Queensland Government

Our ref: MC57301

Office of the
Minister for Transport and Multicultural Affairs

22 AUG 2011

Mr Chris [redacted]

Dear Mr [redacted]

I refer to your email to the Honourable Annastacia Pałaszczuk MP, Minister for Transport and Multicultural Affairs, and the Honourable Craig Wallace MP, Minister for Main Roads, Fisheries and Marine Infrastructure, about lowering the blood alcohol limit for motorcyclists and the use of wire rope safety barriers. The Ministers have asked that I respond on their behalf.

The Queensland Government is committed to providing a safe riding environment. The government also acknowledges the broader benefits of riding such as reducing congestion and potentially lowering greenhouse emissions. However, motorcycle riding remains a high risk activity.

In light of this, the government has taken a number of tangible steps to improve motorcycle safety. A number of initiatives contained in the *Queensland Motorcycle Safety Strategy 2009–2012* have been introduced. These include, provisional licence holders displaying a P plate when riding, restricting learners from carrying a pillion passenger (including supervisors), and the introduction of a Learner Approved Motorcycle Scheme.

Further to this, evidence suggests that there are a range of measures already in place in Queensland to prevent drink driving/riding such as random breath testing, tougher fines and penalties for licensing offences, public education and designated driver programs are effective.

These measures have been supplemented by recent initiatives such as the extension of a zero blood alcohol concentration limit to all Learner, Provisional and Probationary drivers, regardless of age, and to all RE motorcycle riders in their first 12 months of holding that licence, vehicle impoundment for high level repeat drink drivers, cumulative disqualifications for drivers who commit multiple drink or drug driving related offences and immediate licence suspension for certain drink or drug driving/riding offences.

The *Queensland Motorcycle Safety Strategy 2009–2012* also committed to investigate the benefits of introducing a zero blood alcohol concentration for all motorcycle riders given that some research shows it is safest to drive and ride with a blood alcohol concentration of zero.

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However, further research is needed to identify the crash risks for motorcyclists associated with blood alcohol concentration levels below the current limit of 0.05. Monash University's Accident Research Centre is currently undertaking research on behalf of the Department of Transport and Main Roads to help establish a body of evidence into the effect lower levels of alcohol has on riders. The project is scheduled for completion later this year.

To add to this proactive approach, the *National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020* has recently (20 May 2011) been approved by the Australian Transport Council and outlines a number of initiatives to improve the safety of motorcyclists. The strategy includes a review (within the first three years) of the application of blood alcohol concentration limits currently applying to certain licence categories. Any decision to reduce the blood alcohol concentration limit will be made in light of all available research and evidence and in consultation with the community and other key stakeholders. Further information on the strategy is available at www.infrastructure.gov.au.

In recognition of the risks faced by motorcyclists in the event of loss of control (and impact with a rigid object) the department seeks to take a balanced view in the application of road safety barriers. Road safety barriers are installed only where hazards (such as trees, poles, rock embankments, steep drops, concrete culverts) or possible median crossover crashes present a greater threat than the barrier itself.

In response to rider concerns in 1998, the Australian Transport Safety Bureau undertook a study of the safety of wire rope safety barriers. The bureau found that wire rope safety barriers were no more dangerous to riders than other barriers. This was also a conclusion made by the EuroRAP Motorcycle Safety Review Panel in the "Barriers to change" report published in 2008.

Wire rope safety barriers have saved many lives. The drop in the road toll in Sweden is testimony to this. Sweden has used wire rope safety barriers to reduce, by up to 90%, the incidence of run-off-road and head-on serious injury and fatal crashes on treated routes (Monash University Accident Research Centre - Flexible Barrier Systems Along High-Speed Roads: A Lifesaving Opportunity, December 2003). This reduction has been achieved through extensive use of wire rope safety barriers, as well as by the introduction of the innovative "2+1" road configuration. Under this layout flexible barriers are used to separate opposing traffic by providing alternating sections of two lanes in one direction, separated from the one lane in the opposing direction. An evaluation of Sweden's 2+1 system (Carlsson, 2009) concluded that there was no increase in motorcycle casualties from the use of wire rope safety barriers in that country, but rather that motorcycle crashes had decreased by a substantial amount.

Wire rope safety barriers approved for use in Queensland by the Department of Transport and Main Roads are compliant to Australian Standard 3845 – Road Safety Barriers. The purpose of the standard is to ensure barrier systems perform in a manner that minimises the likelihood of injury to road users, while protecting vehicles from impacting more hazardous roadside objects. This standard is currently under review and representatives from the department and the Australian Motorcycle Council are on the review committee.

The issue of motorcyclist safety at road safety barriers is under consideration by the committee. The department will be guided by the outcome of this review in its future use of wire rope safety barriers. At this time, the wire rope safety barrier will continue to be carefully utilised as one of a suite of safety tools to reduce crash severity, considering the needs of all road users.

If you require further information, please call Ms Catherine Broadley, Principal Advisor in Road Safety and System Management, on 3253 4868. Ms Broadley will be pleased to assist.

Yours sincerely

Linda Whatman
Principal Advisor