
2020
AREAS FOR CONTINUED FOCUS AND EMERGING ISSUES
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## WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

- Of all the safety features invented for vehicles, seatbelts have made one of the largest contributions to improving road safety.
- A United States study of the contribution of vehicle safety technology from 1960 to 2002 found that fatalities had been halved as a result of seat belts.
- New Zealand has made good progress in increasing restraint use, although there is still room for improvement. On average 95 percent of adults use front seatbelts and 87 percent use rear seatbelts. Ninety-one percent of children under the age of five now use restraints.

## HOW CAN WE INCREASE OUR LEVEL OF RESTRAINT USE?

In this section the suggested initiatives for increasing restraint use are to:

- Bring our child restraint laws in line with international best practice
- Ensure correct use of child restraints
- Conduct a targeted programme in regions below the national average to improve rear seatbelt use
- Conduct a targeted programme to improve seatbelt wearing rates for commercial drivers.

### Bring our child restraint laws in line with international best practice

Child restraints vary depending on a child's age and weight. Rear-facing seats are best for young infants, forward-facing restraints are best for younger children and booster seats used with seat-belts work best for older children.

New Zealand has fallen behind international best practice child restraint use by primary school-aged children. This partly explains why we have one of the highest child road fatality rates in the OECD.

Many child deaths and serious injuries could be prevented by bringing our laws in line with international best practice. This would mean requiring children to use appropriate child restraints until they are 148 cm in height or ten years of age.

Many countries, including member states of the European Commission, Canada and several states of the United States have strengthened restraint laws for children over the age of five, and other countries, including Australia, are planning to follow suit.

Overseas experience shows a requirement based on height is more effective than one based on age.

In New Zealand, our five to seven year olds are only required to use a child restraint if one is present in the vehicle. We have no requirements for children aged eight or older to use a booster seat.

Strengthening our child restraint requirements will bring an immediate safety benefit but it will also impose costs. The price of a new booster seat starts from $159. However, parents are likely to have a choice between buying new, second hand or renting. Further analysis will be required on the number of New Zealand children that would be affected by this proposal.

### Ensure the correct use of child restraints

We also need to maintain a focus on the correct use of all child restraints. Child restraints are only fully effective when they are the right size for both the child and the vehicle, and the child is correctly positioned and strapped in.

Surveys show that 91 percent of pre school children were using restraints, but we do not know how many were using them correctly. Checks carried out in 2005 found that up to 65 percent of families surveyed were not using child restraints correctly. Another in Wellington in 2009 found that 45 percent were not used correctly.

There are a number of initiatives aimed at increasing the correct use of child restraints (eg through Plunket and Safe2Go[23]) that need to continue, but there is still room for improvement.

### Conduct a targeted programme to improve rear seatbelt use in regions below the national average

Improvements could be made by targeting regions where rates are below average. The national average wearing rate for rear seatbelts is 87 percent, but in Northland and Southland it is 71 percent, and in the Bay of Plenty it is 76 percent. We could support local initiatives in these areas.

### Conduct a targeted programme to improve wearing rates for commercial drivers

We could continue to focus on commercial drivers such as heavy vehicle, taxi and delivery drivers. We could encourage employers to require their drivers to wear seatbelts as part of their company's safety policy.

Recent surveys reveal that only 80 percent of commercial drivers use seatbelts where these are fitted. Fifteen truck drivers are killed on average each year due to not wearing seatbelts. Through this low cost targeted initiative we could aim to improve the wearing rate so it at least equals that for light vehicle drivers (currently 95 percent). We could also consider strengthening the penalties for not wearing a seatbelt.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

**Do you support aligning our requirements for child restraints with international best practice? This would mean that children over five years of age could use adult seat belts only when they reach 148cm in height. Before that they would have to use an appropriate child restraint. This includes the use of booster seats.**

**How could we improve seatbelt wearing rates among commercial drivers?**

23 See www.safe2go.co.nz


## WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

- High risk drivers are disqualified drivers, unlicensed drivers and drivers involved in illegal street racing (ie boy racers). It is not possible to know exactly how many high risk drivers there are. We do know that around 67,000 drivers are disqualified each year.
- Although probably low in number, high risk drivers are over-represented in crash statistics and their crashes tend to be more serious than those involving other drivers. They are also more likely to be at fault.
- Over the period 2004 – 2008 high risk drivers were deemed to be at fault in 9 percent of serious injury crashes and 13 percent of fatal crashes. For 2008 such crashes resulted in 880 minor injuries, 244 serious injuries, and 41 fatalities.
- The total social cost of crashes where high risk drivers were at fault was $340 million for 2008.

