

To The Legislative Council Select Committee on Road Safety in Tasmania

Honourable Members of the Select Committee on Road Safety.

I must thank you for the opportunity to present a submission to your Select Committee on the subject of Road Safety, which has been a strong interest of mine during my adult life.

Driving opens up so many opportunities in life, so you can imagine my delight when I gained my Full License at a time when only 17% of first-time candidates were successful.

There is a great need for an education program that emphasises that having a Drivers Licence is a privilege and NOT a right.

If you have any queries about my submission or wish to speak to me about it, I would be pleased to make myself available for that purpose.

Many thanks again,

Dr W. Peter Holm...OAM

25 August 2021

[REDACTED]

**Submission to The Legislative Council Select Committee of Enquiry
into Road Safety in Tasmania 2021**

The driving environment, the type of vehicle and the driver of the vehicle are the three fundamental factors which are involved in road safety and the outcome of every journey.

The driving and road environment:

This environment determines what are called the driving conditions. Various factors should always be taken into consideration by every driver as follows:

The road itself:

Bitumen sealed, gravel surface, camber, road junctions and intersections, roundabouts and any breaks in the road surface or material on the road, eg. mud, gravel, ice, rain water draining across the carriageway and any interruptions to traffic flow. Also, traffic signs indicating changes in the environment, traffic controls eg. traffic lights etc.

Also, other vehicles, large / oversize vehicles and traffic flow. Whether another driver is signalling to the driver by using their brake lights, indicators etc., and not only in the vehicles in front of the driven vehicle but also alongside and behind it.

The weather; hot, cold, wet, windy, ice, wind direction and force particularly when passing trees or entering / emerging from areas that are shaded etc.

The vehicle being driven:

Pedestrians and people exercising, eg. jogging, as well as a wide variety of vehicles use the road, ranging from bicycles, mopeds, motor cycles, and passenger cars and also both small and large commercial vehicles, together with funeral hearses and the occasional tractor / excavator, log truck and low loader etc. All require different driving skills as is recognised by the various licences required to drive them, and also all have requirements and performance that need to be recognised and taken into account by other road-users.

The driver or person in control of the vehicle:

Drivers vary in age, temperament and level of perception and driving skills, as well as how they have been taught to control a vehicle. They are the greatest variable factor of the three components of the road safety equation, and yet many do not even understand that in most situations they are in charge of a lethal weapon. Even a cyclist can kill a pedestrian. More dangerous still is that a majority of drivers believe that their driving skills are good!

Further considerations:

Roads and the driving environment:

Governments over many years have recognised that roads need to be designed and maintained to provide a suitable carriageway for vehicles, and hundreds of millions of dollars have been expended to achieve this objective, and to make the driving environment as straight forward and clear as possible.

Maintenance has always been an issue especially as vehicle speeds have increased and large vehicles and their loads have got heavier. There are too many places, especially on highways, where carriageways have not only defects and potholes, but even wide shallow grooves caused by trucks, which make steering and controlling lighter vehicles problematic at times.

All these factors, amongst others, must be taken into account by a competent driver, and when considering road safety.

Vehicles and traffic:

The volume and speed of traffic as well as the variety of vehicles, have not only increased over many years, but the increasing complexity of the driving environment has meant that there needs to be a corresponding increase in driving skills.

Everyone in control of any vehicle must be familiar with their vehicle, its controls, features, handling characteristics and performance. This is a gradual process which takes time, and during this period all drivers should proceed slowly and with caution and care.

All vehicles made and / or imported into Australia since Jan. 1, 1969 have a requirement to be fitted with an Australian Design Rule Compliance Plate. This confirms the vehicle has been designed, constructed and has all the features specified by the A.D.R s as amended.

All vehicles that have been subject to modification, apart from minor changes, eg. fitting a roof-rack, must have been modified by an approved person, with a permit and are subject to the National Code of Practice for light vehicle construction and modification (1969) as amended.

I would suggest that many utilities, panel vans and cars are modified without such a permit, and may therefore be unsafe, and further would not be able to be insured. Many not only have oversize tyres, but also suspension, brake and engine modifications, and may be fitted with a more powerful engine.

During the past 4-5 decades, with the advent of computers and electronics, the functioning parts and systems of vehicles have come under ever greater electronic control. Computers now regulate engines, suspension systems, brakes, fuel consumption and many other functions. The days of spark plugs and distributors are long since over. Concurrently, there have been major advances in passenger comfort and cabin appointments and fittings with their own controls, including efficient heaters, a/c units, multi-speed window wipers and in-car entertainment systems. (ICE). Together with the ubiquitous spread and adoption of mobile phones, these have created major distractions

for drivers at a time when the driving environment has become faster and more congested, crowded and complex. This should be termed "Attention deficit"

The development of electric cars, which are now appearing on the roads, present further problems for other road users as many are almost silent. There has also emerged in recent time a push to develop driverless motor cars. These also present many challenges as sensors would probably not have as wide a spread in their perception of driving situations as a person and may have to depend on in-road sensory guidance strips as are used for buses in some Chinese cities.

