

Regulating safe driving behavior passing stationary emergency and enforcement vehicles with flashing warning lights

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Abstract

Emergency and enforcement workers perform diverse and time-critical tasks on the road and in road-related environments, placing them at risk of being struck by passing vehicles. In response to ongoing concerns from emergency providers and other agencies, VicRoads undertook a collaborative process to investigate the nature of roadside incidents involving emergency or enforcement workers and the feasibility of regulating driver behavior. Informed by research and consultation, a new road rule was introduced requiring drivers and riders to safely slow to 40 km/h when passing stationary or slow-moving emergency and enforcement vehicles with red, blue or magenta flashing warning lights.

Background

Emergency and enforcement workers perform diverse and time-critical tasks on the road and in road-related environments, placing them at risk of being struck by passing vehicles. There is limited data on the prevalence of roadside incidents involving emergency and enforcement workers however anecdotal reports suggest near misses are common. In response to ongoing concerns for the safety of emergency and enforcement workers, VicRoads worked with stakeholders to explore the extent and nature of incidents and options for regulatory reforms.

Policy Development

From November 2015 to September 2016, a range of investigatory and policy development activities were conducted. This included (i) establishing a cross-agency Working Group to guide activities, (ii) stakeholders surveying over 1,600 Victorian emergency and enforcement workers to ascertain the extent and nature of roadside incidents (The Police Association Victoria, 2016), (iii) investigating the key contributors to roadside incidents (iv) reviewing local and international approaches, including effectiveness of countermeasures introduced (v) undertaking a network impact analysis to determine potential impacts on travel time of potential regulatory solutions (Clark & Strickland, 2016). A consultation process was undertaken on potential regulatory options, including a universal speed limit, differing speed reduction requirements depending on road type and speed reduction requirements in combination with a move-over requirement.

Outcomes

Survey: The worker survey indicated that in the previous three years seventeen per cent of respondents were involved in a near miss on four or more occasions. Eight per cent of respondents had their vehicle struck by a passing vehicle and three per cent had been injured while evading a passing vehicle. Eighty-six per cent of respondents supported regulating driver behavior passing stationary emergency vehicles with flashing lights to improve safety (The Police Association Victoria, 2016). *Evidence Review:* The main contributors to roadside incidents involving stationary emergency services were excessive speed and driver inattention. South Australia was the only Australian jurisdiction to have laws in place requiring drivers to slow within the vicinity of emergency vehicles with flashing lights. Internationally, move-over laws operate throughout North America, however no outcome evaluations of these laws could be found. Community awareness and simplicity were seen as essential to fostering driver compliance with move-over laws in these jurisdictions. *Network Impact Analysis:* Using police vehicle intercept data as a proxy for roadside incidents, the network

impact analysis showed a 40 km/h speed limit passing emergency or enforcement vehicles would add approximately 29,000 vehicle hours to the Victorian freeway network annually, equating to a non-significant 0.01% volume increase in annual travel time (Clark & Strickland, 2016). *Consultation*: A regulatory response was considered warranted and three regulatory options were canvassed for stakeholder comment. A universal 40 km/h limit when passing stationary emergency and enforcement vehicles with flashing lights received strongest support.

Conclusion

Following Ministerial approval, road rule 79A commenced in Victoria on 1 July 2017. It requires drivers to slow to 40 km/h when passing stationary or slow-moving emergency or enforcement vehicles with flashing red, blue or magenta lights. Monitoring of effectiveness and driver compliance is ongoing.

References

- Clark, R., Strickland, T. 2016. Analysis of network impacts with an emergency speed zone (police intercepts). VicRoads, Melbourne, Victoria. (unpublished)
- The Police Association Victoria. (2016). Results from the emergency vehicle roadside safety survey. East Melbourne, Victoria. (unpublished)