

## DECEMBER 2006 ROAD SAFETY POLICY STATEMENT

### Purpose

1. The purpose of this Policy Statement is to provide an overall sense of direction to guide the efforts of all those involved in the provision of road safety policy and services on behalf of the Government. This should result in strong alignment across the wide range of specific interventions that are undertaken in relation to achieving the Government's road safety goals.

### Introduction

2. Road traffic crashes result in more years of life being lost than any other source of injury in New Zealand, and are the leading cause of death for children. Around 393 people died in the last 12 months and around 7,000 have been hospitalised.
3. In 2002 the Government set the goals of less than 300 deaths and 4,500 hospitalisations each year by the end of 2010. Achievement of these broad goals is certainly in view, but does not take account of the uneven impact of road trauma, particularly on young people. This level of road trauma also has a substantial impact on the New Zealand health system and any reductions would assist in freeing up resources to meet other health demands. There is also an impact on the economy through loss of production.

### Stakeholder and community engagement

4. The government believes that further gains in road safety can be made by fully engaging the community in the task of making the road network safer. Using the network as a driver, pedestrian or cyclist becomes more complex by the day, as traffic volumes increase and the pace of life continues to accelerate.
5. As part of continuing improvement to road safety, engaging those involved in designing, managing and using the road network in thinking about and contributing to development of much safer users, vehicles and roads, has been a major focus of attention over the last few months. This has been done through the *See you there... Safe As!* stakeholder and community engagement programme. While this cannot be considered to be a representative sample of New Zealanders, over 1,000 people were involved in a nationwide series of workshops. There has also been active discussion and debate on road safety issues through the associated website [www.safeas.govt.nz](http://www.safeas.govt.nz). There are now almost 2,000 posts on the site which has around 200 members. A great deal has been learned.

## **New approach**

6. There is a need to build on current education efforts and promote education as a key catalyst and enabler of safer people, safer roads and safer vehicles. Education and the provision of information was the standout item throughout the engagement process. The National Road Safety Committee (NRSC) has endorsed a new *Road Safety Education Strategic Framework* to guide the on-going efforts of agencies in this area.
7. While education as a theme runs across all elements of our road safety effort, there is a particular requirement for increased education and training in respect of young and novice drivers. There is also a clear need to take a hard look at the Graduated Driver Licensing System to ensure that it does the job of keeping our young drivers safe in their early encounters with the roading network. Work has now started on that.
8. Enhanced public education about the safety of vehicles and roads, for example, will help to generate consumer demand for improved safety in both these areas. This will challenge the producers and importers of vehicles and the builders of roads to do even better.
9. It is critical that ways are found to educate and motivate people to behave in a safe and courteous manner on the road. In respect of road users, the most fundamental challenge now, is trying to encourage everyone using the road network to exercise consistently safe judgements in the many thousands of decisions they are called to make in the course of undertaking any trip. Our broad advertising campaigns will be used as appropriate to help to make people are aware of the road safety risks posed by issues like fatigue and driver distractions that cannot be addressed by enforcement.
10. While there is much that can and has been done through legislation, particularly in the areas of drink driving and speeding, there are road safety issues that do not lend themselves to a legislative solution. Fatigue and many driver distractions like eating, drinking and interacting with passengers fall into this category. Similarly road managers do not need legislative change to take opportunities to influence safer use and consequently a safer system performance.
11. This new approach will also be taking account of climate change issues and the impact of emissions on health. There are environmental benefits to be gained from, for example, speed reductions on the open road. There is potential for synergy between our efforts in respect of road safety and the effort we could make to enhance transport sustainability. Officials will work to bring these issues together.

