

## **Preliminary Findings from the Evaluation of the NSW Minimum Passing Distance Trial**

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### **Abstract**

An evaluation of the NSW minimum passing distance (MPD) trial is nearing completion. It assessed practical implementation, impact on road users' behaviours, attitudes and perceptions, and road safety benefits. Draft findings indicate awareness of the MPD rule increased and motorists were generally compliant. Compared to the pre-trial trend, there were 15 fewer casualty crashes indicative of non-rule compliance in the 10 months after the trial began, but the difference was not statistically significant. The draft findings confirm the rule has improved motorist awareness of the need to provide space when passing, and suggest the rule has contributed to cyclists' safety.

### **Context**

In March 2016, NSW commenced a two-year trial of minimum passing distance rules. The rules require drivers passing a cyclist to leave at least 1 metre when the speed limit is 60 km/h or below, and 1.5 metres if above 60 km/h. The MPD rules aimed to influence safe passing behaviour by removing ambiguity about the expectations for leaving space when passing a cyclist and providing a clear measure for NSW Police to enforce unsafe overtaking manoeuvres. Compliance is facilitated by providing exemptions to existing road rules so motorists can pass cyclists in safe circumstances.

The Centre for Road Safety commissioned the Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety – Queensland to evaluate the practical implementation of the rule, its impact on road users' attitudes and perceptions, and road safety effects. The evaluation is nearing completion, with a final report expected to be completed during the first half of 2018.

### **Methodology**

Evaluation methods included: pre (n=1,755) and post-rule (n=1,812) surveys with cyclists and motorists; pre and post-rule observations of passing events at 12 low and high-speed sites across metro and regional NSW (with 3,329 passing events measured in the pre-rule period and 2,650 in the post); interviews and focus groups with 18 stakeholders; and infringement and crash data analysis using an interrupted time series analysis.

### **Preliminary Findings**

Post-rule survey results showed most cyclists (80%) and drivers (69%) supported or strongly supported the rule. All stakeholders generally considered the MPD and the speed limit ranges to which they applied were appropriate. All stakeholders thought the rule improved driver awareness of the need to provide space when passing, and validated cyclists' right to cycle on roads. While Police were supportive of the rule they had concerns about enforcing it. In practice, 45 infringement notices related to MPD rules were issued between March 2016 and May 2017.

Most drivers (69%) and cyclists (81%) surveyed thought the rule had improved safety. Awareness of the rule increased from about half of the drivers and cyclists in the pre-rule survey to about two-thirds in the post.

The median passing distances across low-speed sites were observed to range between 1.2 and 1.8 metres, and between 1.7 and 2.8 metres across high-speed sites, suggesting a general level of compliance with the rule.

Crash data analysis comparing five-year trends before the introduction of the MPD rule with the 10 months post found a 14% reduction in the number of casualty crashes per month involving a bicycle and a motor vehicle in the post period.

There were also 15 fewer casualty crashes indicative of non-rule compliance involving cyclists and motor vehicles in the post period, although the change was not statistically significant.

### **Conclusion**

Overall, draft findings indicate the MPD rule is mostly supported. Awareness of the rule increased after the trial began, and motorists were generally compliant. Compared to the pre-rule trend, there were fewer casualty crashes involving bicycles and motor vehicles after introduction of the rule. When finalised, evaluation findings will inform further decisions regarding future implementation.

### **References**

Centre for Road Safety, 2017. *Evaluation of the NSW Minimum Passing Distance Rule*. Unpublished report prepared by the Centre for Accident Research and Road Safety – Queensland, for the Centre for Road Safety, Transport for NSW.