

Roads Act 1993 Review

Background of author.

64 years as a driver in 15 countries with about 2 million kilometres traveled. 10 years on farm machinery before that. One collision – with a wallaby that jumped out of the dark. An applied scientist with working experience in a dangerous industry (steel making). Later experience in assessing industrial research and development proposals covering technology, managerial capability, financial capability and commercial prospects.

Introduction.

The statistics quoted on pages 14 and 18, particularly the proportions of drivers and bicycle riders, seem to be collected using different base information.

The proportion of NSW residents being licenced to drive is clearly from statistical evidence – the number of people with a driving licence is from Departmental records and the number of residents is from the census. While this correctly addresses the likely users of vehicles it does not address the on-drivers who are generally dependent on being transported by car.

However, the number of cyclists does not have a verifiable statistical source. The inclusion of “interested” in the total number of cyclists is farcical. Experience indicates that this type of figure is likely to come from a survey done by a pressure group and should be treated with extreme caution. Similarly, the numbers of households said to have one working bicycle is unverifiable but may be from a similar survey. This figure may also include children's cycles which are no longer of use because the child has grown out of it. Casual observation indicates suspicion of the accuracy of these figures.

As the accuracy of this information is essential for planning purposes and operation of the Act, or any review, it is essential that the information is verified using independent operatives.

The overall impression from the information in the issues paper is that there is an intent to obstruct the principal users of the road system, i.e. vehicles, and give preference to minority users – this will have significantly negative impacts on the economy and, paradoxically on safety in general.

Questions.

4.0

The road system is being manipulated by pressure groups to put restrictions on vehicle users for their benefit, but which increase costs for both private and commercial users. This has a negative effect on the economy. This also applies to road safety groups who only propose negative solutions and never positive ideas.

An example is the reduction in the speed limit from 80 km/h to 70 km/h on Forest Way between Terry Hills and Belrose. By reports it is alleged that a dominant input was a petition with some 1,600 signatures organised by a cyclist group, the majority of whom had never been there. That part of the road is divided with two lanes in each direction separated by a vegetated median strip through a semi-rural area.

4.1

a) Any definition of objectives for roads and streets should be careful to ensure that the principal users are not excluded – the essence of a road/street network is its ability to transfer goods and people both locally and from further distances.

b) Outcomes for safety, public health and environment can be easily manipulated by activists and any review must ensure that an equitable outcome is possible. Note that many “safety” systems increase emissions, tyre and brake wear, e.g. low speeds limits mean a lower gear and increased emissions, speed humps/cushions cause braking and subsequent acceleration. Reviews of the safety of these are scientifically inadequate.

There is inadequate rest and refreshment areas on long highways – the French Aires are a good example on the Autoroutes.

Impenetrable barriers are needed on divided highways as used on European motorway type roads. A few metres of grass on a median strip will not stop an out-of-control vehicle.

c) Smooth flow minimises emissions.

4.2

A clear and simple definition of the priorities for each part of a road/street is essential for developing safe and effective operational systems, e.g. the part between the (nominal)

kerb lines is priority for wheeled vehicles and the part behind the kerb line is priority for pedestrians. Pedestrian crossings and traffic light controlled areas should be defined as equitable shared zones.

4.3

Simplify definitions and clarify the responsibilities for “shared” roads.

4.4

Nil comments

4.5

Nil comments.

4.6

In general alternative correctional systems should be explored – the simplistic application of financial penalties for what are breaches of often arbitrary levels of restriction do not alter behavioral standards even with forced compliance. Additionally simplistic application of penalties discourages feedback which can lead to improvements in regulations.

4.7

a) Use of streets in different ways on some days of the year or some times of the day should continue to be referred to the Local Traffic Committee to ensure that a full appraisal is given to the concept. This the current methodology.

Area wide speed zone reductions or even specific street speed reductions must never be delegated to Councils. This because of the actions of activists forcing unrealistic speed reductions. The optimal speed designation is that speed that a reasonably good driver would naturally use given the conditions and an unnaturally low limit will lead to significant disobedience by drivers with resultant disdain for all regulation. The classic example of this outcome is Prohibition in the USA which lead to significant disregard for all laws and

the rise of law breaking organisations. It appears that Transport has given in to activist demands imposing excessively low limits such as City of Sydney with areas of 40 km/h zones in ordinary usage and attempts at wide range 0 km/h in the Northern Beaches Council area.

Regulation of traffic on local streets should always be referred to the Local Traffic Committee for balancing comment and control.

b) Any form of “regulatory experimentation” should be treated with caution and subjected to continuous observation.

C) Sustainability is a misused word to enforce restrictions on people’s activities often without reason. It must be balanced with pragmatic actions or the unintended outcomes can be disastrous.