

Community perceptions of speed enforcement tolerances in Queensland

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Abstract

This study explored the changes in community perceptions of speed enforcement tolerances in Queensland. The changes in community perceptions were revealed from an analysis of speeding related questions in an annual online survey commissioned by the Department of Transport and Main Roads, and speeding enforcement data received from the Queensland Police Service. It is envisaged that the impact of community perceptions on speeding behaviour will identify triggers to behaviour change and inform enhancements to speed management in Queensland.

Background

Speeding is a complex social behavioural issue and it still represents a high proportion of contributing factors of road crashes in Queensland. Speed-related crashes contributed to 65 fatalities during 2014, representing more than one in four road deaths in Queensland. In general, motorists believe they can travel within an acceptable speed above the posted speed limit and will not receive a fine. This relates to a perceived enforcement tolerance applied by the Queensland Police Service (QPS), which are not publicised.

The aim of this study was to better understand the attitudes that contribute to the behaviour of motorists to inform ways to address speeding which continues to be one of the 'Fatal Five' driving behaviours.

Method

The Department of Transport and Main Roads commissions the Road Safety Perceptions and Attitudes Tracking Survey to monitor trends over time for a variety of road safety topics. The survey uses an online panel to recruit a representative sample of 600 Queenslanders. Annual data collection typically occurs in April and May.

QPS provides the department with a monthly speeding infringement report that includes the number of vehicles monitored, offences detected, notices issued and hours of camera deployment. The notices issued are broken down into bands of <13 km/h over the limit, 13-20 km/h over the limit, 21-30 km/h over the limit, 31-40 km/h over the limit, and >40 km/h over the limit.

Results

Survey responses to the question "*How far over the speed limit are people generally allowed to drive/ride without being booked for speeding?*" can be interpreted as respondents' perception of enforcement tolerance levels. Response options included no speed over the speed limit, up to 5/10/15/20 km/h over the speed limit, more than 20 km/hr over the speed limit, depends on the speed limit, other (type in), and don't know.

A positive trend in responses to this item has been observed. In 2006 and 2007, 68% of respondents believed they could travel up to 5-10 km/h over the speed limit before being booked for speeding, compared with only 55% in 2013, 51% in 2014 and 45% in 2015. These results are consistent with changes in motorist's perception and awareness of changes to enforcement tolerance levels.

Infringement statistics also suggest that motorists were aware of the changes. Following a publicised reduction in the operational enforcement tolerance, there was an expected spike <13

km/h over the limit in infringements, followed by a steady reduction. This suggests that after an initial learning period, motorists became aware of the changes and adjusted their behaviour.

Conclusions

Community surveys and speeding infringement statistics suggest that Queensland motorists are sensitive to changes to enforcement tolerances and adjust their behaviour accordingly. These findings have implications for identifying the triggers for behaviour change as well as understanding the motivation for specific behaviours such as low level speeding. Future research to profile low level speeders may reduce infringement rates in this category. Collection of attitudinal data will continue to monitor self-reported speed compliance and respective behavioural changes over time.