

Driver behaviour and attitude is a key factor...

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Abstract

Focusing on producing better drivers, competent and aware drivers, making better decisions and reducing risk on Australian roads.

Whilst we can be proud as a Nation that our road toll has reduced over the past decade, the number of serious accidents has not reduced, and this cannot be ignored.

Over 99% of crashes involve some degree of driver error. Driver decisions in the moments leading up to a crash, can in most cases prevent or reduce the severity.

An urgent focus needs to be placed on creating a "responsible" culture of drivers on our roads. A vehicle cannot be driven without a driver. Yet little credibility is placed on the value of focusing on improving driver education to improve road safety. It has been disappointing to see whenever this subject is raised in the road safety industry it is instantly dismissed by many.

It would appear this thinking has come about because of statements such as "even the most competent driver will still make mistakes", so the focus has been to remove the driver from the equation, in an effort to reduce the risk.

Whilst all drivers can make mistakes, what needs to be considered is that "aware drivers" have the ability to manage and correct those mistakes, and most importantly, can often anticipate the mistakes of other drivers.

The Safe System Approach as part of the National Road Safety Strategy is yet to realise its full potential when it comes to Safer People. It is far more effective to avoid crashes in the first place by adopting lower risk driving techniques.

In this regard, enthusiasts aim to be recognised as the leaders in safe driving practice and would welcome the opportunity to discuss this as part of the 2015 conference.

Introduction

The forward to the National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020, acknowledges that whilst there has been a measurable decrease in deaths on Australian roads over the past decade, there has been slower national progress in reducing the number of serious injuries during the same time period.

Despite setting a target to reduce serious injury crashes by 30% by 2020, there continues to be little progress in the reduction of serious injuries, and this continuing trend can no longer be ignored.

It is the belief of the Motoring Advisory Council (MAC), that an urgent focus needs to be placed on creating a "responsible driving culture" in Australia; through a refocus on 'Safer People' as part of the National Road Safety Strategy, to 'take action together' by sharing the responsibility to use roads safely.

It is time for new thinking and a willingness to adjust priorities in order to see a measurable decrease in the number of serious injuries on the road.

Shift in thinking

Much focus has been placed on “surviving the crash”. With advancements in vehicle safety technology, infrastructure and trauma response, improvements are being made in these areas, and MAC fully support a continued focus in this area.

Unfortunately, little focus has been placed on “avoiding the crash” in the first place, as a measurable way to reduce the number of serious injuries on the road.

A holistic approach to the National Road Safety Strategy should include both; The primary focus should be to reduce the number of incidents on the road and the secondary focus should be to increase the chance of surviving a crash, should one occur.

It needs to be remembered that the latest 5 Star ANCAP rating vehicle has the same road safety outcome as a 1965 Classic Vehicle, if it is not involved in a crash.

Driver decisions in the moments leading up to a crash can, in most cases, prevent or reduce the severity.

By implementing systems based on competence rather than compliance, better drivers/riders will be created, and will lead to a better road experience that is safer for all.

Safer People within a Safe System

Australia’s National Road Safety Strategy (NRSS) is based on the ‘Safe System’ approach; *Safer Roads, Safer Vehicles, Safer Speeds, Safer People*.

The MAC are calling for a stronger focus on ‘Safer People’ under the ‘Safe System’, with the aim to develop a responsible community of Road Users.

The unrealised potential of “Safer People”, if realised, presents a real opportunity to produce a better road safety outcome for all road users.

Why Re-focus on Safer People?

- New advances in education and training pedagogy
- New educational research into how we learn, parental influence and cognitive neuroscience
- New technologies to support road user education and training
- Economical access to new technologies to support road user education and training. (Australian Naturalistic Driving Study).

Driver/Rider education and training, benefits not only the driver/rider but every other road user, including the more vulnerable road users.

Key themes***Low Risk Driving Practices***

Using the road is never risk free, but it is a realistic goal to minimise that risk.

A workplace health and safety (WH&S) approach should be applied to minimising risk associated with using the road.

Competency, behaviour and attitude are key factors to reducing risk.

The 'human element' of road use can no longer be ignored. Competent, aware drivers/rider are lower risk road users, as they can anticipate and potentially avoid a serious incident on the road. (Underwood, Ngai, Underwood 2012)

Teaching situational awareness, knowing what is happening on the road around the road user, will enable road users to anticipate potential risk, thus minimising the risk to themselves and others on the road.

A focus on the WH&S Sector shows evidence that additional training for vehicle users has the result in less road incidents while in a work vehicle - therefore less cost to the employer, damage to person and property, lower insurance premiums, time off work due to injury, etc, as well as less lost time and productivity when an employee may be involved in a road incident in their own personal time as well.

The greater the community of road users practising low risk driving practices, the safer the road will be.

Education & Training

Education and training is an essential component for developing safer road users.

The validity of improving road user education and training cannot be ignored simply because prior research is not only now out dated, but has become an end unto its self.

Competent and aware road users have the ability to manage, and correct those mistakes, and most importantly, can often anticipate the mistakes of other road users. (Underwood, Ngai, Underwood 2012)

Educational research has shown that learning skills needed for an 'emergency' situation in a 'non-emergency' situation is more effective when those skills are required for an 'emergency' situation. (Westwell, Panizzon 2011)

'Whole of Life' Education

There are many opportunities to influence, educate and skill people for safer road use – from young children through to older drivers (whole of life learning).

Challenges

It is important to revisit the reasons why improving driver education to improve road safety crash outcomes has not yet been proven in Australia, and how this may have held back further research and advancement in this area.

“There is community support for driver education programs; however, the research evidence on the effectiveness of such programs in reducing serious crashes remains disappointing”. (National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020 – Safer People)

One obvious challenge when the focus is to avoid crashes, is in data collection, as a “crash avoided” is never recorded.

Summary

More emphasis needs to be placed on ‘Safer People’ under the ‘Safe System’ to reduce the number of serious crashes on our roads.

Look to the WH&S Sector for evidence of increased education and training translating to improved economic and social outcomes.

Education and training is a key component in producing safer road users. A move towards ‘whole of life’ education and skills development will develop people who can make safer on-road decisions.

A shift towards a ‘responsible’ road user culture in Australia is required; *responsible not just for self, but every other road user.*

A license is a privilege not a right.

Where to from here

This is merely the beginning of a new conversation around road safety, looking at one of the key Road Safety System elements which has not been in focus recently. Since the improvements to technology and road infrastructure have not led to the reduction in serious injuries on the road that was anticipated, an additional focus on the ‘Safe People’ element is timely.

While the Motoring Enthusiasts Community may not have all the answers to how best tackle the ‘Safe People’ element, as a group of responsible road users who are, often, under-represented in road incident statistics, and draw ranks from a wide cross-section of the community, this group have many suggestions as to how this element may be brought back into alignment with the others of the Road Safety System.

MAC is calling for an Industry lead summit around ‘Road User Education and Training’ to provide additional strategies, and work towards the cost and risk analysis of a range of strategies to bring Safe People to the fore of the community’s focus.

References

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