

**Submission  
No 14**

## **SUPPORT FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL LEARNER DRIVERS**

**Organisation:** Blue Mountains City Council

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Parliament of New South Wales,  
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Dear Sir/Madam

**SUBJECT Submission to Youth Safe Parliamentary Inquiry - Support for Rural and Regional Learner Drivers**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment on how to better support rural and regional learner drivers. This submission is made on behalf of Blue Mountains City Council's Road Safety program.

**a. Challenges faced by learner drivers in rural and regional areas to get the required training and experience to obtain a licence**

- Although the Blue Mountains LGA is 100km west of Sydney CBD more than 52% of the Blue Mountains residents travel outside of their residence for work with 64% of residents travelling in a private car.
- The ability to drive to work is a key challenge for young people seeking employment opportunities outside of the LGA. According to the Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage, 2016 SEIFA there are key locations of greater social and economic disadvantage in the Blue Mountains LGA. Of particular note central Katoomba, North Katoomba, North Springwood, East Blaxland and Mount Victoria. (<https://atlas.id.com.au/blue-mountains/maps/socio-economic-disadvantage>)
- Social and economic disadvantage can be a barrier to getting a licence
- In regional and rural areas, transport disadvantage is a key factor in the ability to access opportunities for education, health and employment.
- Transport disadvantage is of particular note where provision for public transport is less available, infrequent or non-existent. Public transport is also not an option for travel due to the lack of infrastructure.
- The challenge of the Graduated Licencing System (GLS) is the assumption that all young drivers wishing to learn have access to a suitable, skilled, supervising driver to support and teach them. There is also an assumption that they have access to a safe, roadworthy and registered car.
- Young people who have non-driving disabled parents have a barrier to getting a licence.
- Young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds in regional and rural areas may also be learning on vehicles that are older and have less safety features. This presents a higher risk to young and inexperienced drivers.
- This also presents a barrier for young people who may experience or have experienced family violence. They may not have a relationship with family due to family breakdown and therefore no avenue to learn to drive.

- Young parents and sole parents are particularly vulnerable to transport disadvantage. These transport difficulties can play a key role in social exclusion.
- b. Options for rural and regional learners to access driver training opportunities**
- The Keys2Drive program is limited in the way it is provided in regional areas. This needs to be expanded to enable greater access for rural and regional young drivers
  - The cost of hourly, private driving lessons (\$60 and up) and the Safer Driver course (\$140) are prohibitive for many young people or their families due to economic pressures.
  - The Safer Driver course needs to be subsidised, particularly for young people who can demonstrate the barriers of socio-economic disadvantage or disability.
  - Safer Driver course needs to be expanded and supported in rural and regional areas.
  - There are no current programs in our local area that allow mentoring for young people under 25 to learn to drive with a suitable teacher at a free, subsidised or low cost.
- c. Support for rural and regional learner drivers in other jurisdictions**
- In regional and rural areas, learner drivers lack exposure to many driving environments which are commonplace in urban areas, (traffic lights, roundabouts, high density pedestrian environments, built-up areas or other road environments which require immediate assessment of multiple safety factors)
  - Wider delivery of Graduated Licencing Scheme - Helping Driver Workshop for Supervising Drivers as an online module so it can be an option for those in rural or regional areas at any time of the year. The workshop needs to be tailored for regional and rural environments.
  - Expansion of the Driver Licensing Access Program currently offered to Indigenous young people to include young people who demonstrate barriers of socio-economic disadvantage, cultural barriers or disability to learner to drive.
  - TfNSW to work with and fund targeted localised youth, multicultural or women's services to deliver Driver Licencing Access Programs using trained driving instructors to disadvantaged young people. This would be a social and economic investment in enabling disadvantaged young people to access training, employment and health services.
- d. Use of technology**
- Driving simulation would be a useful tool to engage young people particularly in teaching Hazard Perception Skills. There would need to be planning on how this is rolled out. As road safety is part of the high school curriculum a visit from a mobile truck fitted out with driving simulation equipment for students year 9 – 12 would be an ideal tool to deliver this education. This could also be appropriate for TAFE and new University students.
  - Prioritising access to this technology for young people who have learn-to-drive barriers would have the greatest impact.
  - Measuring the use of this type of technology in a controlled setting for learner drivers in regional and rural areas, and who have socio-economic barriers could potentially be used as a justification to reduce the target of 120 hours of supervised driving required for a Provisional Licence
  - Cost and access to an appropriately modified vehicle can be a barrier for young people who live with a disability. These need to be considered in making the learner driver experience available for young people living with a physical disability.

**e. Changes to driver training and testing in New South Wales since Staysafe's 2017 report into driver education, training and road safety.**

- The benefits to the 120 hours of supervised driving as part of the licence provisions are known – it has led to an overall reductions in crashes involving young and inexperienced drivers. There are also long-term benefits to good quality driver education as drivers face challenges through the lifespan.
- Completing the Hazard Perception Test (HPT) prior to a young person attending driver testing is a positive development.
- Ensure that young people have read the Road Users Handbook and not just completed online tests before attempting their Learner test.

**f. Any other related matters**

- Regulation of driving instructors. There needs to be accountability for driving instructors not only for their capacity to teach good driving skills but also for their conduct around young people (specifically young women, Indigenous youth and those who speak English as a second language.) learning to drive.
- Useful inclusion in the driving instructor training would be training in appropriate conduct and cultural sensitivity.
- Continued driver education and road safety education opportunities targeting young people – considering a variety of methods to deliver this information.

Yours faithfully,

GARY PARSONS

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