The person in control of a vehicle:

Road safety is ultimately in the hands and care of those in charge of vehicles. It is essential for them to be aware of the whole driving and road environment around their vehicle and for pedestrians to also have an appreciation of that same environment.

Training is of the utmost importance for all users of the road environment, from little children educated by their parents, to cyclists, who not only need to know the rules of the road and appreciate the road space needs of other vehicles, and also their speed, braking distances etc.

Drivers of motor vehicles need to be trained properly if we are to reduce the road toll. The first rule of the road is that we must have a driving licence. The second rule is that we drive on the left- hand side of the road, yet how many times do we see solitary vehicles driving in the right- hand lane of urban dual carriage-ways? How often do we see vehicles turning without a signal being given, or drivers speeding along main highways, particularly in passing lanes doing 130+ kph and how many of them have a "P" plate displayed? If you look to the left, your left hand tends to draw the steering wheel that way and so off the road, if to the right, then a head on smash is highly likely!

Converse behaviour is seen when overtaking in an overtaking lane on a main highway when the lead vehicle will signal to pass a truck travelling at 100km and slowly pass doing only 110km. That may be the legal limit, but passing should be done quickly and efficiently and not cause frustration to other drivers who, as the overtaking lane ends, then follow the truck for another 5 – 10 kms!

These everyday occurrences must tell us that **driver training is hopelessly inadequate!**

To exacerbate this problem, we expect parents and volunteers to accompany learner drivers and "P" plate drivers to sign off on them having done so many hours of driving. **NO tuition is given during these periods and the errors of the older person are perpetuated** and regarded as good driving.

This situation is totally unacceptable.

We have had a Road Safety Traffic Advisory Committee for at least 40 years, they have run campaigns about road safety, advertising programs and many other initiatives, yet we still have the continuing and major disaster in road fatalities, trauma and crashes every year.

"Towards Zero" is a dream! Whenever there are a number of objects moving around in a confined space there are going to be collisions. That is a scientific fact.

We must train drivers to be aware of their environment, such that collisions may be minimised and less severe.

Perhaps we must look overseas to learn from the skills and experiences of others:

Driver training and driving tests:

In Germany, driver training is divided into several parts as my daughter found when living there.

The first 24 hours of lessons consist of classroom tuition, about 1/3, the Rules of the road, then a similar time observing how traffic flows and hazards to be aware of, and then a first aid course. Only having passed that exam could you be permitted to get in a car or simulator and learn to drive under the instruction of a government licenced and approved instructor. These instructors are the only people qualified to train learner drivers how to drive safely, and only when a learner has the requisite skills would they put them forward for the next driving test. Each test is progressive with increasing complexity, starting with quiet suburban driving and progressing to city driving and night driving etc. with the final test being autobahn / highway / high speed driving.

Eight specified tasks have to be completed to the examiner's satisfaction in the course of the driving test. These include approach to road junctions / intersections, traffic lights, pedestrian crossings and roundabouts; also, lane changes, 3- point turns, reverse parking and the use of signals, eg. indicators. Also assessed are other driving skills, such as traffic observation, communication with other road users, hill starts, speed adjustments and vehicle positioning on the road as the traffic and road environment requires, and the use of mirrors.

The learner driver's aptitude, and attitudes to other drivers, are also assessed.

At the end of each test the examiner is required to give the candidate a ten-minute de-brief.

This process is not inexpensive, but cheap compared to the cost of hospital care for injuries in crashes, loss of life and working / earning potential. It could easily be covered by a HECS financial assistance program such as that for university students.

Moreover, in Germany, between 1991 and 2016, there has been a reduction of 70% in the number a Vehicle Crash Fatalities and 20 % less injuries, but vehicle numbers have increased and distance travelled was up by 30%

In Norway, which has the safest roads in Europe and possibly the world, their driver training scheme is under a multinational road safety plan called "Vision Zero".

In 2008 Norway had 4.7 deaths per 100,000 population, about the same as Tasmania this year. In 2019 & 2020 Norway had reduced the death toll to 2 deaths per 100,000 population. If that were the figure for Tasmania, we would expect an annual death toll of about 10-12, but this is still one person being killed on the roads every month compared to every 10 days, as now happens in this State.

Surely, we can learn from the programs they have in Norway and perhaps Germany, for training our drivers and improving road safety.

A suggested Driver Training program for Tasmania:

As outlined above we must look overseas to glean and adopt the best of other driver training programs.

