



Young and High-Risk Drivers Recommendations

Summary

The Legislature in the 2015 Supplemental Transportation Budget directed the Department of Licensing (DOL), in consultation with the Washington Traffic Safety Commission (WTSC), Washington State Patrol (WSP), the insurance industry, and Professional Driving School Association (PDSA), to review options and make recommendations on strategies for addressing young and high-risk drivers to the Legislature and the Governor by December 31, 2015.

The proviso specifically directed DOL to consider findings of the Target Zero plan and include an analysis of expanding traffic safety education to 18-24 year olds who haven't taken traffic safety education, and drivers that have been convicted of high risk behavior, such as DUI and reckless driving.

While some need further study, refinement and cost benefit analysis, here are recommendations to consider:

Young Driver (Under 18) Policy Recommendations:

1. Expand the nighttime driving restriction for new drivers from 1am to 9pm.
2. Extend the driving permit period from 6 months to a full year.
3. Extend the no passenger restriction for new drivers from 6 months to a full year.
4. Institute a new driver decal requirement similar to one established in New Jersey to improve intermediate driver license enforcement.

Traffic Safety Education for 18-24 Year Olds:

1. Extend comprehensive classroom and behind-the-wheel driver training to new drivers under age 21.
2. Establish a subsidy program for low-income students.

High-Risk Drivers:

1. Provide DOL with the authority to assess a driver improvement course fee.
2. Consider implementing a random insurance verification program.

As part of our ongoing work as the young driver lead agency, DOL spent the last several months validating strategies identified in the Target Zero plan and other proposals. Based on this work and in consultation with our traffic safety partners, we have outlined a series of recommendations that would significantly improve the safety of young drivers in our state.

Many of these recommendations have been identified and validated in the state's Target Zero plan (<http://www.targetzero.com/plan.htm>). Another good resource is the Traffic Injury Research Foundation (<http://www.tirf.ca>), which has developed a research-based graduated licensing model in partnership with the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the National Safety Council.¹

Background information on young driver licensing requirements as well as a more detailed discussion of these recommendations are below. As always, DOL is available to provide technical assistance in drafting any of these recommendations in bill form. We can also provide additional data and resources for any of these recommendations upon request.

Aside from these recommendations, DOL and WTSC are preparing to significantly increase efforts around young driver policy and outreach over the next year. In January, DOL Director Pat Kohler will ask the Commission to create a new *Action Council on Young Drivers*, which will bring stakeholders together to develop and build support for a comprehensive Young Driver Target Zero legislative package in time for the 2017 legislative session. DOL will provide more details about this effort in early 2016.

¹ http://www.tirf.ca/publications/PDF_publications/ANewGDLFramework_EvidenceBasetoIntegrateNoviceDriverStrategies_6.pdf

Background Information

Washington essentially has two tracks for driver licensing:

For drivers under age 18, we require completion of a comprehensive traffic safety education course with 30 classroom hours and 6 behind-the-wheel hours. After a driver passes the written knowledge test and skills test, we issue an “Intermediate Driver License.” Young drivers must be at least 16 years of age to get their license, which is then subject to a series of restrictions, including limits on nighttime driving and passengers, and greater consequences for traffic violations. In general, these restrictions go away when the driver turns 18. See <http://www.dol.wa.gov/driverslicense/teens.html> for more information.

For drivers age 18 and older, there are no driver training requirements or driving restrictions. All that is required is successful completion of our written knowledge test and driving skills test. Drivers don’t even have to have a permit or practice driving before taking a drive test.

Young Driver (Under 18) Policy Recommendations:

- **Extend the Nighttime Driving Restriction from 1 a.m. to 9 p.m.**
Under current law, a driver under age 18 cannot drive between the hours of 1 a.m. and 5 a.m. during their first year of driving unless they are accompanied by a licensed driver who is at least 25 years of age. See [RCW 46.20.075\(3\)](#).² Even though a large number of 16 and 17-year-old fatalities occur between 1 a.m. and 5 a.m., a greater number of teens are typically killed each year between 9:00 p.m. and 1:00 a.m.

The Target Zero plan identified this as a proven strategy. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration also identified the nighttime restriction as a highly effective countermeasure that is extremely effective in saving lives. And the Traffic Injury Research Foundation has identified 9 p.m. as the most effective start time based on its research and evaluation of data nationwide.

Even with an exception for school, work, and other sanctioned extracurricular activities, changing the start time of the nighttime restriction could greatly reduce the number of teen drivers killed on Washington’s roadways during the early nighttime hours.

It’s important to remember that the nighttime driving restriction is not a curfew. It is, however, a key strategy to keep young drivers safe in light of their inexperience and the inherent dangers associated with nighttime driving.

