

Greetings!

My name is Dale Robinson and I am the owner of Ken's Driving Instruction, LLC, operating in the Twin Cities metro area.

I have been following with great interest the ongoing discussion in the legislature and DVS regarding ways of reducing the massive backlog of Class D road/skills tests. I understand that some suggestions such as temporarily allowing driving school instructors to conduct road tests, or eliminating the road test altogether, have been already been discussed. I'm not completely clear what has been eliminated or might still be on the table for further discussion, but I would appreciate it very much if the committee would indulge me by allowing me to present a few thoughts and ideas that may help ease the huge backlog of road tests.

THE ISSUE OF DEMOGRAPHICS

I believe much of the discussion to date has been focused on teens being able to take their road tests in a time manner. While their plight is certainly important, there is another large demographic that must be addressed: the adult immigrant. A trip to your local metro area exam site will show that many of the people in line waiting to take a road test are immigrants. Regardless, both groups have to pass a road test to get their license. Failing a road test by either demographic increases the backlog.

TEENS:

-- As a behind the wheel instructor, I find that teens are usually my best students and typically possess the best driving skills of any demographic I instruct. They are required to have 50 hours of behind the wheel instruction with their parents, in addition to six hours with a professional driving instructor, so they already have a significant amount of experience when they show up for their road test. And, while this demographic may have a statistically higher number of accidents, I think this may have more to do with their driving behavior AFTER getting their license rather than their actual driving skill. It's impossible to test what one's driving behavior will be AFTER they get their license, but it is easy to assess their driving skills during a road test. Therefore, I would be in favor of TEMPORARILY allowing driving instructors to test teen students (not their own) to help alleviate the road test backlog. It will be up to their parents, however, to continue to police their driving behavior.

ADULTS:

-- Adults 18+ represent the largest demographic of clients at my school and it is also the most complex. Many adults have a great deal of driving experience while others have virtually NONE. My biggest challenge in this demographic is the immigrant adult who has previous driving experience in their home country. It is common knowledge that traffic laws are notoriously lax in most underdeveloped countries, therefore, while many of these adult students can "control" the car well enough, they often have a great deal of difficulty "understanding" our relatively strict driving laws. If you've ever witnessed driving in a foreign country, you can understand what I mean. Many students have told me that it is very easy to get a driver's license in their country of origin, with little or no behind the wheel experience or training required. Using their foreign license, they are allowed to take a road test in Minnesota without the need for an instruction permit, just as long as they pass

the knowledge test. Of course, their failure rate is quite high and thus contributes to the backlog of road tests.

Adult immigrants who do not come the US with a foreign license can get an instruction permit upon passing the knowledge test, which they must hold for only three months (six months if under 19 years of age) before taking a road test. While there is an expectation by the DVS that this waiting period will be used for behind the wheel practice, it has been my experience that such practice is often spotty and sometimes nonexistent. Again, this results in multiple road tests and contributes to the backlog. One possible solution to consider is requiring all adults to show proof of having trained with a professional driving instructor. A six hour requirement, such as a teenager must have, might be excessive in some cases, but certainly not in others. But, having at least SOME training should help them have a higher success rate in passing their road exam.

OTHER IDEAS:

-- Consider temporarily eliminating the parallel parking requirement. This could potentially save several minutes per road test and reduce test anxiety at the same time. I've been told that examiners are supposed to allow only two minutes for parallel parking but I've witnessed 5+ minutes. Parallel parking, while an excellent skill to develop, is generally not a dangerous activity resulting in injury or death and could therefore be temporarily eliminated.

-- The three metro exam stations (Arden Hills, Plymouth and Eagan) have a peculiar uncontrolled intersection that is the cause of many failures. These exam sites have a major street entering directly from a road/highway outside the facility (except Plymouth) that traverses the entire length of the exam site. It is crossed by a one way street at an UNCONTROLLED intersection. This intersection has the appearance of a major intersection, causing a driver to assume it has some sort of traffic control device. Persons entering the exam site often travel through this intersection at a high rate of speed, and without looking, oblivious to the fact that it is uncontrolled (no signage or traffic lights). While it is certainly important to understand how to navigate uncontrolled intersections, intersections like the one at these two sites, involving a four lane one way street and a six lane major street, *rarely* exist on normal streets or don't exist at all. Intersections of this size are virtually always semi-controlled with a stop or yield sign, or fully controlled with a four way stop or traffic light. I suggest placing a yield sign, a 2 way stop sign, or a 4 way stop sign at this intersection to help reduce failures and provide a more realistic driving experience. While four way stops are common in real life, there are NO four way stops at either of these three exam sites (I would think this would be a valuable skill that should be tested anyway, and this intersection would be a great place for such a modification). There are other minor uncontrolled intersections that can remain uncontrolled, thus fulfilling the purpose of proving a student's ability to navigate these types of intersections. (Side note: I witnessed a VERY near accident at the Arden Hills exam station on May 28th at this uncontrolled intersection. I'm sure this resulted in both students failing their road test. The vehicles came within mere inches of colliding - very dangerous.)

-- Create a new "score sheet" that is easily understandable (like those that many other states use). The existing yellow carbon copy that is provided to persons failing their road test is virtually unreadable largely due to the "secret code" system used by examiners (this secret code was confirmed to me by Debra Carlson, DVS Exam Services Coordinator). Additionally, the handwritten notes in the remarks section of this form are too often unreadable and/or confusing. Most of the students that I take to road tests are immigrant adults and have limited English skills. Some cannot read or write English at all.

While most of the examiners do their best at explaining to a student why they failed, many of these students simply don't understand English well enough to comprehend what the examiner is telling them. This confusion and lack of comprehension due to the lack of strong English skills further exacerbates road test backlogs because these same people end up taking multiple road tests. I've been told by Debra Carlson that I can sit in on the post-exam briefing, but many times the briefing is so short that I don't get to the car on time to speak to the examiner before he/she is on their way to their next road test. Unfortunately, this means that the student does not fully understand why he/she failed, and neither do I. Also, I often end up with these people as clients only after they fail four road tests, at which point they are REQUIRED to pay for six hours of lessons with a trained driving instructor. Often times, I find these students to be quite skilled at driving - it was simply silly errors that they kept committing without realizing what they were doing wrong until I was able to clearly explain it to them.

CONCLUSION

The issue of a severe road test backlog is keeping many people from getting their driver's license in a timely manner. The metro exam stations were already backlogged at least four months before the Governor's stay-at-home order forced a multi-week shutdown of DVS exam stations. This has led to a backlog of multiple 10's of thousands of road tests in Minnesota. Safe and effective ways of easing this backlog should be explored quickly. In addition, making modifications to the road test and scoring systems should help reduce the backlog by helping more people to pass their road test within a couple of attempts (preferably their first attempt).

If I can be of further assistance to the Committee, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Dale Robinson, owner

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