

**Submission  
No 29**

# **INQUIRY INTO SPEED ZONING AND ITS IMPACT ON THE DEMERIT POINTS SCHEME**

**Organisation:** NRMA Motoring and Services  
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Dear Mr Aplin

**NRMA Submission to Staysafe Inquiry into Speed Zoning and its impact on the Demerit Points Scheme**

Thank you for your letter inviting NRMA Motoring & Services (NRMA) to make a submission to Staysafe's Inquiry into Speed Zoning and its impact on the Demerit Points Scheme.

NRMA has more than 2.4 million Members in NSW and the ACT. For more than 90 years, NRMA has represented the interests of motorists in relation to road funding, road safety, driver education and other related public policy issues.

Throughout the years, NRMA has advocated on behalf of our members on a variety of issues around speed zones, speeding enforcement and the role of the demerit points system in promoting positive changes in driver behaviour.

NRMA has responded to each of the Inquiry terms of reference. This submission highlights in particular the following:

1. The benefits of providing NSW motorists with the option to undertake a speed awareness course at their own cost in lieu of demerit points and fines.
2. Concerns that the impact on traffic flow and capacity is rarely considered in any road safety analysis of speed limit reductions.
3. The benefits of retaining 70km/h and 90km/h speed limits in the NSW speed limit mix.

Our responses to the Inquiry terms of reference are set out below.

**a) The contribution of speed to crash rates on NSW roads**

It is widely accepted that speed may be a factor in collisions, and is often compounded with other factors such as fatigue, distraction or alcohol.

No matter the circumstances of an accident, it is likely that had the driver been driving at a slower speed, the accident or fatality may have been avoided, or at least resulted in significantly less damage.

It is important to draw a distinction between inappropriate speeds and driving over the legal limit. Depending on the conditions, a driver may be traveling at a speed that is inappropriate but is not over the legal limit. Driver education is key in this scenario. Drivers must be taught to drive to the appropriate speeds to ensure the safety of themselves and other drivers on the road.

When looking at the effect that speed has on crashes it is important to compare the NSW figures to other jurisdictions, both in Australia and abroad. Roads and Maritime Services (RMS) has stated that speeding is a factor in 42% of crashes in NSW, higher than any other jurisdiction. In New Zealand only 20% of fatal and serious injuries are caused by speed.<sup>1</sup> In Queensland only 21.1% of accidents were attributed to speed.<sup>2</sup>

In Victoria, it has been reported by Victoria Police, that speeding contributed to one third of all road traumas in that state.<sup>3</sup> Further, Victoria Police has stated that the government has no 'hard' data about the number of road deaths caused by drivers exceeding the posted speed limit. In NSW it appears there is no differentiation made between cases of inappropriate speeds and exceeding the legal speed limit.

With regard to the above, NRMA believes that NSW authorities should review their approach to collecting data relating to crashes caused by speed, and ensure that the data reported is comparable to other jurisdictions.

NRMA is concerned that that drivers are spending more time focused on their speedometers than on the road. This is a concern, particularly at intersections monitored by red-light speed cameras, as drivers are often more focused on ensuring they are obeying the speed limit than focusing on the conditions of the intersection itself.

While in recent years there has been a downward trend in the number of road accidents, the number of accidents caused by speed appears to have risen. This does not necessarily mean that current speed enforcement techniques are ineffective; however, it is evidence that additional factors need to be considered to effectively reduce speed related accidents.

It is widely accepted that significant reductions in the rate of fatal and serious injury crashes have been achieved as a result of improved infrastructure and vehicle safety, and through initiatives such as graduated licensing and drink-driving enforcement that have targeted high risk road users.

NRMA believes that concentrating speed enforcement around known accident black spots has a greater impact on reducing fatality and serious injury rates, and removes perceptions

<sup>1</sup> 9<sup>th</sup> Australian Road Engineering & Maintenance Conference, *Road Safety Video*. Available from: <<http://commstrat.cvent.com/events/9th-australian-road-engineering-maintenance-conference/custom-118-a758f6d0b7cd44298bf67aa4b8b24da4.aspx>>. [25 February 2014].

<sup>2</sup> Department of Transport and Main Roads 2013, *Is speeding really that dangerous?* Queensland Government, Available from: <[www.tmr.qld.gov.au/Safety/Driver-guide/Speeding/Is-speeding-really-that-dangerous.aspx](http://www.tmr.qld.gov.au/Safety/Driver-guide/Speeding/Is-speeding-really-that-dangerous.aspx)>. [25 February 2014].

<sup>3</sup> Dowling, J 2014, 'Victoria Police document reveals arsenal of weapons for war on speeding', *The Age* 23 January. Available from: <<http://theage.drive.com.au/motor-news/victoria-police-document-reveals-arsenal-of-weapons-for-war-on-speeding-20140122-3196e.html>>. [25 February 2014].

that speed enforcement through the use of speed cameras is nothing more than a 'revenue raising' exercise.

### **Regression to the mean**

Crashes are random, unpredictable events. A spike in crashes at a particular location will generally be followed by a reduction in the following years. Moreover, the exposure (likelihood) to crashes at intersections increases as the volume of traffic increases.

These are key factors to bear in mind when a speed camera or speed reduction is being considered and in evaluating the effect of such initiatives.

### **b) The rationale for and current operation of speed zones on NSW roads; and**

#### **c) Key factors governing the establishment of speed limits**

NRMA successfully lobbied the NSW Government to undertake an audit of speed zones as part of its 100 Day Action Plan.