## Education

12. The *Road Safety Education Strategic Framework* document has been endorsed by the NRSC as the lead document supporting and guiding effective road safety education programmes and their management in New Zealand. This strategic framework for education is expected to help produce lasting attitudes and behaviours that will support development of an enhanced road safety culture that, in turn, will lead to reduced fatalities and injuries. Any reduction in road trauma leads to a smaller proportion of the health budget being required to treat road accident injuries.
13. The framework creates a cohesive approach to road safety education, which takes account of and clarifies the interaction of various government strategies that address key government goals for road safety, injury prevention, health and enforcement of road safety values as they appear in law. It also recognises that different modes of road transport exist and envisages that many education programmes will work well together to achieve more than one of the four main principles underpinning the vision of the New Zealand Transport Strategy: sustainability, integration, safety and responsiveness.
14. The framework reflects the Government's view that road safety is a core public health issue and one which each of us needs to understand and take responsibility for in order to meet our needs for a safe and healthy life. The higher level knowledge and skills required to create a safe road or to be a safe driver are similar to those required to recognise a variety of risks to the health of every person which exist in the environment, and which need to be take account of and mitigated where possible. Consequently, the Government wants to see road safety education within the spectrum of public health education initiatives and developing synergies with such existing programmes where possible.
15. Many effective education programmes catering for a variety of specific audiences already exist and will be extended or modified as required. Programmes to meet newly prioritised needs, including non-enforceable issues like fatigue, and driver distractions, will be developed as evidence dictates and effective ways to address such needs are devised. For example, road safety messages learned by very young children have been found to form the basis of their adult attitudes and behaviour in overseas jurisdictions. New ways to introduce effective road safety education for very young New Zealanders will be considered as soon as possible, including working through their parents.
16. Transport agencies will continue to support the work of teachers and school management to provide educational opportunities for children and young adults to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours needed to become safe users of the land transport network. Transport agencies can support teachers in their work assisting students to develop the skill of wise decision making which has been pinpointed as a core competency in the draft national curriculum. It has relevance across a range of challenging life issues faced by young people today including

alcohol, drugs, relationships and how the law relates to community needs, all of which impact on students' safety on the road network.

17. Improvement of opportunities for young people to access high quality driver training, a key work skill in today's New Zealand, is critical, including issues to do with training affordability. We know that gaining proficiency and qualification in driving gives some young people an opportunity to experience success and may create the motivation to develop educational opportunities further in other areas.

## **Penalties**

18. There is a clear need to re-align the penalty regime around safety. The engagement process highlighted a number of areas where the current penalty regime is ineffective at deterring high risk offenders. The most obvious problems exist in the young and novice driver area relating to breaches of the Graduated Driver Licensing System (GDLS). Currently the imposition of relatively high fines leads offenders to simply ignore the fines because they have difficulty paying them and end up being let off anyway.
19. A second area, where fines have been problematic, is in relation to speed management, where unfounded accusations of revenue gathering have been able to undermine the safety message as being the sole reason for speed enforcement.
20. Both of these areas, and others, came in for much comment during the stakeholder engagement exercise and an innovative new approach to demerit points was offered on the website. Diminishing demerits is an idea that appears, on the face of it, to have considerable merit. This system does not allow for the clock to be set back to zero when a person, disqualified as a result of achieving 100 demerit points, has served their disqualification and their licence is reinstated. Instead, points would start to drop off the total at a specified rate from the point when they are allocated. As a result, when an offender gets their licence back they could still have a total of say 70 demerit points so that the next infringement would get them a further disqualification rather than waiting to accumulate 100 points from scratch. This would impact significantly on repeat and serious offenders but serve merely as a warning to those who make an occasional mistake. The idea received strong support from commentators on the website.
21. The Government is not prepared to introduce demerit points on speed offences detected by camera. However, it does wish to explore the feasibility of the diminishing demerit points system. Officials have been tasked with examining the potential of this system. Officials have also been asked to propose a range of ways in which the use of demerit points can be increased and the balance between fines and demerit points be changed to give priority to demerit points. Areas likely to be affected include:

- a) offences by young and novice drivers under the GDLS;
  - b) running red lights and intersection offences such as failure to stop at a stop sign; and
  - c) safety-belt non-wearing offences.
22. Officials will also explore the potential for changing the balance of demerits and fines in officer detected speed offences, but will need to bear in mind the decision not to introduce demerit points on speed camera detected offences.
23. Proposals for changes to the penalty regime will be provided to Ministers by May 2007. Any resulting legislative changes would be included in a Bill for introduction later in 2007.

