

Community attitudes towards road safety initiatives in South Australia

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Abstract

Community support is essential to achieve National and State-based road safety targets. An online survey was used to explore attitudes towards road safety and enforcement strategies used in South Australia (SA). The study identified that a significant proportion of the community are more concerned now regarding the road toll than they were in the past. Driver distraction and impatience are considered the leading contributors towards the state road toll, and community members believe that visible policing and driver training are amongst the most effective strategies for reducing the number of road crashes.

Background

Advances in road design, vehicle safety and driver education have contributed to reductions in road fatalities across Australia. The *National Road Safety Strategy* (Australian Transport Council, 2011) has set national targets to achieve by 2020, with a recent review identifying 12 key recommendations that are supported by RAA. Similarly, the SA Government aims to reduce the annual state road toll to less than 80 people killed by 2020 (Government of South Australia, 2011).

Public support of these action plans is essential to achieve road safety targets. Objectives of the current study were to explore community attitudes towards road safety and enforcement strategies used in SA.

Method

An online survey was disseminated by email to the RAA Member Panel (an opt-in list comprising 3,100 members), with a sample size of 1,063 individuals obtained. Respondents included a higher percentage of males (68%) and those aged over 55 years (81%). The survey was administered via Typeform (Typeform S.L., Barcelona, Spain). Data were analysed in Microsoft Excel using a combination of descriptive techniques.

Results and Discussion

When surveyed, a significant portion of the community indicated they are more concerned now regarding the road toll compared to 12 months ago (43%), and compared to 5 years ago (48%). Interestingly, whilst 69% agreed that a voluntary road rules refresher course for drivers could be an effective measure for reducing the road toll, only 44% would readily support its introduction in SA.

The most recent *Community Attitudes to Road Safety Report* (Australian Government, 2018) highlighted a shift in perceptions regarding the cause of road crashes, which is supported by the results of the current study. Many believe that driver distraction and impatience are the leading contributors to the SA road toll, whilst speeding is thought to be implicated to a lesser extent.

More than half of those surveyed consider visible policing, driver training and penalties for drink/drug driving as the most effective methods for reducing the road toll (Table 1). Conversely, less support was shown for reduced speed limits. Crash data shows a reduction in urban crashes since default speed limits were introduced in SA (Government of South Australia, 2011), indicating a need for greater public awareness regarding this initiative.

Differences were seen between metropolitan and rural samples, with rural residents considering infrastructure safety programs to be the most effective method of reducing the road toll, while metropolitan residents feel driver training is most effective.

Table 1: Percentage of respondents indicating that road safety and enforcement strategies are effective methods for reducing the road toll in South Australia

	Total Sample (n=1063)	Metro Sample* (n=801)	Rural Sample* (n=259)
Visible policing including RBT's	51.6%	51.7% (2)	51.7% (3)
Driver training	51.3%	52.4% (1)	47.8% (4)
Penalties for drunk / drug driving	50.0%	48.7% (3)	54.8% (2)
Infrastructure safety programs	46.6%	42.7% (4)	59.0% (1)
Black spot programs	42.2%	41.9% (5)	42.8% (5)
Use of seatbelts and child restraints	37.7%	39.4% (6)	32.4% (7)
Graduated licensing schemes	36.5%	37.7% (8)	32.8% (6)
Courses / education	35.5%	37.8% (7)	28.1% (8)
Alcohol interlock programs	32.5%	32.4% (10)	32.4% (7)
Unmarked police cars	31.9%	33.7% (9)	26.2% (10)
Penalties for speeding	27.6%	28.0% (11)	25.9% (11)
Vehicle technology	27.4%	27.3% (12)	27.4% (9)
Prevention campaigns and advertising	24.6%	26.3% (13)	19.3% (12)
Speed and red-light cameras	21.2%	22.1% (14)	18.1% (13)
Demerit points	18.8%	19.0% (15)	18.1% (13)
Variable message boards	14.5%	14.3% (16)	14.2% (14)
50km/hr default speed limit	10.7%	11.7% (17)	7.3% (15)

*rank within a column shown in brackets, with 1 being 'most effective'

Enforcement measures used in SA were largely supported, with 89% agreeing with the use of RBT's. However, less support was indicated for the use of speed cameras (53%). This aligns with recent public negativity towards the use of speed cameras in SA, and suggests a need for greater transparency in their use and contribution to revenue.

South Australians would like greater focus on tourists and heavy vehicles in future road safety campaigns, but are less supportive of promoting alternative transport options (i.e. public transport) as a measure for reducing the road toll.

Conclusions

These results highlight the need for greater community education regarding the effectiveness of strategies which aim to reduce the road toll, and could be used to facilitate a shift in community support for specific road safety and enforcement campaigns.

References

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