

INTRODUCTION

This document discusses the Government's proposed improvements to New Zealand's Graduated Driver Licensing System (GDLS or licensing system).

Consultation gives the people and organisations affected by proposals an opportunity to give their views and help make sure the resulting changes are sound and work well.

The proposals in this document are designed to work together. We recommend you read the entire document before providing feedback.

Your specific feedback on the proposals in this document will help inform the final proposals and any changes to the Land Transport (Driver Licensing) Rule 1999 (the Rule) and the Land Transport Act 1998 (the Act).

The Cabinet paper agreeing to public consultation and the supporting interim Regulatory Impact Statement are published alongside this consultation document.

Consultation closes 9 June 2025.

Sending your submission

You can fill out the online survey included in this page or you can email your submission to: GDLS@transport.govt.nz

Your submission may be shared with the New Zealand Transport Agency

The Ministry of Transport may share your submission and identifying information with the New Zealand Transport Agency Waka Kotahi (NZTA) for submissions analysis purposes.

Your submission is public information

Please note your submission may become publicly available. The Ministry of Transport may publish any information you submit and may identify you as the submitter should it publish your submission. Therefore, **please clearly indicate if your comments are commercially sensitive or should not be disclosed for another reason, or the reason why you should not be identified as the submitter.** Any request for non-disclosure will be considered under the Official Information Act 1982.

OVERVIEW

The New Zealand Graduated Driver Licensing System

The New Zealand driver licensing system consists of three stages – learner, restricted and full. The requirements of each stage are explained below:



To get your full licence, you must pass one theory and two practical tests. All drivers must spend at least six months on their learner licence before they can apply for their restricted licence. The time you spend on your restricted licence depends on your age and whether you choose to do an advanced driving course:

Age	Standard period	With advanced driving course
Under 25	18 months	12 months
25 and over	6 months	3 months

The total cost of all three tests is \$362.50, or more if you fail more than two tests at any stage. You need to go into a driver licensing agent to sit the test, and a vision screening test, at each step of the process. Generally, you need to bring a registered and warranted vehicle to sit the practical tests in. On top of the financial cost, it takes time to book, travel to, and sit the tests. Many people may have to take time off work or school to do this.

Case for change

More than one million people over 16 years in New Zealand do not have a full driver licence, and nearly half of these people have no licence at all.

There are wider economic benefits from more people having a licence, as it helps people to access jobs, education, healthcare, their community and other services. If people choose to drive without a licence, they put themselves and other road users at risk. Young people are particularly overrepresented in road crashes. In 2024, young drivers (16-24 years) made up

12 percent of licensed drivers but were responsible for 24 percent of serious injury crashes and 22 percent of fatal crashes.

There are also impacts on the justice system and the individuals involved if unpaid fines for traffic offences end up in court.

There is an opportunity to reduce the cost and burden on people going through the system to support more people to get their full licence and help improve the associated economic and safety outcomes.

Scope of proposed changes

The Road Safety Objectives document lays out the Government's plan to improve road safety. As part of the focus on safer drivers, it includes an action to:

Identify opportunities to improve the Graduated Driver Licensing System, taking into account road safety (for example, ensuring drivers are adequately trained) alongside making a licence cheaper and easier to obtain.

The proposed changes in this document respond to this action. Changes are focussed on New Zealand Class 1 (car) licence holders progressing through the licensing system. There are no changes proposed to overseas licence conversions or test fees. We will advise the Minister of Transport separately on whether changes to driver licensing fees are required.

PROPOSED CHANGES

Remove the full test and introduce mitigations to maintain safety outcomes

New Zealand is one of few places to require a practical test to gain a full licence (full test). The full test is a 30-minute practical driving test. Applicants must also describe potential hazards they see while driving, such as pedestrians waiting at a crossing.

Most countries do not have a full test but often impose tougher restrictions or lower offence thresholds for drivers on learner and restricted licences.

We propose to remove the full test and introduce mitigations to maintain safety outcomes. The proposed mitigations are a clean driving record requirement in the restricted stage, a reduced demerit threshold for novice drivers and a zero-alcohol limit for novice drivers. These are discussed in more detail below.

The Director of Land Transport (part of NZTA) approves the content of licence tests. If the full test is removed, NZTA will consider whether the hazard perception test could be moved to another stage of the licensing system. For example, applicants could sit a computerised hazard perception test at the end of the learner stage, as is common in Australia.

The full test costs \$98.90 to book, with one free resit if needed. Removing the full test would reduce a cost for people getting a licence. People would also save time and money because they would no longer need to travel to a testing agent and sit the test. We would expect to see wider economic benefits from more people getting a full licence and having increased access to jobs and education. It could also reduce the number of people getting fines and demerit points, and possibly entering the justice system, for driving without an appropriate licence.

Introduce a clean driving record requirement to the restricted licence

We propose to introduce a requirement that drivers on their restricted licence must keep a clean driving record before they can get their full licence.

The restricted periods and option to take an advanced driver training course would not change:

Age	Standard time	With advanced driving course
Under 25	18 months	12 months
Over 25	6 months	3 months

There would be zero-tolerance for any driving-related offence. This means you could not commit any driving offence for the whole of the restricted stage. If you commit an offence, the restricted licence period would restart from the time of offence (you would not need to resit the restricted test).

NZTA would check that you have kept a clean record for your restricted licence period before issuing your full licence.

This proposal is designed to encourage inexperienced drivers to drive safely, or risk having to spend longer on their restricted licence. This approach would mean drivers who break the

road rules would not be able to get their full licence until they have shown they can drive safely and responsibly for an extended time.

