

Mandatory Driver Training and Assessment Relating to Awareness of Vulnerable Road Users

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Abstract

The ACT Government is taking the lead nationally with mandatory driver training and assessment on driving safely around vulnerable road users (cyclists, pedestrians and motorcyclists). Learner drivers must now achieve 100% in the road rules test for questions relating to vulnerable road users. In the practical driving test, a new 'vulnerable road user driver competency' applies in which the applicant is required to demonstrate a range of skills. The skill requirements are – good observation, recognition and risk management and display appropriate and calm decision making to mitigate and avoid risk and harm to any vulnerable road users.

Background

Vulnerable road users are over-represented in Australian Capital Territory (ACT) road crash statistics (ACT Government, 2016). In 2015, five fatalities and 244 injuries involved vulnerable road users – which represented 33% of fatalities and 31% of reported injuries in the ACT. In relation to cyclists, the number of high threat to life injuries in the ACT has increased at a much higher rate than nationally (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2015). The ACT rate per 100,000 population was 1.5 in 2001, increasing to 7.0 in 2010 compared with a national increase from 2.4 in 2001 to 4.9 in 2010.

The ACT Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020 is supported by multi-year action plans. The ACT Road Safety Action Plan 2016–2020 is the second action plan under the current strategy and seeks to improve the ACT's road safety performance by targeting key road safety issues for the ACT. Improving road safety for vulnerable road users is one of the key issues being targeted under this action plan, with a number of measures including a commitment to establish the new driver competency and to introduce specific content in the ACT's road rules knowledge test, relating to vulnerable road users.

Method

A project implementation paper was developed which identified the implementation stages (e.g. research, policy development, development of a legislative framework, information technology changes, development of publications etc), implementation issues – and how these would be addressed, and a communications and consultation strategy including workshops and training with the ACT driver training industry.

The only implementation issue which was identified was whether the new driver competency should apply to people who obtained their learner licence before the implementation of the new competency. The implementation paper proposed that the new competency apply only to drivers who obtained their learner licence on or after the implementation date and that branding changes to learner driver logbooks be introduced to assist Accredited Driving Instructors and Government Licence Examiners in distinguishing between the two groups of learners.

Importantly, the ACT's new driver competency is evidence based having been informed by findings from a study which was being completed at the time by Dr Marilyn Johnson from Monash

University with Dr Jennifer Bonham from the University of Adelaide.¹ This study was investigating current gaps and opportunities for teaching new drivers safe driving skills when sharing the road. The draft driver competency was provided to Dr Johnson for review and comment and her suggested changes were adopted.

Results

New driver competency

The new driver competency sets out a range of requirements for how a learner is to drive responsibly – recognising the potential harm they could cause to a vulnerable road user. The learner must perform the tasks of the competency throughout an entire assessment and unaided by the licence examiner. Training and assessment of the competency is undertaken using a wide variety of different road and traffic conditions where vulnerable road users may be encountered. This includes roads with green bicycle lanes and marked bicycle lanes, and areas with high numbers of cyclists and pedestrians, such as shared zones, town centres, group centres, aged care facilities, and school zones.

Enhanced theoretical testing

On the changes to the road rules test, a new section was introduced which relates specifically to vulnerable road users. This section of the test includes five questions randomly selected from a large pool of questions relating to this topic. The applicant must answer all questions correctly in order to pass the test.

Evaluation

Data from practical driving assessments and the online knowledge test system will be used to identify the number of assessments failed as a result of not passing the vulnerable road user content. This will allow the directorate to develop enhanced materials on driving around vulnerable road users to support learner drivers in the licensing process. There are future research opportunities which will be considered by the ACT Government. Vulnerable road users is a priority funding area under the ACT Road Safety Fund and research into the impact of this initiative will be given a greater weighting when future research proposals are considered by the ACT Road Safety Advisory Board.

References

- Justice and Community Safety Directorate. (2016). *2015 ACT Road Crash Report*. Canberra, Australia: ACT Publishing Services.
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Flinders University. (2015). *Trends in serious injury due to road vehicle traffic crashes, Australia 2001 to 2010*. Canberra, Australia: self published.

¹ As at 23 August 2017, the report is yet to be published.