

Question on Notice

No. 613

Asked on 20 May 2004

MR FOLEY asked the Minister for Transport and Main Roads (MR LUCAS)—

QUESTION:

With reference to a constituent who has raised an idea with me that may be helpful in decreasing the burgeoning road toll, that is, if motor vehicle drivers had to face ongoing reassessment of their skills and knowledge of road rules such as is required of pilots, doctors and police that this would be helpful in reducing the road toll-

Is there merit in such a system, and will he consider introducing legislation to tighten this area up?

ANSWER:

I thank the Honourable Member for raising this question on behalf of his constituent and am pleased to see his interest in the important area of road safety.

The critical issue in assessing the value of retesting relates to the role of vehicle handling skills and knowledge in crashes. There are a range of factors which contribute to driver crashes, over and above poor vehicle handling skills or lack of knowledge. In-depth studies of vehicle crashes have found driving skill deficiencies to be relevant in less than 5% of crash involvements in Australia and the USA.

To date, mass licence retesting has not been introduced by any Australian state or territory. Licence retesting is undertaken in few overseas countries and in a small number of North American jurisdictions. Evaluations have failed to indicate that it is an effective approach. For example, evaluation of knowledge retesting in North America and Europe have failed to show that it produces any road safety benefits, or that its withdrawal would result in any disbenefits.

Research has also indicated that the practical driving test has little predictive validity in terms of identifying drivers most likely to crash and there is no research to suggest that this improves when it is used as part of a retesting program. Factors that most likely contribute to crash involvement, such as disobeying traffic rules and inattention, cannot be directly targeted by retesting.

The available evidence confirms that the retesting of either knowledge or practical driving skills would not represent a cost-effective measure at this time due to:

- the extra time and inconvenience for drivers to prepare for and sit a test;
- the cost of delivering the test to all drivers across Queensland and the impact this may have on the cost of the licence; and

- loss of licence being a sanction generally reserved for serious offences, such as drink driving, or for persistent re-offenders. Applying this penalty for failing either a knowledge or practical retest could be considered disproportionate, particularly for drivers with a clear driving history.

Current legislation already allows both Queensland Transport and the Queensland Police Service to require drivers to undergo a practical driving test where circumstances indicate a review is desirable, for example, where there is evidence of a deteriorating medical condition. Therefore, a move to practical driver retesting is not considered worthwhile at this time on the grounds of poor cost-benefit and lack of positive impact on road safety.