

EDITORIAL & COMMENTARY



BOOI!

SCOTT LONGFIELD

IT'S YOUR TURN

Commentary

Experience Matters More than Age with Young-Adult Driver Safety

By Tracy Noble

Experience behind the wheel may matter more than age when it comes to the safety of young-adult drivers, according to two new studies by the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety.

These results suggest that states could reduce road crashes, fatalities and injuries by extending graduated driver licensing (GDL) laws to novice drivers beyond age 17.

Graduated driver licensing laws are designed to help new drivers gain practical experience in a relatively safe environment by initially restricting their exposure to risky situations, such as driving at night or with young passengers. The law then gradually phases in more privileges as new drivers gain more experience.

Turning 18 does not instantly make someone a safer driver. This new research reinforces how important experience is to safe driving and suggests that graduated driver licensing laws may be beneficial for people that begin driving at an older age.

The findings are based on two studies that examined crash rates of new drivers. The first study looked at crash rates in both California and North Carolina, which are two states that allow driving at age 16 and have no GDL requirements for new drivers ages 18 or older.

While new drivers licensed at older ages tended to be less likely to crash during their first months and years of driving than younger beginners, the research revealed an important

exception: New drivers licensed at age 18 were more likely to be involved in a crash resulting in injuries during their first year of solo driving than new drivers licensed at any other age.

The second study examined crash rates in New Jersey, which has a minimum age of 17 for unsupervised driving and is the only state in the country to have a comprehensive GDL program for all new drivers up to age 21. In New Jersey, while crash rates of new drivers licensed at different ages largely converged after six months of solo driving experience, older beginners had lower crash rates overall and lower rates of injury crashes than younger beginners.

Although the data did not allow researchers to directly investigate whether these differences were caused by GDL provisions, collectively, the results of the two studies suggest that applying GDL to all new drivers, or at least to some new drivers older than 17, might have a protective effect and improve safety.

Graduated driver licensing can greatly reduce crashes, injuries and deaths for everyone on the road. These laws set the parameters to help ease the transition behind the wheel during the learning to drive process.

Graduated driver licensing programs have reduced 16- and 17-year-old driver crashes, but generally do not apply to new drivers ages 18 and older.

Prior AAA Foundation research found that an estimated 36 percent of new drivers miss out on the protections of GDL by delaying licensure until age 18 or older.

AAA is not calling for states to extend GDL provisions just yet, but does believe the research results are very promising in terms of pinpointing a way to keep these drivers safe.

The AAA Foundation is planning to dive deeper into this area of research in the

coming year.

Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for U.S. teenagers, and drivers ages 18-20 were involved in more than 800,000 crashes in the United States in 2012.

Parents and teens can learn more about teen driver issues and GDL requirements in their state by visiting AAA's Keys2Drive website.

Established by AAA in 1947, the AAA Foundation for Traffic Safety is a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit, publicly supported charitable educational and research organization. Dedicated to saving lives and reducing injuries on our roads, the Foundation's mission is to prevent crashes and save lives through research and education about traffic safety. The Foundation has funded over 200 research projects designed to discover the causes of traffic crashes, prevent them and minimize injuries when they do occur. Visit www.aaafoundation.org for more information on this and other research.

Tracy Noble is a spokesperson for AAA Mid-Atlantic.

Top 10 reasons to vote YES on 2

By Michele S. Byers

New Jerseyans will vote on Tuesday, Nov. 4, on a critical question about the future of our state. Public Question No. 2 proposes to use part of the state's existing corporate business tax to fund open space and farmland preservation.

Here's why we at the New Jersey Conservation Foundation recommend that all vote yes:

- No new taxes or debt. This proposal does not increase the state's debt load by selling bonds that must be repaid. Nor does it create new taxes. The proposal would take a small percentage of the existing corporate business tax and use it to preserve open space, parks, farmland, historic sites and flood-prone places. It is fiscally conservative – the only solution in a time of tight budgets and reduced revenues.

- Clean drinking water. Preserved lands filter rainwater, removing impurities as the water trickles down into underground aquifers that provide clean drinking water for much of the state. Without clean water, a healthy economy is impossible.

- Health and happiness. New Jersey has more people per square mile than any other state, and our nearly 9 million residents need places to get away from it all. Studies show that parks, recreation areas, nature preserves and wilderness areas are very good for us, physically and mentally. With an epidemic of obesity and other conditions caused by physical inactivity, we need parks and outdoor places that are easily accessible to all.

- Clean air. Trees are our best friends when it comes to purifying air, absorbing carbon dioxide and producing oxygen. A single tree can absorb as much as 48 pounds of carbon per year from the atmosphere. When in full leaf, mature trees lower air temperature around

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COURTESY DORN'S CLASSIC IMAGES

Two River Moment

Though this undated photo is marked as being Marine Park in Red Bank, some believe it could be Atlantic Highlands. Do you know where this is? Please send responses to editor@tworivertimes.com.

them by up to 12 degrees by creating shade and releasing water vapor from their leaves.

- Fresh, nutritious food. It's no accident that New Jersey is called the Garden State. Anyone who has savored our famous tomatoes, corn, blueberries and cranberries – and lots more – knows we have some of the best soils in the world for growing produce. But development pressure is high. Preserving farmland by purchasing its development rights is the best way to ensure that these incredibly fertile soils will always be able to grow healthy food.

- Flood control. Wetlands, forests, fields and tidal marshes act like giant sponges to soak up runoff from rainstorms, as well as storm surges from hurricanes and northeasters. Preserving land is cheap compared to repeatedly paying for flood damages! Climate change experts predict more frequent and powerful storms in the future, so this is a no-brainer!

- Wildlife. Suburban sprawl has taken its toll on wildlife over the past half-century. Although some adaptive species can thrive in human-dominated environments, hundreds more are on the decline because of habitat loss. Without continued funding, our state will continue to lose habitat and rare species.

- Tourism and recreation. Eco-tourism, agri-tourism, historic tourism and outdoor recreation combine to create a powerful economic engine, drawing visitors from within and outside New Jersey.

- Smart economics. New Jersey wants to attract new jobs and businesses, which helps everyone's bottom line. Corporations locate – and stay – in places with an educated, highly skilled workforce. To remain competitive with other states, New Jersey needs to maintain its high quality of life.

- Future generations. By the middle of this century, New Jersey is projected to reach full build-out, that point where every acre is developed or preserved. Two-million acres hang in the balance, and we need to preserve about a million of those – 350,000 acres of farmland and 650,000 acres for open space, parks, water supply and flood control.

- New Jersey's land preservation programs have saved hundreds of thousands of acres in the past 50 years, but now these programs are flat broke. Without replenished funding, many critical lands that could be preserved will instead be developed. Once it's gone, it's gone forever. Or, as former state Agriculture Secretary Phil Alampi used to say, "Asphalt is the last crop."

To learn more about the ballot question, visit the NJ Keep It Green website at www.njkeepitgreen.org.

And for more information on preserving New Jersey's land and natural resources, go to the New Jersey Conservation Foundation website at www.njconservation.org or contact me at info@njconservation.org.

Michele S. Byers is the executive director of the New Jersey Conservation Foundation.