MINO-0446 - 2012 changes to the driver licencing system

2 September 2022

Information on the 2012 changes to the driver licence system

Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency's response:
A number of changes were introduced in 2012 to address concerns with the driver licence system at the time. Most of these changes were made to improve young driver safety and address key factors that puts them at risk. Young people were over-represented in crash statistics, with the highest road death rate in the OECD for 15-17 year olds.

Driving age raised to 16 years
This was primarily done to address concerns that 15-year-olds were not mature enough to drive. Research shows the lower the age of a solo driver, particularly under the age of 18, the higher the crash risk. The minimum legal driving age was raised from 15 to 16 in an effort to reduce the number of needless deaths and injuries of teen drivers on New Zealand roads. New Zealand had one of the lowest licensing ages in the OECD before this change. It was estimated that raising the licensing age to 16 would save at least four lives and prevent 25 serious injuries and 148 minor injuries each year.

Change to driver licence tests
Under the previous model the full licence test was the longer test with a shorter test for learner drivers to progress to a restricted licence.

The restricted test was made more complex to act as an incentive for novice drivers to undertake more supervised training and gain the necessary skills and competency prior to sitting the restricted licence test. International evidence shows that novice drivers who accumulate higher levels of supervised driving experience have a much lower likelihood of crashing when driving solo.

Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency adapted the Australian Government VicRoads Drive Test to emphasise those skills we saw as needing focus on here, based on New Zealand crash statistics. This test is based on a driver having 120 hours of supervised driving and gaining experience in common situations. Emphasis was placed on hazard perception and risk management as well as aligning the driving tasks to high crash situations of the young and novice driver.

To accommodate the extended restricted license (from 20 minutes' drive time to 45 minutes' drive time) the full license test was reduced, from 45 minutes' drive time to 20 minutes' drive time. The remaining 10 minutes of the test time is used for licence and vehicle checks, providing feedback to the candidate etc.

Introduction of Alcohol Interlock and Zero Alcohol Licences
These were introduced as part of safer journeys to address the volume of alcohol based fatal crashes and recidivist drink driving. While holding an alcohol interlock or zero alcohol licence, you can be disqualified from driving if convicted for a further offence or have your licence suspended for excess demerit points. Waka Kotahi and Te Manatū Waka are planning a review of these schemes via the next Road to Zero Action Plan in light of a number of unintended licensing, sentencing and rehabilitative discrepancies we and the Courts are experiencing and noticing.

Released under the Official Information Act 1982

Introduction of Licence reinstatement requirements

This was introduced to tighten the requirements for those returning to driving after a period of suspension or disqualification. Following a sanction, drivers are now required to submit an application to reinstate their licence before returning to driving.

Introduction of Motorcycle Graduated Driver Licence changes and Learner Approved Motorcycle Scheme (LAMS)

This change removed the Advanced Driving Course Certificates. These enabled people to accelerate progression through the Motorcycle (Class 6) licence by producing a certificate confirming competency in a Class 1 vehicle (car). The Class 6 basic handling skills test was reviewed and upgraded introducing a four-stage riding assessment testing a number of basic riding manoeuvres to a prescribed criteria.

The LAMS identified a range of motorcycles appropriate for learner and restricted class 6 licence holders, based on the holder's level of experience. LAMS then determines appropriate motorcycles based on the overall performance capability of the motorcycle.

Introduction of zero alcohol requirements (and associated infringements) for drivers under 20 years old

This sought to lower the legal drink drive limit from 0.03 blood alcohol content (BAC) to zero. Introduced to address and reduce the volume of crashes for younger and inexperienced drivers where alcohol was a factor. This change recognised that even small amounts of alcohol can impair driving, and for young people the task of driving is more demanding than those who are experience drivers. Therefore, the effect of alcohol on driving can be greater.

In 2009 there were 68 deaths and 503 reported serious injuries in crashes that involved at least one 15-19 year old driver. Of those, 26 deaths and 119 serious injuries were in crashes where alcohol was proven or suspected for a 15-19 year old driver. The associated infringement offence is a fee of $200 and 50 demerit points.

Introduction of the Accelerated Licensing process (ALP)

This is a scheme designed for approved Transport Operators to progress drivers to a Heavy rigid vehicle (Class 4) licence or a Heavy combination vehicle (Class 5) licence (as the case may be) where the driver met specific criteria of the lower licences stipulated in Part 4A of the Land Transport (Driver Licensing) Rule 1999 (DL Rule).

There has been very little uptake of the ALP since it was introduced, and Te Manatū Waka is working on providing you with information on the scheme as part of the completed 2019 consultation on amendments to the DL Rule.

Changes to the appearance of the Photo Driver Licence (PDL)

Changes were made to the appearance of the PDL. Descriptions were given to each section on the front of the PDL. To make room for this information the issue date, expiry date and classes held were moved to the back of the PDL. Images were added next to each class held to aid in identifying what vehicle type each class relates to.

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