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Proposed speed limit changes on the Blackwood to Goolwa Road within the Alexandrina Council area.

This brief submission, on behalf of the Motorcycle Riders' Association of South Australia, is partially based on the Centre for Automotive Safety Research's (CASR) evaluation of recent speed limit changes in the Adelaide Hills Council area entitled 'Evaluation of the Adelaide Hills speed limit change from 100 km/h to 80 km/h' by A D Long and T P Hutchinson published in March 2009.

The proposed Alexandrina Council area speed changes have a close parallel.

This review covers the 5 year periods before and after a similar speed limit change as the one currently proposed. In summary, the review exposed the following main points:

- The review showed an 8% reduction in casualty crashes over the 10 year period in the area. This result is acknowledged as being statistically within the expected standard deviation level of 10% making the results inconclusive even when factoring in the natural rate of population increase in the target area. (The 8% reduction is in line with the overall fatal and serious injury reduction throughout the State in the same period.)
- The difference in average speed fell by only 2.5 km/h as a result of the decreased speed limits. Obviously, the road users thought that the previous limits were basically in order and correct and continued to drive and ride at the speed they thought safe and appropriate.
- The variance between crash numbers over the review years within the period shows no pattern and was entirely random. (Some years it was up. Other years it was down.)

The lowering of speed limits is an easy option when facing the task of improving the fatality numbers experienced so far in 2011/2012. At the time of writing there has been no significant increase in YTD fatality figures for 2012. The cry of 'we must do something; let's lower the speed limits' is over-riding the real issues that cause serious injury and fatal crashes. Installing new 80 km/h signs as a token effort in a targeted area does not obviate the Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure and the Alexandrina Council from embracing the real issues.

Many Adelaide Hills roads, including the Bull Creek Road, are well designed to take 100 km/h traffic in complete safety with appropriate width carriageways, excellent line marking, good sealed shoulders where appropriate and guard rail installations where warranted. To apply a lower blanket speed limit is to waste these valuable resources in planning, engineering and maintenance.

This issue of increased travel times must be addressed. Many local based businesses rely on expedient freighting of goods from the Adelaide environs. Lowering speed limits will lead to increased travel times and time is money to these local business owners.

(There is an excellent 2003 paper on this topic entitled 'Road Speed Limits – economic effect of allowing more flexibility' by the Federal Government Department of Transport and Regional Services.)

Also closely allied with this increase travel time scenario is the possibility of increased fatigue levels experienced by drivers and riders who suffer from the 'drone effect' when forced to travel well below the natural speed levels they perceive as right for the conditions. The need to constantly check vehicle speed can cause fatal inattention levels as eyes are diverted from the carriageway ahead in order to avoid a possible speeding fine.

There is no doubt that lowering speed limits will bring with it increased attention from SAPOL on the roads affected. This extra attention is welcome as a visible Police presence and is a well proven tool to control the 'hoon element' but not for the reasons to collect revenue from drivers and riders who are proceeding in a safe and orderly manner but inadvertently a few kilometers over the new posted speed limit.

Local residents know the areas around them and use due caution based on experience when traversing these roads – they know the potentially dangerous parts of the road network and travel at appropriate speeds. Casual users and tourists also use caution when traversing these roads as they do not know what is around the corner. Again the speeds travelled are at velocities they are comfortable with and may be well under the existing posted speed limits. Of course authorities always have to deal with the minority of 'thrill seekers' who use the roads as their playgrounds. They usually thumb their noses at all speed limits signs and enforcement is the only way to catch and deal with these habitual speeders. Unfortunately they are high profile news stories when they come to grief giving a false impression of the extent of the 'speeding menace' in that particular area. (Recent events in the Barossa Valley where speed limits were reduced to 80 km/h have highlighted this anomaly when two teenagers were fatally injured when travelling at very high speed. Decreased posted speed limits did nothing to deter these people.)

It is recommended that increased enforcement be used to catch habitual speeders and to conduct license checks in the Adelaide Hills area in general. This would have a more positive effect on the crash rate than any reduction of speed limits. This move would also not alienate the local inhabitants who see the potential reduction of speed limits as a retrograde step, impinging on their life style and decreasing their spare time while increasing transport costs. The possibility of 'accidental speeding' and being caught is something they have to live with constantly.

Lowering speed limits is no excuse to ameliorate poor road conditions when a road has been left to deteriorate where previously it was safe for travel at 100 km/h and now is suitable only for 80 km/h. Constant road maintenance programs must be administered to keep these pavements in appropriate condition for the traffic numbers and the safe transit of users.

There is strong evidence to show that 'speed limits set of the 85th percentile speed have fewer accidents' as described in the paper on speed limits from the National Motorists Association to the Federal Governments enquiry into speed limits.

The area currently under scrutiny includes the Bull Creek Road (Meadows to Ashbourne) which is a piece of pavement favoured by motorcyclists for a long time. It is a potential motorcycle black spot area mainly because of the very high number of recreational riders using this road.

From 2007 – 2011 there have been 8 overall casualty crashes recorded on this road including 2 fatalities and 1 serious injury. To my knowledge, one fatality was a motorcyclist and the crash causation was not speed related.

Some possibilities to make this road safer for motorcyclists in particular are to place warning signs at each end and at relevant entry roads. Such signs could convey the message that the area about to be entered is a 'motorcycle high risk area'. (Signs conveying this exact message are currently in use in motorcycle black spot areas in the Yarra Ranges and Great Ocean Road areas near Melbourne where they have been proven to be very effective.)

It is therefore advocated that the DPTI and Alexandrina Council do not promote a speed limit reduction to 80 km/h on this road but to conduct an engineering based audit on the capabilities of this road to safely conduct traffic at the current speed limit of 100 km/h.

Other low costs options must also be explored such as warning signs.

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