

House of Commons Transport Committee
request for views on their report "Road safety"
(Second Report of Session 2012-13) ahead of a
Parliamentary debate to be held on Thursday 25th April



Response from:

The Motor Schools Association of Great Britain
101 Wellington Road North, Stockport, Cheshire SK4 2LP
Tel: 0161 429 9669 Email: mail@msagb.co.uk Web: msagb.com
April 23 2013

THE ORGANISATION

The Motor Schools Association of Great Britain (MSAGB) makes the following response to the House of Commons Transport Committee report "Road safety" (Second Report of Session 2012-13).

WHO WE REPRESENT

The MSA is the national trade association for driving instructors and schools, which was founded in 1935. Members of the association are, in the main, Driving Standards Agency Approved Driving Instructors (ADI).

We also have a partnership with the Institute of Large Goods Vehicle Driving Instructors, representing their interests along with those of potential driving instructors and a number of bus, coach and motorcycle instructors.

PREFACE

The Motor Schools Association of Great Britain last year supported the Transport Select Committee's call for the government to "get a grip" on road safety, following a series of reports that showed an increase in the number of road deaths in 2011; the first such rise since 2003.

We also agree with the select committee that this recent increase in road fatalities should be a wake-up call for the government and that they need to show strong leadership in this area.

The MSA believe that it is unacceptable that 1,901 people were killed on the roads in 2011 and is further concerned that of those fatalities, 283 were car occupants aged between 16 and 25. Statistics also show that 27% of young men aged between 17 and 19 are involved in a road collision during the first year of driving.

Whilst the MSA welcomes the attention that has been focused on cyclists, there is much more that needs doing to improve road safety amongst new young drivers. We do not believe that the government is taking this issue seriously enough.

Whilst we supported the report of the select committee last year, we were somewhat surprised that they had called for an independent review of driver training to reduce casualty rates amongst young drivers. Over recent years successive governments have been reviewing changes to driver training; our concern is that little has been implemented.

Whilst there are a number of initiatives that can be undertaken, the MSA believes that education is the key to reducing road fatalities, particularly amongst the young.

The MSA has already given a cautious welcome to the Green Paper, unveiled by the Department for Transport, but believes that government should be doing more and should not be engaging in change for change's sake. MSA supports the following measures:

STATUTORY RECORD OF ACHIEVEMENT

The MSA believes that as part of the learning to drive process, new drivers should be required to follow the recommended learning to drive syllabus and should be responsible for recording their own progress in a record of achievement or 'log book' to ensure that the entire syllabus has been undertaken before sitting the practical driving test.

The MSA also believes that the requisite manoeuvres should be removed from the driving test, made part of the log book process and 'signed-off' by an Approved Driving Instructor (ADI). The advantage of this procedure is that it would free up more time during the driving test for genuine driving meaning that test routes would no longer be determined by having to find residential areas for manoeuvring purposes, allowing examiners to go out of town and experience different road and traffic conditions.

MOTORWAY DRIVING

In 2007 the Transport Select Committee recommended that learner drivers should be allowed to be trained and tested on motorways – an idea picked up by the previous minister, Mike Penning MP.

We fully support this measure and have been campaigning for it for some years. It is ludicrous that a new driver can pass a driving test in the morning and then drive on a motorway in the afternoon without any experience whatsoever.

Whilst we acknowledge that crash and fatality rates are considerably lower on motorways, when an accident does occur it can have devastating effects.

There are also a considerable number of new drivers who are too frightened to drive on motorways, because it has never been taught as part of the curriculum, choosing instead to take longer, more dangerous, trips on rural A or B roads.

MINIMUM LEARNING PERIOD FOR LEARNER DRIVERS

The proposed Green Paper suggests having a minimum learning period of 12 months before a learner is permitted to take a practical driving test.

We believe that the minimum learning period for learners is pointless, unrealistic and unenforceable. The last COHORT report indicated that the average learning period is already 14 months. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that the length of time a licence is held makes any significant difference to experience gained. We should focus entirely on ensuring that the full syllabus is taught.

PRIVATE PRACTICE

To support the learning to drive process, the Driving Standards Agency (DSA) has been promoting the concept of private practice, whereby a parent or guardian adds to the tuition given by a driving instructor, to enhance the learner drivers' experience. Despite these efforts our own research has shown that only about a quarter of learners are undertaking any private practice and even more are having no practice at all.

Whilst private practice may have a place in the learning process, further research has revealed that learners standard of driving is only 'marginally' better amongst 60% of those that are taking private practice.

There is also potential safety issues involved with private practice and, if this process is to be promoted, then there should be a formal syllabus for 'supervising' adults to follow.

INCREASING THE PROBATIONARY PERIOD FOR NEW DRIVERS

The Green Paper is proposing an increase in the current probationary period set for new drivers from two years to three years, during which a licence can be revoked if the driver gains six points or more on their licence.

The MSA, whilst not opposing such a policy, believes that the focus should be on prevention rather than cure and that there should be greater incentives for newly qualified drivers to take additional training after passing their practical test.

The MSA does, however, support the Green Paper proposal that there should be temporary restrictions on a newly qualified driver's licence, such as the carrying of passengers, driving at night and on certain types of road.

DRIVING INSTRUCTORS

It is essential that driver training is, and continues to be, given by approved driving instructors, who have, arguably, passed one of the world's strictest driver training qualifications.

That said, the MSA strongly believes that the qualifying process still needs to be overhauled in order to support the greater aims of the learning to drive process. This should include a review of the licence to give instruction (trainee licence), the test of continued fitness to give instruction (check-test) and the qualifying examination.

It is essential that ADIs are required to undertake further development training, to ensure that they are, at all times, up to date with legislation and training techniques.

The MSA believes that mandatory continuing professional development should be introduced, as it is in other industries. Again, this is an idea that has been mooted for some years and was put back on the agenda by the last minister.

CONCLUSION

A number of road safety ministers have picked up on many of the issues that are discussed above, but few seem to have made much progress.

The Motor Schools Association is frustrated by the seeming lack of activity on what is a very serious issue. The fact that 2011 saw a three percent increase in road deaths, taking the toll to 1,901, is simply unacceptable.

What we do not need is another review; what we require is action to stem the fatality rate, particularly amongst new young drivers.

For further information contact:

John Lepine General Manager MSA

Landline: 0161 429 9669

Mobile: 07720 941698