of the condition of cars travelling on our roads – 40 years ago it was quite common to go through roadside car checks – I don't think I have seen one in the last 20 years! Too expensive?

The condition of the driver depends on his or her car control skills but can be impaired by the effects of alcohol, drugs or more often the state of mind at the time of the crash. This state of mind includes all of the normal emotions we experience which may result in irrational behaviour. These are issues that cannot be controlled by a speed sign.

The vast majority of rural road users, driving on our improving road system, in a reasonably maintained vehicle, have no problem driving safely at up to 100km/h where they deem it appropriate.

A reduction to 90 can only impact on crashes occurring to sign-obeying citizens while travelling between 90 and 100 km/h who would not have had an accident had they been travelling at 90 km. I believe this would be very few in number.

I believe more should be done in the area of education on defensive driving – starting in schools. While it may be expensive to educate people in better skills to control a car (which would be highly desirable), it is certainly not very expensive to make defensive driving a greater requirement this is something that can be taught and should be taught particularly in school. Defensive driving should also be strongly promoted in advertising campaigns. Following too close to the car in front and a lack of attention to what is happening ahead of them is all too obvious on our roads.

Over the past 50 years we have had massive reductions in road trauma despite there being a huge increase in the number of cars on our roads. This has been particularly helped by improvements to roads and cars (particularly handling and controllability as well as occupant protection) as well as legislation on seat belts and drink-driving.

A side issue -

When we hear press releases from the police on how terrible we are as drivers because a large number of people were booked that weekend for exceeding the speed limit it begs the question - have we suddenly become a irresponsible or have the police chosen to target sections of road where in fact the people were driving quite safely but just at a speed which was higher than the posted speed limit.

I don't believe I've ever seen a speed camera placed in the centre of the town or at the point of the road where it is important to travel at the speed limit. Is this because most drivers do drive sensibly and reduce their speed through those areas. It is difficult for drivers to respect speed cameras when they see that most bookings occur on sections of road where they are driving quite safely and inadvertently stray above the set limit.

Inappropriate speed limits lead to frustration and drivers spending more time trying to focus on the speedo rather than concentrating on the road around them and driving safely to the conditions

Road safety statistics refer to speed as one of the contributing factors in about 30% of serious injuries but acknowledge that quite often it is not the underlying or main cause of the accident. This does not stipulate whether the speed was under or over

the limit and whether a lower speed limit would have had any effect on the particular crash.

In summary, I believe that such a blanket reduction in speed limit on rural roads will have little if any impact on road safety and possibly having a negative impact by virtue of increased inattention on our roads. I believe we should continue and increase our focus on education, road improvement and upgrading the age of cars on our roads by eliminating stamp duty on new and used cars.

PS Has anything significant been learnt from the Kingston experiment.

Yours sincerely

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

Bruce Taylor

18 January 2013