

What's the ride answer? Australia must take a more integrated approach to motorcycle safety

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Abstract

Australia must take a more integrated approach to motorcycle safety if the desired reduction in serious casualty crashes is to be achieved. Some great progress has been made with motorcycle safety initiatives in different jurisdictions, but a coordinated approach would have even greater outcomes.

Motorcycle use continues to grow in popularity, but in many policy areas there remains a reluctance to embrace motorcycle transport or do things that might be seen as 'encouraging' or supporting motorcycle use.

Within the Safe System approach, the focus on safer infrastructure and safer vehicles is limiting the potential for greater motorcycle and scooter safety outcomes. There are challenges and limitations in terms of making infrastructure more forgiving and vehicles safer, so there needs to be greater focus on 'safer road users' for these vehicle types. Riders are far better off avoiding crashes altogether than relying on the 'system' to minimise injuries in the event of a crash.

Another example is with marketing. In the digital age, state-based road safety campaigns become lost in the blur of social media.

Introduction

The Australian Motorcycle Council (AMC) was formed in 1980 and is the peak road rider representative organisation in Australia. The AMC's membership is made up of the main rider organisations from each state and territory and also includes a number of standalone national associations. The AMC has been active in promoting motorcycle safety in Australia and internationally throughout this time and was a member of the Australian Government's Motorcycle Safety Consultative Committee (MSCC) until funding of this forum was ceased by the Government in 2010.

The call for a national approach to motorcycle safety extends for over a decade. In 2004, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Transport and Regional Services released its report on an Inquiry into National Road Safety, *Eyes on the Road Ahead*. One of the report's recommendations was the development of a national motorcycle safety strategy. This has never happened.

In 2008 the Australian Government, through the MSCC and with funding support from the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries (FCAI), hosted the Motorcycle and Scooter Safety Summit in Canberra. The summit produced an extensive list of key recommendations in seven policy areas, but lacked a plan for how these would be progressed. Subsequently, little has happened with many of these recommendations.

Soon after the Canberra summit, the OECD's International Transport Forum held a Workshop on Motorcycling Safety at Lillehammer, Norway. This was attended by representatives from the Australian Government, the AMC and the FCAI. The workshop produced a list of 19 recommendations; however this also lacked a plan for implementing recommendations. The OECD subsequently formed a working group to prepare a report on progressing the workshop

recommendations. This was due for publication by the end of 2014, although by mid-2015 this had not occurred.

In 2010, the short-lived National Road Safety Council (NRSC) picked up on the lack of national progress with motorcycle safety and decided to initially focus on one area – rider training. At the NRSC's request, the MSCC to develop a proposal for a national approach to rider training. This was referred to Austroads in late 2010. A number of jurisdictions have commenced separate reviews of motorcycle rider training since that time.

Education

The importance of marketing messages for motorcycle safety was one of the seven areas highlighted at the 2008 summit. This is a subject explored by the Australian Motorcycle Council at the Australasian College of Road Safety conference in Adelaide in 2013.

The significant growth in social media use in recent years has added a significant new dimension to marketing in Australia. There are now over 11 million Facebook users and 2.2 million Twitter accounts.

Video advertisements that were once almost the sole domain of geographically-based television networks are now shared across the country, and around the world. There should be reconsideration of how road safety campaigns are delivered in Australia

This situation of multiple messages in a national market is not new. State-based safety campaigns have been promoted in national motorcycle print magazines for at least a decade. It hasn't been unusual to see an advertisement from New South Wales on one page, and another taking a completely different approach from Victoria a few pages later.

From a marketing perspective, it might be normal to have competing businesses with different approaches, but with motorcycle safety, isn't it trying to 'sell' the same brand?

Road rules

Australia generally has a set of national road rules, with some local interpretations, exceptions and additions. Something of a paradox in relation to a national approach to motorcycle safety exists in the area of lane filtering. It's fair to say that if Australia had waited for a lane filtering to become part of the national road rules, it would have been a long wait.

Instead, New South Wales acted first and after a successful trial, specifically defined and legalised lane filtering from July 2014. Queensland followed with similar rules. Now a trial is currently underway in the Australian Capital Territory and the Victorian Government is running a public consultation process examining the subject.

Whilst welcoming progress in these jurisdictions, we are fast-heading to a state of filtering being defined slightly differently depending on where you live. This is not a good situation for people who travel or who live near a border in a highly-populated area – two such regions exist in Australia.

Rider training

Following a report from the now-defunct MSCC to the now-defunct NRSC in 2010, an Austroads' project has considered development of a national graduated licensing scheme for motorcycle Riders.

One aspect of the MSCC report was a strong recommendation that the motorcycle rider training industry in Australia should be closely consulted as part of any review. The AMC has continued to advocate for a national approach but has been kept completely in the dark on progress of the project over the past four and a half years. Meanwhile, a number of jurisdictions have been undertaking separate reviews of rider training. State rider organisations have been consulted in these reviews.

Infrastructure and motorcycle safety

This is one area where the beginnings of a national approach are underway with some elements. Austroads has two projects underway that are paying particular attention to motorcycle safety. One is entitled Safe System Infrastructure which has looked at motorcycles as a separate road user category. A second is specifically looking at the Austroads Guides to see if additional information specific to motorcycles should be included.

Meanwhile, over the past decade almost all jurisdictions have developed individual projects aimed at improving infrastructure aimed at reducing motorcycle and scooter casualties. These have been a mix of measures aimed at reducing the frequency of crashes and those aimed at reducing severity of injury in the event of a crash.

Conclusion

Motorcycle safety continues to be one of the most frequently discussed aspects of road safety in Australia, but despite significant amounts of knowledge and goodwill, progress has been very slow in many areas.

Other countries have done far better – *The Government's Motorcycling Strategy* from the United Kingdom is one example. The *National Strategy for Motorcycle and Mopeds* from Norway is a joint production of the Norwegian Government and the Norwegian Motorcycle Union – the country's equivalent of the Australian Motorcycle Council.

Australia has taken a proactive to cycling, with the Austroads-funded Australian Bicycle Council responsible for implementing a national cycling strategy – which includes many safety elements.

This year, the Senate Standing Committee on Rural and Regional Affairs has held an Inquiry into Aspects of Road Safety in Australia. The AMC expects that this Inquiry – just like the House of Representatives inquiry before it in 2004 – after consideration of all the evidence presented, will make a recommendation for a national approach to motorcycle safety.

Will this be a case of history repeats, or is there now the will and desire to take a united approach?

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