- **Extend the Driving Permit Period from 6 Months to 1 Year**
Under current law, a driver under age 18 must hold an instruction permit for at least 6 months before applying for a driver’s license. See [RCW 46.20.075](#). The minimum age for a permit in Washington is 15 years old if enrolled in an approved traffic safety education course and 15 ½ if not.

The Target Zero plan identified this as a recommended strategy. The Traffic Injury Research Foundation has also identified this policy to lower crash rates for young drivers, with at least one study showing a 7% crash rate reduction when delaying licensure for 6 months.

This policy effectively extends the age that most young drivers actually get their driver’s license because most drivers do not get their instruction permit at age 15 or 15 ½. It also allows for more

² There is an exception for agricultural purposes. [RCW 46.20.070](#).

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behind-the-wheel practice time, which we know students and parents struggle with under the current 6 month timeline.

- **Extend the No Passenger Restriction from 6 Months to 1 Year**

Under current law, a driver under age 18 cannot drive with passengers who are under 20 years old during their first 6 months of driving and they cannot drive with more than 3 passengers who are under 20 years old during the next 6 months of driving. See [RCW 46.20.075\(2\)](#).³ There is a direct correlation between the number of young passengers and crash risk.

The Target Zero plan identified this as a recommended strategy that was validated by the National Cooperative Highway Research Program. A 2012 study by the AAA Foundation found that young passengers in the car with a young driver is a significant risk factor in crashes.⁴ That study found that just one passenger under age 21 increases a 16 or 17-year-old driver's risk per mile driven of being killed by 44%.

Extending the no passenger restriction to one full year will reduce the crash risk for young newly licensed drivers. It will also make enforcement easier for law enforcement by simplifying the restriction. A blanket one-year prohibition on passengers (other than immediate family) is a reasonable restriction that will allow new drivers to gain valuable experience without unnecessary distractions from other young passengers.

- **New Driver Decal on Vehicle License Plate**

Enforcing the intermediate driver license restrictions on nighttime driving and passengers remains very difficult for law enforcement. Requiring all drivers under 18 who hold an intermediate driver license to place a decal on the license plates of any car they are driving may reduce crashes and increase compliance with the intermediate driving restrictions.⁵

In 2010, New Jersey enacted a new driver decal law, which requires all drivers between the ages of 16 and 20 to display a small red removable decal on the license plate of any car that they drive. The presence of the decal provides law enforcement with probable cause to enforce IDL restrictions.

A study by the Center for Injury Research and Prevention at The Children's Hospital of Philadelphia found appreciable public safety benefits as a result of the law.⁶ Young driver crash rates went down 9.5% during the first two years after the law took effect. Citations issued to intermediate drivers also went up 14% during the first year of implementation.

The Target Zero plan has identified the new driver decal as a recommended strategy.

Traffic Safety Education for 18-24 Year Olds:

³ There is an exception for immediate family member passengers.

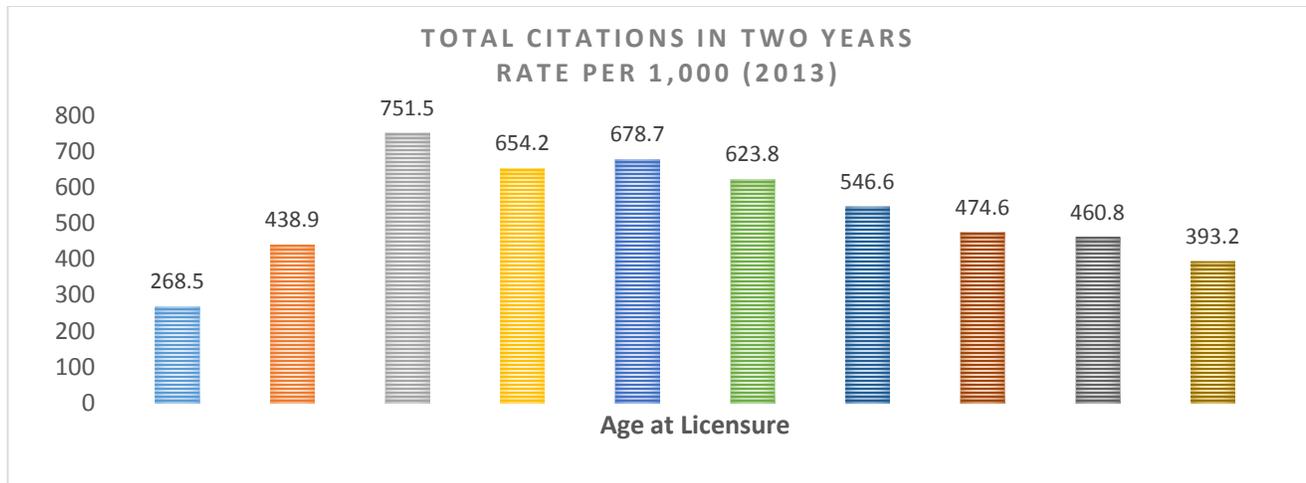
⁴ *Teen Driver Risk in Relation to Age and Number of Passengers*, AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety, May 2012, https://www.aaafoundation.org/sites/default/files/research_reports/2012TeenDriverRiskAgePassengers.pdf.

