



Driving Tests for Everyone, Regularly

Posted by [Glenn](#) on July 19, 2006 - 2:46pm in [The Oil Drum: Local](#)

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Here's a short proposal that would automatically reduce the number of drivers, make our streets and highways safer and less congested, increase demand for mass transit services and save lots of energy along the way.

Written and practical driving tests every 5 years for all licenced automobile drivers regardless of age. Examinations will also be required within one month of any traffic incident* that results in a personal injury.

This idea is loosely based on yesterday's NY Times opinion piece by [Andrew Haas](#), who was hit by an elderly driver while riding his bike and severely injured.

Here was the result of the traffic incident*:

In the year since the accident, I have learned to walk again. The Ironman, however, is well beyond my ability. I cannot run down the block without serious pain, especially in my pelvis. Professionally, I missed almost a year of work, which forced me to restart my orthopedic surgery practice from scratch. I have a long way to go before I regain even a semblance of my former life.

But the driver who hit me has scarcely been inconvenienced. He was charged with failure to yield and issued a \$128 fine. He is permitted to drive without restrictions and without any assessment of his competence. In all probability, he has had no legally mandated driver training since he received his driver's license more than half a century ago.

And this type of incident happens everyday. Here was his original proposal:

Given their great, and frequently proven, capacity to do harm, drivers should be required to take a continuing driver education course every 10 years.

Special emphasis should be placed on elderly drivers. Motor-vehicle injuries are the leading cause of injury-related deaths among 65- to 74-year-olds and are the second leading cause, after falls, among 75- to 84-year-olds. Older drivers have a higher fatality rate per mile driven than any age group except drivers under 25. The American Medical Association estimates that as the population of the United States ages, drivers aged 65 and older will eventually account for 25 percent of all fatal crashes.

What I liked even better than his opinion piece, were the [letters to the editor](#) that all concurred

This was typical:

Anyone who feels confident in his driving ability should be willing to put it to the test.

Perhaps organizations like AARP could help by advocating similar requirements.

I would suggest that older drivers, most of whom I expect are reasonable people, could lobby their states and organizations to adopt licensing laws that would make tragedies like Dr. Haas's accident much less likely.

Robert Gelman

Ann Arbor, Mich., July 17, 2006

But this was the one that caught my eye and prompted this post:

I agree that people -- all people -- should be certified every five years. In fact, I would recommend recertification more often -- every two years.

But recertification is only part of the problem. The lack of public transportation is of greater importance.

Our society is willing to put billions into improving highways and streets, but it is loath to put money into improved public transportation.

Adequate public transportation would reduce the number of elderly drivers. As it stands now, an automobile is a necessity if one wants to go to the doctor's or the grocery store.

Harry E. Berndt

Webster Groves, Mo., July 17, 2006

We have created a society in which most people outside major urban centers like New York, Chicago, Boston (and yes Alan, New Orleans) do not have adequate alternative transportation options for obtaining basic needs like food and medicine. This is because our many of our nation's communities are not walkable to grocery stores or pharmacies.

Removing unfit, unsafe and reckless drivers from the road might be the easiest way to dramatically increase demand for mass transit while also encouraging carpooling and more village centered planning and re-zoning.

*Because of rampant misuse in the media of the word "accident" when they report on anything related to injuries or deaths from cars hitting pedestrians, cyclists or other cars, I have decided to consciously start using the more neutral word "incident" which does not let the motorist off casually by labeling it an unavoidable mistake.



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