

TRAFINZ

Opening remarks

Thank you for the invitation to speak at your annual conference.

It's great to join you again this year.

Before I begin, I want to acknowledge TRAFINZ President Andy Foster and the conference organising committee, along with this impressive line up of guest speakers and delegates representing transport professionals and policy makers from around New Zealand and overseas.

I would also like to acknowledge the support of all the conference sponsors, and in particular Wellington City Council and HMI Technologies who I understand have supported the TRAFINZ conference for many years now.

Road Safety Update

At last year's conference I focussed on road safety – I had just launched the 10-year *Safer Journeys* road safety strategy.

A lot has happened since then so I want to start by giving you an update on that.

Safer Journeys sets actions for the entire road system, aiming for safer road use, safer vehicles, safer speeds, and safer roads and roadsides.

This 'Safe System' approach is something I know you welcome.

I understand that yesterday Transport Ministry Chief Executive Martin Matthews spoke on this in detail, and workshops were held to discuss the safe system in practice. I trust that robust discussion was had.

The *Safer Journeys* strategy was launched in March of this year.

For me, it's a strategy to deliver real road safety gains over the next ten years.

Its development truly was a collaborative effort – 1,500 people and organisations took the time to share their views during consultation last year.

I thank TRAFINZ for its part.

The level of interest from right across the country reflects New Zealanders' concerns about our high road toll.

And now the strategy is in place and its implementation underway.

Firstly, in April, Cabinet agreed a package of measures aimed at improving the safety of our young people on the roads.

Essentially, we want to ensure our young people have the skills and the experience to be safe.

This was a top priority for the government because last year 35% of people killed on our roads were under 25.

That's not just disproportionate, it's tragic. So here's what we're doing about it:

- We're increasing the minimum driving age from 15 to 16.
- Lowering the legal blood alcohol limit for drivers under 20 to zero.
- making the restricted licence test more difficult to encourage 120 hours of supervised driving practice
- agreed to raise public awareness of young driver crash risk
- improving the road safety education available to young people and increase access to it
- we're looking at vehicle power restrictions for young drivers
- allowing approved courses (Defensive Driving and Street Talk) to be undertaken in the learner licence phase
- We're also looking at whether tougher penalties should be introduced for breaches of restricted licences.

We can debate until the cows come home (and we have) which of these initiatives is the most important, but the reality is most Australian states have most of these laws in place and their youth fatality rate is 60% lower than ours.

We could not continue to ignore that statistic.

None of these actions is a silver bullet on its own, but combined they will make a real difference to the road toll and to the safety of our young people on the roads.

Legislation to do these things will be introduced into the House this month and should be in place early next year.

The other area we've really focussed on is drink driving – particularly recidivist drink driving.

This is important because drink drivers are responsible for a third of all deaths on our roads. So if we can make an impact in this area – as well

as for young drivers – we should see a significant reduction in the road toll.

So in terms of drink driving we're introducing:

- A zero drink drive limit for recidivist drink drivers
- Much tougher penalties for serious offences causing death and drink driving causing death
- The introduction of alcohol interlocks for repeat drink-drivers.

We are also carrying out research to determine the level of harm caused by drivers with alcohol levels between 0.05 and 0.08.

This information is not able to be collected currently; so we're changing the law to give police the ability to collect it.

There is no doubt that public opinion has move toward a reduced blood alcohol limit but I am conscious that this view can be quite soft.

It's important that we have all the data that opponents of change believe we need before making what would be, I believe, a far-reaching change.

The important thing is that we're still having the debate – it's not over yet and there's no decision either way. But we will have certainty in a couple of years when the research is certain.

What's next?

So already we've made significant changes to target the highest-risk drivers – young people and those who repeatedly drink and drive.

Next off the blocks are measures to improve the safety of motorcyclists and to make our intersections safer and easier to navigate.

Motorcyclists

We're targeting motorcycle safety because we know that risk of a motorcyclist being killed or seriously injured in a crash is about 18 times higher than for a car driver.

By improving the safety of novice riders we can make an impact on this trend.

We will look to improve motorcycle rider training and licensing.

This will include introducing licensing for moped riders – it is time that our licensing system recognised that driving a car and riding a motorbike or moped require very different skills.

We can also improve the restrictions on the bikes that novices are allowed to ride.

Currently learner and restricted riders can only ride motorcycles of 250cc and less. But technology has changed, and cc rating alone is no longer an accurate measure of a bike's power.

We can introduce a restriction by power-to-weight ratio combined with a higher cc limit. This will give novice riders access to a greater range of motorcycles appropriate for their level of experience.

Intersections

The other area is roads and roadside, particularly around intersections.