⁵ A similar measure was proposed during the 2015 legislative session by Rep. Pike ([HB 1159](#)). That bill would have required young drivers to place a large "NEW DRIVER" decal on their vehicle when driving.

⁶ CHOP Research Study Summary, <https://www.research.chop.edu/new-jersey%E2%80%99s-graduated-driver-decals-linked-fewer-crashes>.

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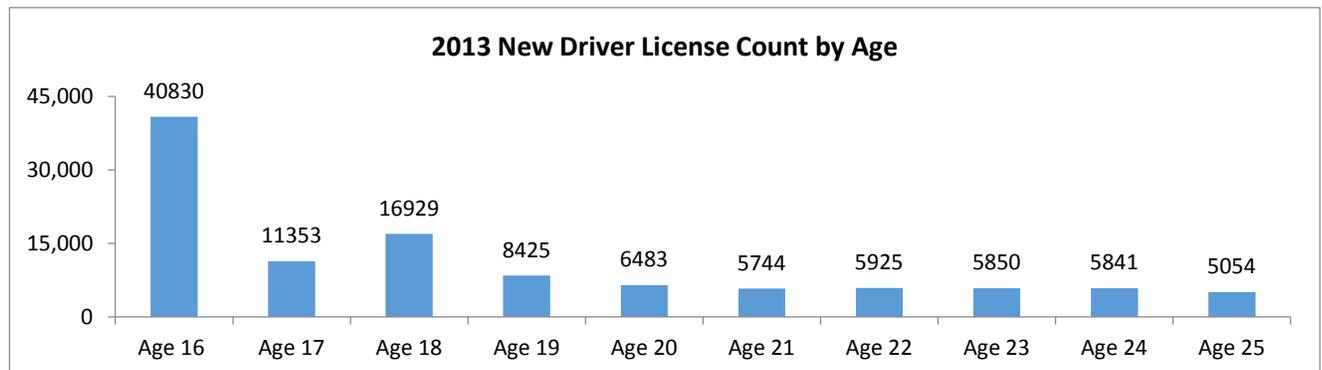
Newly licensed young adult drivers who wait until after age 18 are some of the most dangerous drivers on the road. They do not receive any driver training and they aren't subject to any intermediate driving restrictions. This chart shows the number of tickets per 1,000 drivers based on the age at licensure:



This chart shows the significant increase in citations issued to newly licensed adult drivers compared to 16 and 17-year-old drivers. Even though citation rates remain high through age 24, DOL and many of our traffic safety partners see the 18-21 year old newly licensed group as an area requiring the most attention.

- Extend Comprehensive Traffic Safety Education for Young Adults 18-21⁷**
 Over the last few years, DOL and other traffic safety partners have looked seriously at the need for expanded driver training to newly licensed young adult drivers. DOL has examined this issue extensively and is very concerned by the significant number of drivers waiting until age 18 to get their license. By doing so, these drivers avoid all driver training requirements.

This chart shows the distribution of new licensees by age:



Extending the same comprehensive classroom and behind-the-wheel traffic safety education requirements to new drivers 18-21 will help address the risky behavior newly-licensed young adults engage in. DOL and

⁷ Newly licensed young adults age 21-24 are a high risk group, but not as high as the 18-21 year old newly licensed group. The 21-24 year old newly licensed group is also much smaller. Requiring an abbreviated one day course on traffic laws and safe driving techniques for the 21-24 year old group could have an impact.

many of our traffic safety partners see comprehensive driver education with classroom and behind-the-wheel instruction as a better option compared to a more abbreviated classroom-only course for these drivers.

- **Establish a Low Income Subsidy Program for Traffic Safety Education**

The AAA Foundation conducted a study in 2013 that examined the reasons for why teens are waiting to get their driver license.⁸ That study found that cost is a big reason for the delay, with 36% reporting that driving was too expensive. A recent Joint Transportation Committee study on driver training noted that the average cost of driver training Washington is in the \$350 to \$450 range.⁹

Creating a subsidy program may increase driver education participation by low income individuals. Oregon expanded its subsidy/scholarship program in 2013, which has increased the number of teens enrolling in driver education. DOL operates a subsidy program for motorcycle safety training, which has also increased the number of motorcycle riders enrolling on a training course.

