

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL SELECT COMMITTEE INQUIRY TASWATER

Please accept the following comments as I believe the Committee will find that there is no shortage of suggestions from the public to improve road safety , but there is no effective pathway to progress them . The last Select Committee Inquiry into reduced speed limits showed that the Road Safety Advisory Council were reluctant to make changes even when shown proof of problems (the speed limit changes eventually dropped because the trials showed that it would increase fatalities by 10% rather than the expected 20% drop) , and we continue to see that changes to established practice are resisted purely because making a change is seen by them as admission that they have been doing something wrong . Advances by individual members of the public are not well received by road safety authorities , and if Municipal Councils are not responsive , as they often are for fear of costs to themselves , then nothing is done .

Local residents have the best knowledge of problems in their area , but road safety efforts are directed towards areas that have the most reported crashes , but the problem is that in city areas all crashes are reported , as much for traffic control as anything else , but in country areas if there are no casualties involved people are more likely to call a mate than police . The Meander Valley Council, for example , no longer has a safety committee as it faded away because nothing was followed up . At the wind up we presented Council with a list of 15 road safety items that had been proposed by that safety committee over previous years , but not one has been implemented or passed on to the R.S.A.C. for consideration . One of those items was the need for temperature operated ice warning lights at the notorious Travellers Rest area , similar to ones we do have at the Needles . We consider that we came close to having them installed by State Growth by direct negotiation with Craig Hoey but it fell through because of lack of initiative by our local Council . I do hope that this Committee can help get those lights installed.

All registered vehicles contribute to the road safety levy , and in order to be fair there needs to be an effort to see that road safety spending reaches all areas . There is a need for a better pathway for road safety policies to be dealt with , and we hope this Committee will help in that .

At the announcement of this Inquiry you will note that a Road Safety spokesman made the point that they did not believe that extra driver training was helpful . This has been a long-standing fault with our road safety people –they continue to fail to understand that there is a lot of difference between “ advanced driving “courses on a racetrack and defensive driving courses which concentrate on keeping the vehicle out of harms way . It might be true that the first gives a false sense of security , or cockiness as they seem to believe , but it is certainly the opposite with defensive driver training . Some motorcyclists make the same error – they believe that track days make them better riders . The reality is that what is learnt on track days is not appropriate for road use, and a more defensive style of riding should be used . See section (b) and I would like the opportunity to explain that verbally to the Committee if it is possible .

In the breakdown of causes of the major accidents we are seeing the major causes are :

- (a) The “2 plus 1 “ , or 3 lane highway design currently used .
- (b) Motorcyclists and the current regulations.
- (c) Incidents involving suicide .

(a) The "2 + 1 " method of highway construction has been a dangerous failure and it is clear that many of the most dangerous accidents have been caused by motorists being mistaken about the direction of the lane they are in . Recent examples of this in our area include one in which a driver , even though familiar with the road , remembered that a passing lane began just after an underpass . It turned out to be the wrong underpass . In another case a vehicle slowed to exit left and the following vehicle , instead of slowing with it , pulled into the other lane in the apparent assumption that two lanes were in the same direction . I have personal experience of this when a vehicle pulled out alongside my truck , the trigger being he had seen the exit road from Deloraine and assumed that was a divided section . Even when a vehicle coming towards him flashed their lights he took no action except flash his own lights .The other vehicle was forced off the road and the culprit continued in the wrong lane without braking or swerving , obviously convinced in his own mind that he was in the correct lane .

It will be many years before the problem can be fixed by making the highway either 2 lanes or 4 lanes , but in the meantime the issue can be addressed (at a very low cost) with better road markings. Only 1 in 10 motorists would be aware that there is a colour code for the reflectors used in road markings . Red marks the left side , white are used to mark the centre line where they can be crossed to overtake , and yellow markers are used on the right side and should not be crossed . This is used in many countries , and some including N.Z.emphasise the fact by using yellow lines to mark areas we would use double white lines . The change of colour of lines or reflectors are obvious at a much greater distance . Most of the recently upgraded highway follows the convention , showing that part of the workforce understand , but older sections do not and other roads have used whatever reflector came to hand .

This was raised many years ago in the aftermath of a high profile accident where the police could find no reason why a car was in the wrong lane . I raised the issue with the Chair of the R.S.A.C. at that time as that car had come through a recently upgraded section of the Midland Highway where it travelled properly in the right hand or overtaking lane where the dotted white line and the white reflectors were on the drivers left . In the following older section photos of the crash site showed that a vehicle travelling with the reflectors on the left would be in the wrong lane . No action has been taken to alleviate the problem with markings , but State Growth did immediately upgrade that section .

The types of markings that will help are first of all to give priority to correcting the reflectors on Hwy 1 . Large white arrows to mark the lane directions should be installed on the road surface where there is an exit or merging lane . Consideration given to use of yellow where we use double or unbroken white lines , at least on Hwy 1 .

In the aftermath of the previous Inquiry State Growth did take on board the need for arrows on the road surface to indicate merging lanes . The arrows they have used are not long enough – they need to extend from the left lane right into the right lane so that both lines of traffic have a clear view of them . The problem with having so many merging situations on 2+1 roads is that Tas has two different rules ; if there are dotted lines across the end of merging lanes the left lane gives way , but if there are no dotted lines then the vehicle in front has right of way . Tas does not have the mainland convention that lanes merge 1 for 1 , where there is seldom a problem .

(b) Motorcyclists.

As a motorcyclist of 55 yrs and without an accident I feel obliged to point out that there are three distinct areas that need attention , and they are young offenders on unregistered bikes , returning riders after an absence, even if holding a car licence , and those engaged in excessive speeding . The under-age offenders have been supplied with unregistered bikes by their parents and it is they who should be held accountable for their child's actions . As they pass licence age it is a big financial step to register a bike and get a licence , and so many do not bother . The present registration system provides for 125cc to be registered at half the price of other bikes , but 125 bikes or scooters are not attractive to those people , and in todays traffic can be dangerously underpowered .

A change to the lower class of bikes to 250cc with similar rego cost will encourage those needing cheap transport in their first jobs , and the problem young riders , to buy registered bikes and in association with that obtain licences . A change to a step in rego cost between the LAMS 660cc class and larger bikes would encourage experienced riders to retain a 660 class bike rather than a high performance bike . This would mean a 3 step cost structure .

Riders returning after a period without a bike need a refresher course as bike riding has quite important differences to driving a car . A car can brake in a corner if need be , but returnees need to be reminded that the gyroscopic effect of wheels on a bike means that they will tend to stand up and run wide . For this reason a " late apex " cornering technique is important in road riding .

(c) In the breakdown of causes of fatal accidents there is an issue that is deliberately avoided .A full 30% of fatal accidents Australia wide are due to acts of suicide . This figure is recognized by some suicide prevention groups , but is avoided by a few in the belief that it produces a copy cat effect . The figures represent 9-10 lives in Tas each year and 300 out of the Aus. road toll of 1100 .

It is of little use talking of "Towards Zero " and ignoring 30% of accidents. It is a delicate subject , but I was involved in such an incident in 1985 , and firmly believe that co-operation between mental health and road safety groups can develop a policy that can avoid the copy-cat effect by stressing the effect on the second party involved . We need to develop a policy that results in family members and workmates being able to recognize the signs and get earlier intervention , and for those on a downward spiral to themselves recognize that if they find themselves looking at the front of a truck they need to seek help .It would be a great help if this Committee can initiate talks between road safety and mental health groups .

Yours Sincerely ,

Malcolm J Eastley