What could it mean for you?

John is 17 when he passes his restricted test. He does not do an advanced driving course and is eligible to progress to his full licence 18 months later. However, he gets caught speeding 3 months into his restricted and now must wait another 18 months before being able to progress to his full licence. John commits no more offences and progresses to his full licence 21 months after getting his restricted licence.

Marama is 30 when she passes her restricted test. As she is over 25, and she completes the AA's *defensive driving* course, she must spend at least 3 months on her restricted. She commits no offences during this period and gets her full licence 3 months after getting her restricted licence.

Reduce the demerit threshold for novice drivers to have their licence suspended

Currently, if a driver accumulates 100 or more demerit points within two years, their licence will be suspended for three months and they cannot drive. At the end of their suspension they must go through the process of having their licence reinstated.

We propose to halve the threshold for novice drivers to 50 demerit points. That means if a driver on their learner or restricted licence gets 50 or more demerit points their licence will be suspended and they cannot drive until their licence has been reinstated.

As with the clean driving record requirement, this proposal is intended to encourage novice drivers to drive safely, follow the road rules and stick to their licence conditions.

What could it mean for you?

Mia is on her learner licence and is caught driving without a supervisor on two separate occasions. She receives 35 demerits each time, which takes her demerit points to 70. Her licence is suspended for 3 months and she is not allowed to drive. At the end of the 3-month suspension period, she must apply to have her learner licence reinstated.

Mark is on his restricted licence and is caught speeding by more than 35km/h. He receives 50 demerit points and has his licence suspended for 3 months. At the end of the 3-month suspension period, he must apply to have his restricted licence reinstated.

Introduce a zero-alcohol limit for novice drivers

New Zealand has a zero-alcohol limit for all drivers under the age of 20. The limit for all drivers aged 20 years and over is 250 micrograms of alcohol per litres of breath or 50 milligrams per 100 millilitres of blood.

There is evidence that even small amounts of alcohol result in increased crash risk, which can particularly affect those learning to drive. Australia and other comparable countries have zero-alcohol limits for all novice drivers.

We propose to extend the zero-alcohol limit to include all drivers on their learner and restricted licences. Any of these drivers caught with alcohol in their breath or blood would be subject to the standard penalties – which, under the proposed reduced demerit threshold, would result in their licence being suspended (as alcohol offences carry a penalty of at least 50 demerits).

This change is intended to help keep inexperienced drivers, and other road users, safe by not allowing anyone on a learner or restricted licence to consume any alcohol before driving.

What could it mean for you?

Jason is 45 when he gets his restricted licence. He would not be allowed any alcohol before driving until he gets his full licence.

Kim is 19 and has her full licence. She is not allowed any alcohol before driving until she turns 20. There would be no change to Kim's situation.

Improve NZTA's oversight of approved advanced driver courses

The Rule allows NZTA to approve advanced driver training courses that can reduce the time spent in the restricted stage. There are currently two approved courses - the Automobile Association's Defensive Driving and the New Zealand Institute of Driver Educator's Street Talk. The current provisions provide limited ability for NZTA to ensure that courses are being delivered to standard.

We propose minor changes to give NZTA more scope to consider whether course providers are suitable and allow them to suspend or revoke providers when necessary.

We expect these changes will give NZTA the confidence to approve more courses which will give drivers more choice. It will also help to improve the quality of approved courses and make sure new drivers are taught the skills they need to be safe drivers.

This change will capture approved courses for different classes of licences and endorsements. For example, drivers often take courses to obtain a Class 2 (medium rigid vehicles) licence.

Reduce the number of vision tests

People going through the licensing system need to visit a licensing agent several times and fill out paper forms. Moving more processes online would mean people could do some things at home and would help make the system smoother and more efficient.

One barrier to moving licence renewals online is the need for applicants to sit several vision screening tests. Applicants must either have a vision test done by a driver licensing agent or get a certificate from a vision professional (such as an optometrist) each time they apply for a new licence, and for renewals, reinstatements, and overseas conversions.

We propose to reduce the frequency of vision testing to whenever you apply for your first New Zealand licence, and when you first renew your licence after you turn 45. In place of a vision test, you will need to declare that your vision has not deteriorated since your last vision test. This change would apply to Class 1 (car) and Class 6 (motorcycle) licences. The vision testing requirements would not change for those over 75 years, reinstatements, overseas conversions, or heavy vehicle licences.

This change would support a shift to online licence renewals and reduce the time it takes to apply for a licence in many instances. For example, you would still need to take a vision test when applying for your learner licence but not for your restricted.

Questions

Do you support removing the full licence test with the proposed safety mitigations? If not, why not?

Do you support a zero-tolerance clean driving record requirement in the restricted stage?

Do you support halving the demerit threshold for learner and restricted licence holders?

Do you support a zero-alcohol limit for learner and restricted licence holders?

Do you support the proposed changes to NZTA's oversight of course providers?

Do you support the reduced eyesight testing requirements?

Do you have any other comments on any of the proposed changes?

NEXT STEPS

We seek your feedback on the proposals in this document from **14 April 2025 until 9 June 2025**. Once consultation closes, we will analyse submissions and advise the Minister of

Transport on the outcome of consultation. Your specific feedback on the proposals will help inform our advice to the Minister.

The Minister intends to have changes implemented by 1 July 2026. Once final decisions are made on the changes, we will work with NZTA on implementation and transitional arrangements.