



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON JUSTICE AND COMMUNITY SAFETY
Mr Peter Cain MLA (Chair), Dr Marisa Paterson (Deputy Chair),
Mr Andrew Braddock MLA

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Dangerous Driving

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26 September 2022

Mr Peter Cain MLA

Member for Ginninderra

Chair

Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety

Dear Mr Cain

I hereby lodge a submission to the ACT Legislative Assembly Inquiry into Dangerous Driving, currently being conducted by the Standing Committee on Justice and Community Safety, of which you are the Chairperson.

As a Queensland based retiree who regularly spends time in the ACT for personal reasons, and who travels on foot daily around the Belconnen area when I am in Canberra, dangerous driving by Territory motorists impacts upon me as a pedestrian on a daily basis.

In my view responsibility for acts of dangerous driving in the ACT, rests squarely upon the shoulders of the Labor- Greens Government, and on Chief Minister Andrew Barr in particular. This government has held power in the ACT for almost 21 years and Andrew Barr has been Chief Minister for more than seven years. In that time, nothing it seems has been done to improve road safety and curb acts of dangerous driving such as speeding, tailgating, illegal u turns, and driving through red lights and pedestrian crossings. Either in terms of tougher penalties, or even in just leading the public conversation on the need to improve road safety, the ACT government does not seem to have adequately acknowledged this issue.

I cannot ever recall hearing this current Chief Minister or a Minister of his government commenting on poor driver behaviour in the ACT, despite it regularly being a topic of media reporting. This inaction on the part of the Government has in my view encouraged dangerous driving and made it seem more acceptable as part of daily behaviour by road users. In the meantime, the problems caused by poor behaviour on ACT roads have worsened commensurate with the growth in population. The ACT Government has, if anything, further compounded the risks arising from dangerous driving by allowing the introduction of e scooters onto the road network.

Speeding, dangerous driving and hooning has become such an accepted part of the road user culture in the ACT, across all age demographics, that persons such as myself who bring an outsiders' perspective, could be forgiven for thinking that speeding and driving recklessly on the roads is the only thing that gives Canberra people any sense of meaning in their otherwise mundane and miserable lives. The very fact that Canberra revels in hosting the annual SummerNats festival, reflects the extent to which hooning and unsafe driving has become accepted as part of the local culture here. But that is far from being the only reflection.

In an ACT Government media release dated 23 June 2021 it was reported that in the previous 48 hour period, more than 5000 motorists had been registered exceeding new speed limits on Northbourne Avenue in inner Canberra. This was apparently despite advance notice of reduced speed limits in that area.

When such large numbers of ACT motorists demonstrate a lack of awareness for speed restrictions on a major city thoroughfare with high pedestrian traffic, that indicates an ingrained cultural problem.

When ACT motorists regularly tailgate other road users, without concern for their safety or that of others, that indicates an ingrained cultural problem.

When so many ACT motorists demonstrate their contempt for pedestrians by speeding up to drive through red traffic lights and pedestrian crossings, often when pedestrians are waiting to cross, that indicates an ingrained cultural problem.

When news reports about new speed limits and large numbers of associated fines in the ACT invoke a storm of indignant reaction on both mainstream and social media, that indicates an ingrained cultural problem.

When large numbers of drivers demonstrate contempt for speed limits and other measures, and seemingly have no fear of sanction under existing legislative provisions, that indicates an ingrained cultural problem.

Cultural change in any community requires active and energetic leadership from the top. With cultural change led by a committed and articulate leadership, should come greater community acceptance of increased expenditure on safety measures and tougher legal penalties for criminal action.

The Government of the day could affect cultural change among ACT road users through a range of measures to change driver behaviour but has obviously chosen not to thus far. Effectively tackling the ingrained culture of dangerous driving in the ACT would require a combination of enforcement and mitigative measures, but these would over time improve driver behaviour.

The measures which I would argue for specifically include:

- greater use of traffic calming and street curbing to force motorists to slow down on suburban streets
- reducing speed limits on all suburban streets to perhaps no more than 30 kilometres per hour
- much wider introduction of traffic lights, pedestrian crossings, speed cameras, mobile monitoring vehicles and signage highlighting the speed limits
- better resourcing of ACT Policing to more effectively respond to dangerous driving
- Increasing fines especially for repeat offenders

- Introduction of mandatory minimum sentencing with no parole for drivers in instances where dangerous and reckless driving results in death or serious injury to road users, including cyclists and pedestrians.

It would be interesting to know whether any ACT Government agencies have in recent years comprehensively analysed police data and other sources on road incidents in order to identify if incidents of dangerous driving are more endemic to certain areas of the ACT than others. Such an analysis might serve to highlight precincts of particular concern, in which case localised mitigative measures might be more productive than generally tougher enforcement measures via legislative change.

Traffic calming measures have been an integral part of road safety in other Australian cities for years now. Brisbane, for example, has installed speed humps and street curbing in many suburbs to compel motorists to slow down on suburban streets and these are now a widely accepted element of traffic management and road safety in the Queensland capital. These present a more neutral and less punitive means by which to change driver behaviour.

In the ACT, by contrast, the flimsy speed humps that were installed in Belconnen town centre for example served only as encouragement for reckless drivers to speed over them. I have noticed, however, that the new speed humps installed along Emu Bank near the lakeside restaurant precinct have improved driver behaviour in this local area. This is an example that must be replicated across the ACT.

The need for better traffic management, including traffic calming infrastructure seems particularly acute in areas where higher density housing has resulted in larger numbers of drivers and pedestrians being condensed into small areas with poor infrastructure. Belconnen Town Centre, especially the Labor Club precinct is a classic example where existing substandard infrastructure has not kept pace with the rapid growth in residential density. This area lacks sufficient pedestrian crossings with traffic lights and the existing roundabouts are totally inadequate to manage the much larger volume of traffic.

Issues that arise from poor urban planning cannot necessarily be resolved by tougher criminal penalties alone. I do strongly agree, however that tougher legislated penalties are needed to address recidivist cases of dangerous behaviour on ACT roads.

It would be an easy option to simply increase fines and other punishments alone, but that would be pointless in the absence of adequate police resources to respond to all incidents of dangerous driving. In August 2022 senior ACT Police stated publicly that they simply do not have the resources to deal with all reports of hooning that they receive each day.

To underpin future enforcement, the ACT government should allocate greater funding to Territory police so that they have the resources to properly target dangerous driving. This should be done even it requires funding being re-allocated from other areas of government expenditure and redirected into measures against dangerous driving.

In closing, I would urge the members of your Inquiry panel to consider that there is no one single approach to dealing with the problem of dangerous driving, but that the range of measures which I have had outlined here, if implemented, should gradually improve driver behaviour in the ACT

Yours faithfully

Gregory Moore