



Long weekend is coming Did someone say road trip?

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There's a perfect storm heading straight for New South Wales roads this long weekend and we don't mean the NRL kind coming out of Melbourne.

In coming days, motorists will receive the customary pre-long weekend warning police in NSW and other states observing the Queen's Birthday holiday will be out in serious numbers. In NSW double demerits will be enforced from Friday 5 to Monday 8 June (inclusive).

Restrictions are lifting as the COVID-19 recovery plans start being integrated into our daily lives. There's going to be a good percentage of people on the roads who probably haven't driven much further than the local shops in recent weeks, possibly heading out on a road trip with the enthusiasm of an off the leash puppy at a dog park for the first time.

Conversely, there's also been many people working serious hours. Tiredness has become part of their lives. If you think you are fine to drive a few more hours to your long weekend destination after doing a full shift at work, stop and think a moment. Your first long weekend out after isolation story will look and sound a lot better with holiday memories, not hospital ones.

And what about the highways? Sydney to Melbourne was the second busiest domestic air route in the world. This long weekend, there will be but a handful of flights.

Therefore, there will be a heavy focus on routes such as the Hume Highway as this motorist found out:

About 9.40am (Saturday 30 May 2020), officers from Murray River Police District Highway Patrol were conducting speed enforcement duties on the Hume Highway at Little Billabong, approximately 30km north of Holbrook.

Officers detected a BMW sedan allegedly travelling at 210km/h in a marked 110km/h zone....Police issued the driver, a 29-year-old man from Lidcombe, an infringement notice for exceeding the speed limit by more than 45km/h and suspended his driver's licence on the spot for six months.

The penalty for exceeding the speed limit is \$2482 and six demerit points.

www.police.nsw.gov.au/news

The disruption of air traffic within Australia is not without precedent. During the 1989 pilots' dispute, travellers hit the highways and sadly, many never reached their destination.

According to BITRE data for the five months of August to December 1989, the period the strike occurred, there were 141 fatal crashes on 100 and 110 km/h roads in NSW. The next year (1990), there were 28 fewer crashes on that class of road.

Double demerit points will apply for all speeding, seatbelt/restraint and phone offences. This means there's every chance riders and drivers heading through NSW could rack up a not-so perfect 10 simply because they were using their mobile phone while trying to control their car, truck or motorcycle at the same time.

In non-double demerit periods, the minimum penalty for holding a phone while driving in NSW is \$344 and five demerit points, or \$457 and five demerit points if detected in school zones. The approach in Queensland has been to increase fines to \$1000 and four demerit points.

In the first two months of operation, mobile phone detection cameras in NSW caught 21,000 drivers using handheld devices.



Authorities issued 11,790 mobile phone detection camera fines were issued in March alone, with another 9000 drivers caught in April even though there were fewer cars on the road during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

This is not just an Australian phenomenon. Recent research from Canada's Traffic Injury Research Foundation (TIRF) showed almost one in 10 Canadian drivers (9.7%) reported texting while driving in 2019.

Acusensus, the company that developed the new mobile phone detection system displayed its mobile enforcement platform at the 2019 Australasian Road Safety Conference in Adelaide (see photo).

The Acusensus mobile and gantry-mounted systems operate day and night in all weather conditions. The system can detect if a driver is holding a mobile phone to their ear or if they are attempting to conceal the unlawful behaviour by placing it their lap.

The dangers of distraction are well documented through crashes that have killed and injured people. Using a mobile phone behind the wheel is a choice. You can decide not to use your phone.

It is understood that during the trial period, very few of the thousands of images taken were of drivers holding phones to their ear. This means that those being caught by the system know that what they are doing is illegal and unsafe but they are doing it anyway. This is why authorities reject calls for warning signs in advance of mobile phone detection systems as misguided and not in the interests of road safety.

Even though we're all hopefully across social distancing – practising it on the roads can also be a good thing. Leaving enough room between your car and the one in front of you can be a good thing. That way you have enough room between your vehicle and the one in front to take evasive action if an unexpected hazard presents itself.

Remember, five more females have lost their lives on NSW roads this year compared to 2019 and people aged 39 and under have died in greater numbers in 2020 (NSW Centre for Road Safety data published 1/6/20).

Road safety is for real people and making better choices as a driver or rider or pedestrian comes down to knowledge and education.

The Authors – RTS Zero

RTS Zero is the partnership of Michael Timms and Sonia Roberts who have a combined 55 years of experience in road safety. Their profiles are searchable on LinkedIn.

This work is their personal analysis of current events.