### **Speed management**

24. Speed management presents a dilemma. The view of road safety experts worldwide is that speed is the single most important determinant of the extent to which anyone will be injured in a crash. Everything possible should be done to try and reduce driving speeds as that is the single most effective strategy for reducing road trauma.
25. Against this, while the number of people driving at excessive speeds has been tracking down, and so has the number of speed infringement issued, New Zealand road users are still often demonstrating by their actions that they do not see speed as a substantial threat to safety. If they did we would not be issuing almost 800,000 speeding tickets each year, which account for over half of all offences. Nor would we still be seeing around 130 fatal crashes each year occurring where driving too fast for the conditions is a contributor.
26. Very important messages around the dangers of speeding are simply not getting through and it is critically important that we do better in this area. I have asked officials to come up with a clear and convincing approach to speed management where all the different elements around enforcement, advertising, and road engineering (including reviewing traditional approaches to speed signage and consideration of driver feedback systems) provide a mutually reinforcing framework for dealing effectively with the dangers of speed on the network.
27. A critical component of this new approach needs to be education to improve public understanding of the need for speed management, particularly around the physics of speed, and dispelling the myths about revenue gathering.
28. The approach to speed management needs to link with efforts to address climate change issues and the impact of emissions on health. There are certainly environmental benefits to be made from speed reductions on the open road. Efforts need to be made to find and use the synergy that is available between our speed management efforts in

respect of safety and the effort we could make to enhance transport sustainability.

29. Too many children are being injured on their way to and from school and this may be acting to deter parents from encouraging their children to walk or cycle. We are going to do something about making this activity safe.
30. Starting in February 2007, the Commissioner of Police will be operating a regime of “*No tolerance*” of speeding around schools and early childhood education centres. This will be well supported by appropriate signage and public education.

## **Alcohol and other drugs**

### ***Alcohol***

31. The stakeholder engagement feedback was quite clear. Those who participated believe that New Zealand has a drinking problem. Problems around drugged driving were also highlighted, particularly on the website discussion. Considerable concern was expressed about both the current legislative framework and the lack of public education in respect of driving while under the influence of drugs.
32. While there is a much greater acceptance of the dangers associated with drinking and driving than there is around speeding, there are still over 100 fatal crashes each year where alcohol is a contributing factor. Unfortunately, all the indicators are that this statistic has now started going in the wrong direction. The number of fatal crashes where alcohol is involved has started rising, as well as the numbers of people detected with alcohol levels above the legal limits. Many of these fatal crashes where alcohol is a factor involve young people.
33. There is no doubt that consuming alcohol degrades driving performance and affects driving behaviour. The risk of being involved in a crash increases disproportionately as the concentration of alcohol in a driver’s blood increases. We need to ensure that the public is well aware that driving performance starts to degrade well below the current legal limit for driving. We also need to help people to determine their own individual reactions to alcohol as these vary widely between people. No one should assume that they are safe to drive simply because they are within the current legal limit – we need to ensure that message is clearly communicated and understood.
34. It is important to acknowledge that alcohol also affects pedestrian safety and expand our education efforts accordingly. There are major gains to be made by efforts across sectors on dealing with alcohol problems. Officials have been asked to take a comprehensive approach to education and information on all aspects of the risks posed by alcohol and other drugs.