The Government is acting on NRMA's concerns about the confusion caused to motorists when there are multiple speed limit changes along a route. However, NRMA does not subscribe to the view that there are too many speed limit options in the speed zoning mix in NSW and that removing 70 and 90km/h speed limits would help motorists. There are many roads with 70 or 90km/h speed limits where the speed limit does not change for long distances, including on rural roads between towns.

#### **d) Mechanisms for reviewing the appropriateness of maximum speed limits**

NRMA submits that the appropriateness of speed limits should be reviewed from time to time. Cleveland Street, a State arterial road running between South Dowling Street and Anzac Parade at Moore Park, along with Burnett Street, a regional road to the south of the M4 motorway at Merrylands, are two such examples of 50km/h roads that bear little resemblance to 50km/h residential streets.

In the case of Cleveland Street, the high number of lanes and wide open nature of the road, does not give the appearance of a 50km/h street. This is compounded by its function as a key link between the Eastern Distributor, South Dowling Street and Anzac Parade.

Many motorists heading to the Sydney Cricket Ground and Fox Studios would be unfamiliar with this section of road. It is further complicated by the existence of the school zone since it is not possible to erect fixed 50km/h speed signs within the 40km/h school zone.

### **Reviews through speed infringement data**

NRMA would like to see speed limits and speed cameras reviewed at locations where a large number of speed infringements are being issued. When large numbers of fines are being issued without reviewing the underlying conditions that result in the infringements being issued, it appears to indicate that there is a problem with the current system. Since 2008, the speed cameras on Cleveland Street at Moore Park have generated more than \$26 million from speeding infringements. This would appear to be a good indicator that the reason for the reduced speed limit is not readily apparent to motorists.

Where large numbers of infringements are issued at a particular location on a regular basis, a fundamental review of the location, including analysis as to whether the speed limit is appropriate for a particular road, should be undertaken.

**e) Operation of speed limits in other jurisdictions**

NRMA does not wish to comment on speed limits in other jurisdictions.

**f) The appropriateness of current thresholds in the Demerit Points Scheme for speeding offences**

NRMA submits that the current thresholds for speeding penalties in NSW are appropriate. A review undertaken in 2011 by the NSW Government addressed some anomalies between demerit point penalties issued in NSW and those in other states.

The current thresholds for accumulated points and automatic licence suspension are also supported. However, NRMA believes that these thresholds may need to be revised in the future as speeding enforcement by fixed and mobile speed cameras increases.

NRMA has previously recommended in its 3 Point Plan the implementation of a Speed Awareness Course similar to the one in the United Kingdom. Double demerit periods and the growing prevalence of mobile speed cameras mean that drivers can quite easily accumulate 13 demerit points over a three year cycle.

NRMA submits that the NSW Government should consider allowing drivers to complete a one-off driver education awareness course in lieu of demerit points and a fine for low level speeding offences. Such a course recognises the potential hardship that can result from a temporary loss of licence, particularly for drivers who need to drive to get to work. The awareness course would only be available to drivers once in a three year demerit point cycle on a user-pays basis.

In the United Kingdom, drivers are able to undertake a speed awareness course in place of a £68 fine and 3 demerit points. Relevant authorities within the United Kingdom are granted discretion when prosecuting speeding motorists, with drivers travelling as fast as 86mph in a 70mph zone able to attend a speed awareness course rather than attract demerit points and or a financial penalty.

Research from the United Kingdom suggests that the National Speed Awareness course is effective in changing driver behaviour:

A total of 99% of clients who responded at follow-up reported that they had changed their driving after attending the course, notably driving more slowly, being more aware of the road environment and of their speed, and feeling less stressed while driving. While a minority (9%) described how they had found it difficult to break their driving habits, and that they sometimes felt pressure from other drivers to speed up, particularly on motorways, the majority (90%) reported that they had not experienced any difficulties in applying what they had learnt.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> The Association of Chief Police Officers for England, Wales and Northern Ireland 2011, *Evaluation of the National Speed Awareness Course*, Available from: <[http://www.sussexsaferoads.gov.uk/download/doc\\_download/1478-speed-awareness-research-findings-from-brainbox-research.html](http://www.sussexsaferoads.gov.uk/download/doc_download/1478-speed-awareness-research-findings-from-brainbox-research.html)>. [25 February 2014].

### **g) The impact of demerit points in reducing speeding behaviour**

NRMA submits that the impact of demerit points in modifying driver behaviour depends on the number of offences a driver commits within a three year cycle. For a person with a clean record, the prospect of accumulating demerit points for speeding is unlikely to provide a deterrent. However, a driver who is close to exceeding their allocated demerit points has a clear purpose to obey the speed limit.

NRMA strongly believes that a visible police presence is the most effective way of reducing speeding in the first instance for all drivers, as it provides an immediate and visible deterrent.

The introduction of discounted licences for safe drivers is an initiative that NRMA strongly supports. We believe rewarding those who do the right thing is more effective in changing driver behaviour than punitive measures such as penalties.

Further use of the demerit points system to reward drivers who do the right thing is encouraged. For example, higher discounts for drivers who accumulate no demerit points for two or more 3-year cycles, or discounts or rebates on other charges such as Motor Tax or compulsory third party insurance premiums should be considered.

### **Conclusion**

If we are to seriously address safety and road transport issues in NSW we need to look at the data available, its validity, short comings and work on improving it.

Should you require further information about NRMA's submission, please contact Mr Sam Giddings, Senior Manager, Government Relations and Public Policy, on [REDACTED] or [REDACTED]

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