This is because we know that one of the best ways to make our roads safer is to ensure they are engineered to the highest standards and because 21% of fatal crashes happen at intersections.

So we're looking to simplify the give way rule and bring it into line with overseas jurisdictions.

The rule will be amended to:

- require traffic turning right to give way to traffic turning left into the same road

- require traffic from an uncontrolled terminating road to give way to traffic on a continuing road (the T-intersection rule).

This is one of the final first actions in Safer Journeys – I'm looking forward to the rule going out for consultation in the next while.

Restricted / learner licenses

Another area I'm keen to address is this:

There are 236,175 New Zealanders who have been on their learners or restricted license for more than 5 years.

That's 40% of learner license holders (113,350) and 36% of restricted licence holders (112,825).

I'm sure some of these people have valid reasons for not progressing through the system but most of them won't.

Many, I suspect, are breaching the terms of their license and flouting the law – either deliberately or out of laziness. Not good enough.

We have the graduated driver licensing system for a reason. We know that compliance with the licence conditions at the learner and restricted licence phases reduces the crash risk for novice drivers and riders.

These are important steps – they give new drivers the skills, ability to perceive hazards and driving attitudes to drive safely and responsibly.

And they're not optional.

If you don't haven't demonstrated the skills required to drive alone or to carry unlicensed passengers, you shouldn't be doing so.

We know that the period when a young person first starts to drive solo is the most dangerous, so we need to make sure we have them as ready as they can be before they head out on their own.

So we're looking at a range of options to encourage people to progress through the licensing system.

In summary, in the first half of the term we have:

- Prepared legislation to crack down on drink driving, particularly repeat offenders and to improve the safety of young drivers.
- We've banned drivers from using cell phones at the wheel.
- Changed the law to crack down on drug impaired drivers.
- Introduced new laws around Illegal Street racing activity.

While I appreciate that there will be some in this room who do not think we've done enough, the reality is, I believe, we've done more than any previous government for a very long time.

Engineering - RoNS

Aside from *Safer Journeys*, we've also introduced legislation banning drivers from operating mobile phones while behind the wheel and a number of measures to crack down on illegal street racing.

But making our roads safer isn't all about new laws and rules and better education. Engineering has a significant role to play as well.

We are focusing on safety improvements, such as rumble strips and median barriers, on the riskiest rural roads as well as our riskiest urban intersections.

The economic stimulus package early last year allowed the NZTA to expand its rumble strip programme, meaning that 1,350km of our state highway now has this life-saving feature.

We know that head-on crashes account for 23 percent of all fatal crashes, yet over 90 percent of them could be avoided by having a median barrier.

The biggest initiative in this area though comes through the programme of Roads of National Significance where we will be retrofitting and running separate carriageways through our busiest rural highways.

With all the talk of the economic benefits these roads will bring – and don't get me wrong, the benefits will be significant – it sometimes feels like the safety benefits are over-looked.

We've prioritised roads like Puhoi to Wellsford, Tauranga to Paengaroa, Auckland to Cambridge and Wellington to Levin – all of which are under spec for the traffic that already travels on them and all of which are among the least safe in the country.

The safety benefits of these new highways will be significant. But of course infrastructure builds do take time.

In little over a year since the programme was announced we can already see the progress that has been made on these projects:

- Vic Park – underway

- Waterview – tender process underway; construction starts next year

- Puhoi to Wellsford – standing start; nothing happened under previous govt; will start consulting on route options later this year
- Waikato Expressway - Construction tenders for Rangiriri and Te Rapa sections have been awarded, Te Rapa starts this year, Rangiriri next year. Also planned for Ngaurawahia bypass to start next year and Cambridge bypass in 2012.
 - The last two big sections Huntly and Hamilton bypasses are entering their design phases – both due for construction start in about 2014
- Tauranga Eastern Link – tolling confirmed; enabling construction to start next year – seven years early than would otherwise have been the case.
- Wellington Northern Corridor – current focus – development of all projects so land can be designated and readied for work; alliances set up for major sections.
- Christchurch motorways – stage one under construction; consultation and preliminary design of other sections underway

The work on the Roads of National Significance is a major step in improving highway safety. The government is working hard to improve our roads, but we all need to take responsibility for our safety.

The KiwiRAP programme highlights this important message – not all roads provide the same level of service for drivers. We need to be aware of conditions and adjust our driving and our speeds accordingly.

Closing remarks

The changes we're making – both in terms of road safety and infrastructure development – have been a long time coming.

As a country we have suffered too long from under-investment in our transport corridors and from a lack of focus on reducing the road toll.

Those days are over.

But the government can't do everything – particularly in terms of road safety.

Our focus is on actions that will have a significant impact on the road toll. The goals that we share will be a whole lot easier to achieve if we can work together.

Thank you.