### **Other drugs**

35. The Government will be introducing an offence of being impaired by drugs when driving. It will also be making it compulsory for those who are suspected of driving under the influence of drugs to undertake a roadside impairment test. This legislation is now in the process of being drafted and we hope to have it introduced in the House in the latter half of 2007.
36. The Government has been concerned for sometime about the risks of drugged driving. This is an area that is fraught with difficulty as many other jurisdictions have discovered. We will not be introducing random drug testing at this point, but will continue to watch international developments in this area.
37. There was considerable comment about the perceived dangers of drugged driving in the *See you there... Safe As!* workshops. The website has seen further discussion. It is clear that a major public information campaign will be required prior to the introduction of any legislation and certainly before the new legislation becomes law. Officials have been tasked with getting this information campaign underway for early next year.

### **Young and novice drivers**

38. Despite recent improvements, young drivers are significantly over-represented in crash statistics compared to older drivers. Concern about this expressed through the engagement process was almost overwhelming.
39. The Government believes there is potential for significant road safety gains to be made through improvements to the Graduated Driver Licensing System (GDLS). While the principles underpinning the GDLS are sound, its effectiveness could be improved by rebalancing the penalties for those breaching its conditions to better deter such behaviour. There is also a need to examine some of these restrictions to ensure that they can be complied with.
40. In addition, increasing the level of supervised practice before drivers go solo is likely to produce gains. So too could better ensuring, through mechanisms such as the testing regime and driver training, that young drivers have the appropriate skill set before driving alone. Research consistently indicates that the highest crash risk period for young drivers is in the first six months of being able to drive solo. Officials have been asked to provide a series of proposals that will:
  - (a) ensure that our young people are as capable as possible before driving unsupervised on the network; and
  - (b) deter young drivers from breaking restrictions that are designed to keep them and other road users safe.

## **Driver fatigue and driver distraction**

41. Driver fatigue, which leads to drowsy driving, is an important contributor to road crashes. In 2005 “driver tired or fell asleep” was recorded as a contributor to 12 percent of fatal crashes. At 12 percent, these factors are widely acknowledged as being under-reported. Recent international research has estimated that the figure for all crashes is around 24 percent.
42. Driver fatigue was widely discussed at stakeholder engagement workshops and there has been considerable discussion on this issue on the website. Concern has been expressed about the lack of public awareness of the risks posed by driver fatigue and on action that can be taken by road users and infrastructure providers to recognise and mitigate the risks.
43. There has been considerable work done on driver fatigue in the local community and commercial driving areas and there is still more to be done. However, Government sees a need for an overarching public information campaign to legitimise and support these initiatives and to get the message clearly across to the general public about how dangerous it is to drive tired. There is also a need to improve our base information on the nature and extent of driver fatigue. Officials are now working in this area and we expect to see progress early in 2007.
44. Driver distractions, particularly cell-phone use, also featured in many workshop discussions. Government is keen to ensure that people are clearly informed about the dangers of engaging in distracting activity while driving, and to encourage the development of individual responsibility for behaving safely on the road network. Officials have been asked to pursue initiatives in line with this direction.

## **Safer road infrastructure and land use**

45. Concerns about the safety of the road infrastructure were commonly expressed through the stakeholder engagement process. Some of these concerns focussed on the specific needs of cyclists and motorcyclists and others were more general.
46. Government understands the importance of infrastructure safety. It can be demonstrated that road improvements can have immediate and long lasting effects on road safety outcomes. But in order that safety is integrated into the transport network, a more systematic approach to transport management should build safety in, not add safety on. Safety must continue to be considered in all transport decisions and designed into our infrastructure. This means that the road network should be designed and maintained and the land use planning done in a way that challenges the acceptability of road deaths and serious injuries, and accommodates the safety needs of all users – pedestrians, cyclists, public transport users and motorists.

