



A NEW VISION OF AGING FOR CANADA

February 27, 2013

Honorable Glen Murray
Minister of Transportation
Ministry of Transportation/Ministry of Infrastructure
3rd Floor, Ferguson Block
77 Wellesley Street West
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1Z8

Dear Minister Murray,

We are writing to urge you to expedite your ministry's work in modernizing how it treats older drivers by establishing new policies and protocols for driver training and safety that are based on assessing competence to drive safely rather than age. In particular, there should be a focus on remedial driver training that should be standardized, accredited and eventually mandatory for drivers of all ages.

In the absence of a credible and fair regime, well-meaning but misguided initiatives are proposed to deal with the anxiety that some older drivers are not able to drive safely. But rather than offer remedial training, or fair and legitimate testing, older drivers are threatened with having their licenses confiscated. The most recent egregious example is the proposal in Sudbury to encourage people to anonymously report older drivers to the police through Crime Stoppers. The initiative was targeted at family members who thought their parent or spouse should not be driving but did not want to personally confront them. Police would then have shown up at the home of the driver to assess the situation and recommend competency testing. CARP publicly opposed the program and the police have since suspended it and their plans to roll it out across the province and apologized for the inappropriate response to an important issue.

Older drivers are often misperceived as poor drivers, posing traffic safety problems. The prevailing attitude toward older drivers is that they should be removed from the road, often regardless of ability to drive. Counter to evidence, expert groups and many governments operate on the false and implicitly ageist assumption that the ability to drive safely irrefutably decreases with age. Current government licensing practices are similarly ageist in design, failing to respect the dignity and needs of individual older adults while overlooking evidence that proves older drivers are safe and that remedial driver training can address the mobility and other challenges that could compromise their ability to drive safely.

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We want everyone to be safe on the road; we are not recommending that unsafe drivers be allowed to keep driving. But you can also appreciate that for older drivers, having their licence is very important to their independence and dignity, and especially in areas like Sudbury, where everyone is heavily reliant on their cars to get around.

CARP is calling for a driver improvement and intervention program that seeks to assess safety and skills and provide access to remedial training to ensure safety for all road users without violating the right of older drivers to their independence and dignity.

The system should ensure that all people are safe drivers. Driver improvement programs and interventions should eliminate age-based discrimination for older drivers and pro-actively increase safety measures for all drivers. The following recommendations and examples can help shape new regulations for training, licensing, and intervention programs:

- 1) Assess safety regardless of age: Rather than assessing people when a certain age is reached, assessment should be done for all drivers as warranted, to ensure everyone's safety.
 - Although older adults can become frailer with age, physical and cognitive impairments and changes are not exclusive to older adults and assessment will help identify everyone at risk.
- 2) Assess the ability to drive:
 - Assessment should solely test people's driving skills rather than other unrelated skills, such as people's ability to navigate computer-based programs and other technological interfaces.
 - This means offering practical tests that take into account the particular challenges associated with certain conditions and ailments, such as diabetes and mobility limitations, regardless of age.
- 3) Encourage on-going and remedial training with adaptive supports, protocols and incentives:
 - Everyone should be encouraged to improve their driving. Incentives can include insurance discounts, as is the case in a number of US states.
 - Government should create incentives for safety training, such as diversion programs available in the US and UK where people have the option of taking driver improvement courses in lieu of points or other penalties for noncriminal traffic violations or other prosecution

Driving is important to the quality of life for many of Ontario's seniors. It is a means of mobility, dignity, self-reliance, and social inclusion, particularly for people who live rurally. CARP is calling for evidence based driver improvement programs and interventions that would bridge the gap between the competing concerns of road safety for all road users and the preservation of independence and dignity for older drivers. We look forward to discussing the issue with you in further detail.

Sincerely,

Susan Eng, VP Advocacy

