

Bike Waikato Submission to Graduated Driver Licensing System (GDLS) changes

Kia ora Ministry of Transport

We are writing in opposition to the proposed changes to the Graduated Driver Licensing System (GDLS).

We are a cycling advocacy group based in the Waikato that advocates to help get more people riding bikes safely. There are numerous benefits to riding a bike as transportation, including improved physical and mental health, stronger local economies (due to an increase in disposable income), and reduced environmental and noise pollution. However, a perceived lack of safety is consistently cited as the primary barrier to people riding bikes in Hamilton, and indeed, across the country.

The driver licensing system plays a large role in this, as drivers in New Zealand from a local and international point of view are perceived to be less considerate, less observant, and less knowledgeable on the Road Rules—which is evidenced by our relatively high injury and death rate per capita on the roads, a statistic which is likely to get worse due to the Government's recent decisions to slash funding to transportation infrastructure projects and to direct local authorities to increase speed limits on certain roads.

Our primary opposition to the changes are in the states purpose, as outlines in the cabinet paper¹: "... making a licence cheaper and easier to obtain" (emphasis ours).

A licence should not be easier to obtain and to suggest that doing so would improve road safety outcomes is a farce.

A licence is a privilege and responsibility—one which, right now, most licence holders are taking for granted. People riding bikes are constantly harassed and threatened by people driving cars. We all have at least one story—"Sorry, didn't see you there" or "You shouldn't be in my way". It is clear already given these experiences and our relatively high road toll that many drivers are not familiar with how to share the road with vulnerable road users, and this is likely to worsen if standards are dropped.

The consultation fact sheet outlines six primary proposals², and our responses are outlined below.

1. Remove the full test

¹ Approval to consult on Graduated Driver Licensing System Improvements.
https://consult.transport.govt.nz/policy/gdls-consultation/supporting_documents/GDLS%20Cabinet%20paper%20%20Redacted.pdf

² Proposed improvements to New Zealand's Graduated Driver Licensing System.
https://consult.transport.govt.nz/policy/gdls-consultation/supporting_documents/GDLS%20consultation%20fact%20sheet.pdf

We do not support this change.

Our reasoning is outlined in the paragraphs above. If anything, our licensing system should require more testing before and after a full licence is granted.

2. Introduce a clean driving record requirement to the restricted licence

We support this change on the basis that the policing of driver behaviour is also increased. This would together represent an actual commitment to making the driving environment safer.

3. Reduce the demerit threshold for novice drivers to have their licence suspended

We support this change.

It should be easier for driver licences to be suspended in cases of dangerous and/or unlawful driving and the penalties for these should be higher.

4. Introduce a zero-alcohol limit for novice drivers

We support this change. Alcohol is one of the leading factors in crashes in New Zealand.

5. Improve NZTA's oversight of approved advanced driver courses

We support this change.

6. Reduce the number of vision tests

We do not support this change.

Drivers should have to continuously prove their ability to see. It is not unreasonable that in seeking permission to operate dangerous machinery, drivers should have to demonstrate that they can pass a vision test.

In summary, while we are supportive of some of the administrative changes, such as allowing NZTA more oversight of advanced driver courses and introducing stricter alcohol and demerit limits for learner drivers, we are in opposition in principle to the stated goal of “making it easier [to] obtain a licence”.

In order to improve road safety outcomes, which is the Government's stated goal, and to encourage more people to ride bikes for everyday transportation, which will improve health, economic, and environmental outcomes—economic outcomes that the Government claims to support—these changes to the Graduated Driver Licensing System should be reconsidered for implementation.

Thank you for considering our submission.

Kind regards

Bike Waikato Committee