47. Different regions and communities face different road safety issues. The *Road Safety to 2010* strategy should be supported by regional and local strategies that integrate safety into day-to-day transport management and contribute to a safer New Zealand. Central government will continue to provide strong support and guidance, and regional and local government should continue to assume greater safety management responsibilities.
48. Although it can be argued that road user behaviour contributes to most crashes, we cannot focus entirely on trying to change people's driving habits – the road itself and the vehicle must be safer. It must be recognised that whatever is done to make road users more alert, law abiding and competent, some will still make mistakes. Vehicle design and construction increasingly protects drivers and passengers from crashes and injuries. Work must also continue on designing and operating a road network that better accommodates human error. Striking the right balance between retrofitting existing roads, designing safety performance into new works and building new roads to relieve blackspots is challenging, but achievable.

### **Improving the light vehicle fleet and motorcycle safety**

49. Substantial improvements to safety have come about from improvements to light vehicle crash prevention and occupant protection technology. However, there is still a gap in the level of safety received in New Zealand compared with our road safety partners, so we need to do much better. Any consideration of interventions to improve the safety of the light vehicle fleet must address environmental concerns as well. Government sees no conflict between our safety and environmental goals – in fact, we should be harnessing the synergy. In particular, officials have been asked to focus on:
  - (a) links between speed management and reduction of fuel use;
  - (b) links between emissions control and safety benefits from lowering the age of the vehicle fleet; and
  - (c) environmental and health benefits from increases in safe walking and cycling.
50. Government is keen for people to factor both safety and environmental considerations into their purchasing decisions. In terms of reducing road trauma, the potential for savings are significant, with the European Transport Safety Council estimating that if every motorist upgraded overnight to the safest vehicle in their class then fatalities on Europe's roads would drop by 40-50 percent.
51. Government is concerned about the safety implications of the rapid increase in growth of the motorcycle fleet. Anecdotal evidence suggests that much of this growth is among older and returning riders. This development raises the following issues, which officials have been asked to explore and report on:

- (a) improving education and training of motorcyclists and raising awareness of motorcyclists among the general population of road users;
- (b) considering whether the 70km/h speed limit for learner motorcyclists is appropriate given the concerns expressed by motorcyclists about the risks presented by this limit; and
- (c) assessing the suitability of the infrastructure to support the growth in motorcycling. In particular, there are issues around the safety of the road surface and suitability for motorcycling and cycling.

### **Safety of the heavy vehicle fleet**

52. Where there is a crash involving a truck, it is more likely to involve a fatality, because of the size difference of trucks compared with other vehicles. However, in about two thirds of fatal crashes involving a truck, the fault lies with other road users and this is sometimes the result of the behaviour of motorists around trucks. This needs to be addressed through improved information and awareness among other road users of the constraints around truck operation.
53. Government is keen to continue the productive working relationship established with the heavy motor vehicle user industry. In addition to public information and education, there are three main issues that need to continue being explored through working with the industry:
- (a) means to ensure trucks are complying with speed limits – including means to ensure that cornering speeds for trucks are appropriate;
  - (b) the requirement for under-run protection and/or the prescribing of standards. Under-run protection serves to protect occupants of smaller vehicles, particularly cyclists, in the case of side under-run, by reducing injury severity in the event of a crash with a truck; and
  - (c) improvement in the rates of safety belt wearing among truck drivers.
54. Progress on these issues will be made in partnership with industry bodies and could take the form of a mixture of legislative and non legislative actions.

### **Summary**

55. This Policy Statement sets out the broad direction for completing implementation of those parts of the Government's *Road Safety to 2010* strategy that have been assessed by Government as key to making safety improvements. It is a substantial agenda and will involve both central and local government agencies with road safety responsibilities

working together and working with a wide range of stakeholders, and the broader community, to implement it.

56. The changes to urban speed tolerances will take effect in early February 2007. The work that requires legislative change will be completed in time for a Bill to be introduced into the House towards the end of 2007. The wide range of issues that need to be addressed through educational efforts will start immediately. Resourcing issues that cannot be met through current resources will need to be addressed through the 2008/09 National Land Transport Programme, and beyond.



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