## HOW CAN WE REDUCE THE IMPACT OF HIGH RISK DRIVERS?

The suggestions for reducing the impact of high risk drivers are:

- The initiatives discussed in the sections on alcohol/drug impaired driving, increasing the safety of young drivers and safer speeds
- Enactment of the illegal street racing legislation.

Initiatives proposed for reducing alcohol/drug impaired driving, speeding, and increasing the safety of young drivers will also help reduce the impact of high risk drivers.

Enactment of the proposed illegal street racing legislation will give Police, the courts and local authorities greater powers and sends a strong message to illegal street racers that dangerous, disruptive and antisocial use of vehicles will not be tolerated.

Work will need to continue across government agencies, and at the community level, to change the driving behaviour of repeat traffic offenders.

This would include measuring the success of the proposed illegal street racing legislation. Results of this evaluation would be used to design ways of targeting other high risk drivers.


## WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

- **After young people, older New Zealanders have a higher level of road trauma than other age groups. Their road fatality rate is around 15 deaths per 100,000 population. This compares with the rate of 10 deaths per 100,000 for the entire population.**

Increasing road safety for older New Zealanders (ie people over the age of 75 years) is an emerging issue.

The road safety risk is **to** older New Zealanders rather than from them. Older New Zealanders have a lower risk of being in a crash than other road users, but a higher risk of being seriously injured. Compared to other drivers, older drivers tend to drive slower, less frequently and in less risky situations. Older people injure more easily, and this increases the road safety risk. They are also more vulnerable as pedestrians.

Around 24 people die in crashes each year[24] where an older driver was at fault. Seventeen of these fatalities were the at-fault driver and 5 were the drivers' passengers, most of whom were aged 75 years and over. The remaining two deaths were other road users. In contrast, for every at-fault young driver killed, 1.3 other road users also die.

There are three reasons why we should have a focus on older New Zealanders. The first is that 20 years ago older New Zealanders comprised about 5 percent of total fatalities and 2 percent of total injuries. These figures have since doubled.

The second reason is that given our aging population this trend is likely to continue. The number of New Zealanders aged 65 years and older is expected to increase by more than half in the next ten years. Based on this increase we estimate that by 2020 older road users could make up 14 percent of road deaths and 6 percent of road injuries by 2020.

The third reason is the amount of change needed to prepare for the increase in the older road user population. This means acting earlier rather than later to help older people drive as safely as possible for as long as possible. We can do this by:

- planning for the mobility needs of the elderly including supporting alternative transport options (eg public transport)
- promoting the uptake of safer vehicles
- improving our roads and roadsides.

Current initiatives, as well as those suggested in the safer roads, safer speeds and safer walking and cycling sections will all help improve road safety for older New Zealanders.

## HOW CAN WE IMPROVE THE SAFETY OF OLDER ROAD USERS?

**The suggested initiatives for increasing the safety of older New Zealanders are to:**

- **Improve roads and roadsides to cater for older New Zealanders**
- **Encourage the use of safer vehicles**
- **Expand education to target older drivers**

24 This is based on crashes that occurred over the period 2004 to 2008.

### Target road and roadside improvements to cater for older New Zealanders

We could focus roading improvements on areas of high risk for older drivers (eg simplifying intersections) and older pedestrians (eg providing safer road crossings).

Many of these roading improvements could be completed at a low to medium cost. These costs would be balanced by reductions in deaths and injuries and not just among older people. To provide the greatest benefit we could initially focus on sites where there have been a high proportion of crashes involving older road users.

### Encourage the use of safer vehicles

The elderly injure more easily and more severely in crashes than younger age groups. By encouraging older New Zealanders to buy safer vehicles we could raise road safety for this group. We could do this through advertising campaigns targeted specifically to older drivers.

### Expand road safety education for older New Zealanders

Increased road safety education for older New Zealanders could include refresher driver training, managing high risk situations (eg intersections) and safe mobility scooter use. We could consider targeting areas that have a relatively higher proportion of older New Zealanders.

## DISCUSSION POINTS

**Which of the suggested initiatives do you support and what is the most important one for you in improving road safety for older New Zealanders?**

**Do you have other ideas for how we can improve road safety for older New Zealanders?**