

Committee Secretariat
Transport and Industrial Relations
Parliament Buildings
WELLINGTON
Submitted online

Rural Women New Zealand

Submission on the Land Transport Amendment Bill

Introduction to Rural Women New Zealand

1. Rural Women New Zealand (RWNZ) is a not-for-profit member based organisation that reaches into all rural communities and advocates on issues that impact on those communities. We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the Transport and Industrial Relations Committee (the Committee) on the Land Transport Amendment Bill (the Bill). The issues addressed in this Bill are of an immense important to our members, many of whom live in rural areas facing a number of unique road safety issues. These include: higher rates of roadside fatalities due to lack of seat belt use, a lack of affordable public transport options, out-dated and poorly maintained sections of the road network and low levels of traffic police and medical attention on the ground.

Overview of our submission

2. In general, we support the changes in this Bill. However, we do have concerns about recent spikes in New Zealand's road toll and current police levels. We think the question of whether current policing levels are appropriate for road safety purposes should be examined as part of this Bill. The changes introduced in this Bill will only be effective with the right level of police enforcement. In addition, ongoing government investment in better educating drivers also must also be part of the solution. We expand on these points further below along with our comments on four key areas of the bill. In this submission we:
 - i. support changes to strengthen alcohol interlocks, recognising that the creation of such laws will only make a difference with the right level of policing to enforce them;
 - ii. support tougher penalties for drivers who flee the police and recommend the disqualification period for such drivers is extended to 12 months;
 - iii. recommend the Committee give further consideration to the potential competition effects of changes to the 'smaller passenger' licensing requirements with particular attention to rural areas where taxis have a dominant market position and the ability to charge high prices; and,
 - iv. support new measures to stop heavy vehicles and truck drivers from overloading..

Concerns about recent spikes in road-toll and policing levels

3. In general, we support the changes in this Bill. However, we are concerned about the recent spikes in New Zealand's road toll and the potential connection between this and current low policing levels. According to figures from the Ministry of Transport the road toll last year represented the highest number of fatalities on New Zealand's roads since 2010. 291 fatal road-crashes resulting in 319 deaths.¹
4. Of particular concern to our members, is the high number of road fatalities occurring in regional and rural areas. Over the last five years, Waikato has consistently ranked as the region with the highest number of roadside fatalities, with many of these accidents and fatalities occurring in well-known rural black-spot areas. Other road safety issues that persist in rural areas include: higher rates of roadside fatalities due to lack of seat belt use, a lack of affordable public transport options, out-dated and poorly maintained sections of the road network, and reduced medical attention on the scene to respond to roadside accidents.
5. Recent spikes in the road toll over the last three years does raise questions about the adequacy of current policing levels. According to recent media reports there is about one officer to every 526 people in New Zealand, meaning that the Government is failing to meet its own target of having at least one office to every 500 people.² The recently released New Zealand Police Four Year Plan also indicates that projected workforce numbers for the police are set to remain the same until 2020, despite expected changes in the population over that time.³ In previous submissions to the Government, RWNZ has advocated for a ratio of police officers that is equivalent to that in parts of Australia.⁴ Queensland which has a very similar total population and urban-rural population split to New Zealand, currently has a ratio of 1:423.⁵
6. We think the question of whether current policing levels are appropriate for road safety purposes should be examined as part of this Bill. The changes introduced in this Bill will only be effective with the right level of police enforcement. In addition, ongoing government investment in better educating drivers also must also be part of the solution.

Support strengthening the legislation on alcohol interlocks

7. RWNZ support the provisions in the Bill to strengthen the legislation on alcohol interlocks and to make such devices mandatory for all first time high-alcohol offenders and repeat offenders. Drink and driving is a major cause of vehicle crashes and fatalities in rural communities.

¹ Ministry of Transport (2016). *Annual road toll historical Information*. Available at <http://www.transport.govt.nz/research/roadtoll/annualroadtollhistoricalinformation/>

² http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11690840

³ New Zealand Police (May, 2016) *Four Year Plan (2016/17–2019/20)*. Available at: <http://www.police.govt.nz/sites/default/files/publications/strategic-plan-2016-2020-four-year-plan.pdf>

⁴ Rural Women New Zealand (2016) *Submission on the Law and Order Select Committee inquiry into issues relating to the illegal possession of firearms in New Zealand*.

⁵ New Zealand Police Association (2016). *Association policy on police numbers*. Available at: <https://www.policeassn.org.nz/newsroom/publications/other-publications/association-policy-police-numbers>

8. While, overseas research supports the efficacy of alcohol interlock laws as a means of reducing drink and driving. Again, the effectiveness of these laws is contingent on adequate numbers of police on the ground to both police alcohol breath limits and to ensure that offenders are complying with these restrictions. As discussed, a shortage of police is a major issue in rural areas. We think that it is highly likely that without adequate policing, offenders will resort to any number of ways to get around their alcohol interlock restrictions - the most obvious option being to borrow someone else's car. In addition, we think there are broader issues contributing to New Zealand's high rates of drink and driving which are not addressed in this Bill and which warrant urgent government attention

Support increasing penalties for drivers who fail to stop for the Police – disqualification period should be longer

9. RWNZ also supports the provisions in this Bill to increase penalties for drivers who fail to stop for the police. However, we think that the proposed mandatory driving disqualification period for a first-time offender should be increased to 12 months (as opposed to the 6 month period proposed in the Bill). This type of offending puts innocent victims and police offices lives at risk and as such we believe it should impose tougher penalties. We are also very concerned by the Government's statistics on the rate of this type offending, which estimate that about 2,300 people flee police every year, resulting in 460 crashes.
10. Again, the degree to which an increase in penalties will provide a sufficient deterrent to this type of offending will be contingent on adequate police resourcing. As already discussed, this is an issue that must be urgently addressed by the Government.

The competition effects of "small passenger service" regulations warrant further consideration

11. RWNZ supports the proposal in this bill to simplify the licensing and regulatory requirements for "small passenger services". From a rural perspective, we welcome any efforts by the government to reduce compliance costs and barriers of entry into the commercial taxi market. On this basis, we also recommend that the Committee further review the potential competition effects of creating a single class of passenger service under the Act.
12. While we appreciate that commercial taxi operators have called upon the Government to create a more level playing field in the market. The reality in rural areas, is that taxi operators continue to have significant competitive hold on the market and many charge extortionate prices for their services. Our members report stories of "*\$80 taxi trips to travel just 5km*", "*Paying \$55 for a 9-minute taxi trip, with the alternative option of a shuttle for \$48*". The lack of affordable passenger services in rural areas has a number of negative consequences, particularly for older adults, who are dependent on paid modes of transport.
13. RWNZ also strongly support the provisions in this bill that exempt not-for-profit transport and carpooling providers from the proposed new licensing requirements for small passenger services. These provisions will benefit the number of important small and not-for-profit community transport providers in rural communities that provide vital transport services to vulnerable population groups and who should not be subject to unnecessary compliance costs.

Support new measures to stop heavy vehicles and truck drivers from exceeding weight limits.

14. We strongly support the proposed updates to the heavy vehicle regulations, to stop heavy vehicles from overloading and exceeding their weight limits. While, trucks provide a vital mode of transportation for goods into and out of rural communities. Overladen trucks can be a hazard on the road and overtime can also cause considerable damage to the condition of roads and bridges in rural areas.

Conclusion

15. RWNZ thank the Committee for the opportunity to submit on the Bill. We would greatly appreciate the option to appear before the Committee in support of our submission. Please contact me on penelope.England@ruralwomen.org.nz to discuss our submission further.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Penelope England', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Penelope England
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