I was taught to drive on my Granny's farm, had professional driving lessons followed by training from a Metropolitan police pursuit driving instructor, and passed my driving test almost 60 years ago. Safety was the main consideration of my training, which emphasised the letter "C".

Care and **Caution** were emphasised as paramount, together with **CONCENTRATION**.

No time for conversation, chatter, music or the radio, and fiddling with control knobs while driving was totally forbidden.

Correlate all the information around you, not only the road and traffic in front, but use mirrors to be in touch with and monitor the situation behind and beside you.

Communicate with other drivers by signalling your next intended movements, "Mirror, Signal, Brakes". Position the vehicle in the **correct** place on the road, especially at road junctions. If going left, keep to the left side of the road, if right draw up beside the junction white lines, etc.

At roundabouts the junction is a "give way" situation. DO NOT drive up, slam on the brakes and stop, risking a shunt from behind.

How often do drivers stop at roundabouts instead of looking for a space in the traffic into which to progress? From my experience most of the time!

Also, be aware of other driver's actions, if a driver 3-4 spaces in front applies their brakes, it is wise to transfer one's foot from the accelerator and cover the brake pedal. This greatly reduces reaction time.

Be **Considerate** of other road users, they may be elderly and / infirm, or otherwise not feeling 100%.

Leave plenty of room between your vehicle and the one in front that you are following, and also acknowledge drivers who wait for you to pass a junction, or signal so that you may proceed.

Most of all, **ignore all distractions** and **CONCENTRATE**. **Concentration** takes time to learn. Once learned, even as a passenger, one automatically watches the road.

Other considerations:

We must get away from the perception that having a **driver's licence** is a "right". It is in fact a **privilege**.

Restrictions on learner and "P" plate drivers need to be strengthened. In many countries there are speed limits and engine size / power restrictions especially for motor cycles, and in the UK for drivers of cars (that shall not exceed 1500cc or 2000 cc (2.0 litres), unless accompanied by a fully qualified driver.

To me it demonstrates **a total lack of political will and responsibility** that a 17 years old P plate driver can go out and purchase an old 3-5 litre utility and be allowed to drive it on their own. Speed is so addictive and racing such fun, especially to a late teenager or young fellow in their early 20s! This is not being a "Granny State" but protecting our young people from themselves. Do we allow them to go down the main street wielding a loaded gun and firing it off every now and then????

The main lesson we must inspire in **all learner drivers** and **ALL licenced drivers** is **CONCENTRATE, CONCENTRATE, CONCENTRATE** and be **SAFE**. It is the most essential skill and takes time to acquire.

Learn how fast you are travelling; At 60 kph one is covering 16.66 metres every second and with a reaction time of at least 2 secs. one travels over 33 metres, or in imperial units, 36 yards or 108 feet. That is a lot of road and perhaps all learners should be required to pace it out to see for themselves!

Lastly, it is long passed time that we required every vehicle two years old or more to have a road-worthiness examination at the time of re-registration.

Also, consideration must be given to re-testing drivers after a road accident and, perhaps routinely at the time of licence renewal every 5-10 years. In addition, when they reach a certain age, eg. 70 - 75 years old, a driving test every 2-3years, while in some cases perhaps limiting their driving area to say 50-100 km from home etc.

Costs:

The current cost of traffic collisions, deaths, injuries and health care costs, together with loss of working ability and the trauma of survivors and relatives / friends, must be hundreds of millions if not billions of \$\$\$s each year, and far outweigh the costs associated with teaching people to drive properly.

Many of us have lost a loved one or close friend to a vehicle smash, and those painful and terrible memories are never far from one's mind.

Initial class room training, as in Germany, can be done in groups with students learning from each other as well as from instructors. This should include all motor vehicle learners as well as cyclists etc. The cost could be quite small. Thereafter individual training should be given in simulators or cars under Government licensed driving instructors. For those unable to afford the costs up front a HECS type financial scheme could be put in place so that drivers can pay it off when they get employment.

At the outset of every journey, one expects to arrive safely at one's destination. Much responsibility for that rests with the Government. At present, as a former Chief Magistrate said to me "It is far too easy for people to get a license and far too difficult for me to take it off them".

This must change, and society must come to appreciate, amongst other things, that not everyone is capable of mastering the complex skills required of drivers in the 21st. century.

A competent driver can recognise the road environment and has an appreciation of their vehicle's capability. As a competent driver they will be able to identify dangers and hazards in the road situation and drive accordingly. Most importantly they will be concentrating on the road!

Dr. W. Peter HOLM OAM

FAVA, MANZCVS, MAICD, M.A.(Cantab.), Vet. M.B., B.Sc. (Hons. London), B.A.(Hons.).