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MEDIA RELEASE

Reforms to improve road safety for over-85 drivers

State Plan Priority S7: Safer Roads

April 3, 2008

Roads Minister Eric Roozendaal today announced reforms to the licensing system for older motorists which will keep over-85 drivers safe on NSW roads.

“These reforms balance the safety of road users and the general community with the continuing independence and mobility of over-85 drivers,” Mr Roozendaal said.

The key reforms are:

- ▶ Annual medical check-up from the age of 75 to pick up issues like deteriorating eyesight and dementia earlier
- ▶ Redesigning the over-85 driving test and making it more practical, with testing every two years
- ▶ Introduction of a voluntary driver assessment scheme through accredited driver training organisations like the NRMA and the Australian Driver Trainers Association
- ▶ Maintaining modified licence options for over-85 drivers
- ▶ The establishment of an Older Drivers Implementation Panel to introduce reforms.

“More than 24,000 people had their say on this issue through a discussion paper process last year and the message was clear – we need to take another look at the issue of older driver testing,” Mr Roozendaal said.

“The ageing population means the number of over-85 drivers in NSW will more than double over the next 15 years.

“There are currently around 23,000 over-85 drivers in NSW but that figure is expected to increase to more than 52,000 by 2023 according to Australian Bureau of Statistics data.

“That’s why we need to act now to ensure the systems we have in place for over-85 drivers are fair and safe – not only for them but the wider community.”

The NSW Government will establish an Older Drivers Implementation Group to introduce the reforms through the RTA in consultation with the NSW Centre for Road Safety, the NSW Police Force, the Council on the Ageing, the NRMA, the Australian Medical Association and the Australian Driver Trainers Association.

The NSW Government will monitor the reforms and will be updated regularly by the implementation group.

OVER-85 DRIVER REFORMS

FACT SHEET

Medical check-up from the age of 75

This brings NSW into line with most Australian states and allows potential health and eyesight problems to be discovered earlier.

Most people aged over 75 already see their doctor at least annually, so it's common sense for their GP to give them a tick-off when it comes to their driver's licence as well.

Lowering the age of annual medical testing from 80 to 75 years was supported by 65 per cent of people who made a submission to the RTA's discussion paper.

Early detection of medical conditions is critical for older drivers to maintain mobility and independence.

Overhauling the driving test for over-85s

The Older Drivers Implementation Group will work with the RTA to overhaul the existing test for motorists aged over 85.

The driving test sat by motorists over the age of 85 will be completely re-designed – and over-85 drivers will now sit the test every two years.

The introduction of medical check-ups from the age of 75 means health issues will be able to be detected earlier and older drivers will be able to get the appropriate treatment.

Testing of over-85 drivers has been in place in NSW since the late 1960s, but it's time to take another look at the test and make it more practical.

That will be the job of the implementation group, which will help devise the new test – to be introduced across NSW early in 2009.

The group will consult widely and RTA testing officers across NSW will need to be retrained.

Testing is an important aspect of making sure drivers in their late 80s and 90s still have the appropriate skills to stay safe on our roads – that's why jurisdictions like the UK are working on introducing tests for older drivers.

The new driving test will focus specifically on the critical issues related to older people and their driving behaviour.

Voluntary driver assessment

Older drivers will have the option of undergoing a voluntary driver assessment through accredited organisations like the NRMA and the Australian Driver Trainers Association.

This will allow people to freshen up their skills.

The scheme will operate similar to the existing heavy vehicle licensing program, where heavy vehicle drivers receive training and assessment from accredited organisations.

The accredited driver trainer groups will assess over-85 drivers' competency and abilities and be able to approve them for their licence or identify areas that may need further action.

The assessors would have to apply to the RTA for accreditation and will be audited by the RTA to ensure their testing processes are appropriate.

Over-85 drivers who undergo the voluntary assessment through these groups would still have the ability to sit the new RTA test, which will remain free.

Modified licence options

Rules already exist which allow RTA registry managers to place conditions on an over-85 drivers' licence – in consultation with those drivers.

About 17 per cent of over-85 drivers – or more than 4000 people – already have restrictions on their licence negotiated with their local motor registry.

This system will be expanded to allow over-85 drivers a greater say with their local registry manager to determine licence conditions.

There will be no blanket licence conditions for all over-85 drivers – and this option will be at the complete discretion of the driver.

For example, if a driver feels they cannot drive safely at night any more they will be able to meet with their local RTA registry manager for an assessment and a subsequent condition could be placed on their licence.

It will be completely the driver's choice on approaching the RTA and discussing conditions for a modified licence.

This option allows older drivers to maintain their mobility and a level of independence which does not compromise the community's safety.

RTA registry managers will operate under a strict set of criteria on what licence conditions they can discuss with over-85 drivers.

Drivers who have demonstrated unsafe driving behaviours at an RTA or voluntary driving assessment will not be eligible for a modified licence.