High-Risk Drivers

- **Provide DOL with Authority to Assess a Driver Improvement Course Fee**

Under current law, a driver that is convicted within a 5-year period of 3 or more serious vehicle-related offenses (vehicular homicide, vehicular assault, DUI, Driving While License Suspended, hit-and-run, reckless driving, and eluding), or convicted of 20 or more moving violations, is a “habitual traffic offender.” DOL suspends these drivers. Drivers may then reinstate if they have been in HTO status for at least 4 years and there’s no evidence that they’ve driven within the past 2 years.¹⁰

DOL also has general authority to suspend a driver’s license under [RCW 46.20.291](#) if DOL finds that the driver has demonstrated a disrespect for traffic laws or the safety of other people on the road.

Over the last 30 years, DOL has conducted more than 15 various driver improvement programs with little success. The National Safety Council ([www.nsc.org](#)) has developed an 8-hour “Attitudinal Dynamics of Driving” course that some states offer to drivers in lieu of suspension. A recent study of the effectiveness program shows improved public safety outcomes.¹¹

In order for DOL to implement a course like the one offered by the National Safety Council, DOL would need additional statutory authority to charge a driver improvement course fee, which would then be passed on to the course provider.

- **Consider Establishing a Random Insurance Verification Program**

Under current law, liability insurance is required, but DOL does not have the authority to verify insurance upon registration or at any other time. While not having insurance is not the cause of a collision, uninsured motorists are overrepresented in fatal crashes in Washington.

A 2011 study estimated the uninsured rate in Washington at 16%. This chart shows collisions based on driver age and the uninsured rate in those collisions:

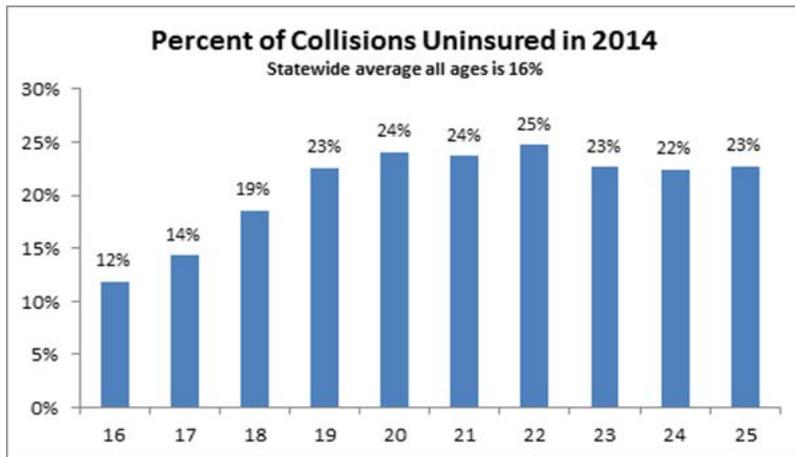
⁸ See <http://newsroom.aaa.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/Teens-Delay-Licensing-FTS-Report.pdf>.

⁹ See http://leg.wa.gov/JTC/Documents/Studies/Driver%20Education_Beth/Final_DriverEdReportFULL_WEB.pdf.

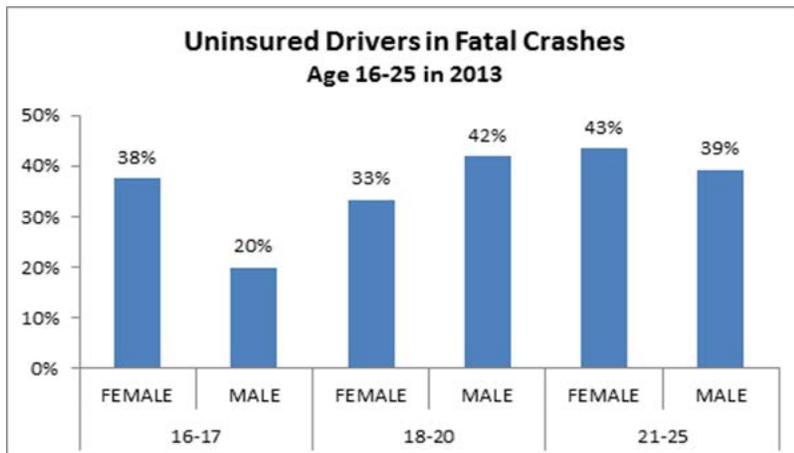
¹⁰ See <http://www.dol.wa.gov/driverslicense/suspendhto.html> for more information.

¹¹ See <http://www.ndsc.org/TrafficSafety/sitedocuments/MassachusettsSummaryStudy.pdf>.

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And this chart shows the percentage of uninsured drivers between ages 16-25 in fatal crashes in 2013:



Oregon uses a random sample system to verify insurance. As part of that program, the state sends a letter at random to 3% of drivers. Drivers are then required to respond with proof of insurance. Failure to respond would then result in a penalty due prior to their vehicle renewal.