

Attention of : **Bill Pender**

Transport and Regional Service Committee

This late submission is written to briefly show you some of the main points covered in my meeting with Mr Peter Andren MP and myself David Leech on Thursday 29th January. My main area of interest is driver fatigue, partly due to my experience as a truck driver for 16 years. I am 34 years old and have driven a broad range of trucks such as local, interstate, livestock, dangerous goods, general goods, singles, B-doubles, road trains and more, without any accidents. I am aware of the problems faced when trying to reduce road toll and why procedures are introduced, but I am also aware why some of these can actually increase the risk of accidents. I have had to teach myself methods to keep alert especially travelling long distances. Having a diploma in massage therapy really helped me discover many aspects, which contribute to driver fatigue.

My main interest is section 1.8 in action plan 2001-2 and fatigue in section 3 in the 2003-4 action plan. I will be pursuing all of these points in the coming years.

From reading the issues addressed in the National Road Safety Strategy 2001-2010 my main aim also is to help bring about the 40% reduction per 100,000 people by 2010 and to make roads safer in general. Below I have commented on some points mentioned in the Strategy.

- Educating the young about road safety is a key area. This could be compulsory through a video of courtesy, safe driving habits and driving with heavy vehicles at licensing time. Also training both professional and domestic drivers to realistically plan their transit time and route would reduce pressure to keep driving.
- New roads are generally safer but it is important to put the white lines on the roads as soon as possible due to dangers experienced during fog. Signs recommending corner speeds are not always changed (or put up in Victoria for bends over 75kph) which can lead to complacency or over-reaction. These are important as new drivers to the area use them for guidance.
- Older vehicles have a higher probability of serious injury when involved in a crash (figure 5) but are more likely to cause accidents due to more engine emissions being produced and entering the vehicles body as well as exhaust, oil, coolant and cabin leaks all effecting the drivers alertness.

- It is important not to speed but there are occasions where you may need the power, such as on bends, so the trailer is not trying to push the prime mover, or for overtaking safely. Speed limiters are an important safety tool, however there is a need to look at how they could be better used to work in with the science of truck handling characteristics.
- It will be hard to measure a drivers fatigue level as there are too many variables but having air quality monitors in vehicles can predict when you are likely to get fatigued due to fumes. These are essential in air crafts but a momentary lapse in concentration is more likely to cause a crash on land.
- Training the general public first aid is a good idea but may be too extensive. It could at least be started by training all professional drivers who are often the first and only person on the scene.
- Road freight is expected to increase more than gross domestic product. It is therefore important to get this flowing as smoothly as possible. Drivers need to be given more realistic traveling times to get to the destination.

ENFORCEMENT

- Use law enforcement's more effectively to better find vehicle defects which contribute to fatigue and safety issues.
- Encourage local trucks to do their deliveries at night. This relieves traffic congestion during busy periods and stops unreasonable time slots
- Cars that travel over a border should be subjected to the same rules as professional drivers, whether it is log books or other enforcement strategies used to monitor travelling hours.
- Use current roadside enforcement agencies to identify fatigue issues while doing routine checks. If they can hear an exhaust leak for example or smell oil or coolant leaks these should be considered defects, which must be repaired.
- Annual inspection of vehicles should be compulsory not just for general issues but for fatigue causing problems (see truck maintenance).
- Allow more flexible logbook rules on certain transport routes to alleviate the pressure of time between safety cam sites. This causes drivers to drive tired, overtake where they wouldn't otherwise, hassle other drivers, or speed.
- Consider increasing driving hours for those with a proven track record of safety, professionalism and low accident rates.

MAINTENANCE

- Educate manufactures about design faults that allow leaks to occur or get in the vehicle.
- Educate the vehicle repair industry about the need to be more particular about repairs and more vigilant about identifying potential hazards.
- Put pressure on mechanics to do an effective job as they can be held responsible.

DRIVING ISSUES

- Following too closely to other vehicles is extremely dangerous. It can cause other drivers to panic and change their focus of concentration, reduce stopping distance, increase emissions in the vehicle behind as well as creating traffic jams on freeways. Many drivers do this either due to the adrenaline that keeps them more awake or due to time restraints. A beeper that goes off if they are following too closely at speed may be a solution.
- More research needs to be done on the effects of coolant, oil and exhaust fumes. An American study showed 30% of the population have hypersensitivity to diesel emissions.
- Do a statistical study of vehicles identifying those most commonly involved in accidents. From that use it to identify design faults, or which are likely to develop leaks or are harder to handle.
- Address limitations in trailer length as this causes the prime movers to be shorter which results in poorer handling ability especially in or contributing towards loss of control situations.
- Drivers seats and posture can cause muscle spasms leading to restricted blood flow to the brain causing fatigue and tiredness.
- The government needs to address the professional driver shortage as this has the potential to allow inexperienced or poor drivers to do a job they are not qualified enough for as there are no alternatives.

CONCLUSION

My position in this fatigue education program is that I am focussed on being an educator and consultant to the transport industry and others, with a result to save lives. It is my experience that drivers know when they have fatigue issues and should be encouraged to come forward and get qualified advice instead of seeking stimulants.

CONTACT INFORMATION

David Leech