

## Nottinghamshire Roosevelt Travelling Scholarship

### Investigation into the driver training and testing processes throughout the US

Sarah Edwards

#### **Introduction**

When I made my application to the Roosevelt Travelling Scholarship back in February 2012, my main proposal was a fairly broad one-to examine the way in which drivers were trained and tested throughout the United States of America. During the months of preparation, I worked alongside higher management within the Driving Standards Agency (DSA), my employer and an executive agency of the Department for Transport, a Government department, to refine my research plan.

I decided that the most effective way in which to make comparisons between each State's approach to driver training and testing to that of ours here in the UK was to link my objectives to those of the DSA which are as follows:

- To deliver tests for all motor vehicles including cars, motorcycles, lorries, buses and taxis.
- Set national standards for driving and motorcycle riding, from the early stages of driver and rider education, through license acquisition to continued post-test learning.
- Regulate the driver training industry effectively and efficiently.
- Review and develop the way in which driving and riding instructors are trained and assessed.

With the above in mind, I developed a set of key points I hoped to find out about whilst in the US:

What elements does the driving test comprise? Is there a theory and hazard perception element?

- How the driving test is conducted, specifically if there is an element of this which involves the candidate driving independently by following a series of directions or road signs.
- How do the relevant Government organisations interact with learner drivers, i.e. are there guides available online?
- All aspects of graduated licensing (in particular the impact of the safe Teen and Novice Driver uniform Protection Act (STANDUP) which I understand in the US Senate in March 2011) and any statistics available on this as well as any feedback obtained from age groups affected by this such as via social media.
- Research carried out and resulting statistics on new drivers- particularly 17-24 year olds.
- Driving instructors:
  - qualifying process to become approved in order to teach people to drive
  - The requirement for registration and their relationship with the Government organisations responsible for driver training and testing.
  - Where registration and interaction between driving instructors and Government organisations are required, are online services available? If so, what is the take-up for this?

This also links with my current role within the DSA which is to manage a team of six administrative officers and assistants who are responsible for the administration of the register for approved driving instructors. This includes carrying out checks to ensure each applicant has obtained a criminal records bureau check and meets the basic criteria to become a driving instructor (details of which are available on the DSA website).

## My journey

I clocked up around 4,500 miles and visited 13 States during my eight weeks in the US, mainly travelling by bus and train, a great way to see the country and meet interesting people. Please use the following link to see a map of my travels: [http://www.travellerspoint.com/member\\_map.cfm?user=sarahinUSA](http://www.travellerspoint.com/member_map.cfm?user=sarahinUSA)

I spent 19 nights in family homes through Servas, an organisation which links voluntary hosts with travellers with similar interests, meeting some really nice people who made me feel so welcome in their homes, around 20 nights in hostels and 11 in hotels. Please look at my blog: <http://www.travellerspoint.com/users/sarahinUSA/> which has detailed accounts of my experiences in each place I visited.



Left: Me with Richelle and her son Theo, my Servas hosts in Hebron/ Hartford, Connecticut. One of Servas hosts in Rochester, NY State Steve and me at Niagara Falls

## Findings

In order to start my research, I firstly had to find out who dealt with regulating the driver training and testing process in each State. I was aware from my research whilst preparing my application for the scholarship that each had very different ways in which they approached this so I started by making contacts within the federal departments based in Washington DC. My main aim was to establish contacts in the state office of at least one state in the regions on my itinerary, namely the North East, North, mid-West, South and West.

My first appointment was to meet with Kara Macek, Communications Manager at the Governors Highway Safety Association (GHSA), based in Washington DC. Kara explained that the GHSA is a national, non-profit organisation, meaning it does not pay federal taxes. Their primary role is to support their members, state Highway Officers (HOs) and allocate Federal Government funding to each of the 56 members (states and territories) in order for them to carry out programmes and campaigns on essential driving behavioral related topics, what's known as 'booze, belts and speed'.

I also found out that the States sub allocate funds to what is known as HVE-High Visibility Enforcement, which enables local authorities to enforce safety issues, such as speed, which Kara explained tends to be a difficult behaviour to address as it can be so common by demonstrating that the HOS can and will take action on anyone caught speeding.

The GHSA contributes to new driving related bills, such as the STANDUP Act by making submissions on their proposals to Congress. They communicate regularly with their members by email, newsletters, online and by submitting surveys.

I also met with Richard Compton, Jim Wright, Linda Cosgrove and Phillip Gulak at the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), part of the US Department of Transportation. The team gave me a good overview of the work of the NHTSA, which is to issue guidance to the state administrations in coordination with AAMVA. Richard and his colleagues did explain, however, that the states are not obliged to take this on board as each has their own laws relating to road safety. However, certain laws each state is required to enforce are incentivised by extra federal funding being granted in order for programmes to be delivered and, in rare cases; this can be withdrawn in order to ensure a state will comply with introducing an important law.

During my visit to Washington DC, I met with staff members from the International issues-Transport Policy at the British Embassy who explained that although Congress pass laws on transport issues, such as the STANDUP Act, each state is not obliged to comply with this. However, any initiatives raised by Federal Government in Washington DC will be recommended to each state and, as an incentive for these to be implemented, particularly important campaigns such as drink driving, seat belt use and speed limits, funds are allocated to each state's Highway Office (Hos).

Through my prior contact with the Embassy, I was able to establish a link with Jordan Baugh, a congressional staff member within Senator Gillibrand's office, the Senator responsible for raising the STANDUP Act in March 2011, an act which attempted to introduce a national standard in terms of the approach to graduated licensing. There, Jordan explained a bit about the Act, its key points and the progress of this so far.

My final meeting in Washington DC was with Michael Calvin, Senior Advisor for Strategic Initiatives at the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA), a body which issues advice to states on how to handle road safety, particularly in relation to young drivers.

Based on my findings so far, I set about arranging meetings with contacts in the various state offices to find out more about their work.

My first visit throughout the states as part of the regions I had selected to look at was to the New York state Department of Motor Vehicles [www.dmv.ny.gov](http://www.dmv.ny.gov) based in the state capital of Albany. I met with Chuck Deweese, Assistant Commissioner and his colleagues at the Governor's Traffic Safety Committee, based within the DMV.

Of the many aspects of driver training/ testing described to me at the DMV, one that stood out the most was the parental involvement expected in a teenager's journey through the driver education and testing process. I was shown a 'contact' between the parent and their offspring starting to learn to drive which outlined agreements on important points such as seat belt use, passengers in the car (some worrying statistics had been published on accidents which had occurred when teenage drivers had their peers as passengers at the time) and the graduated licensing law. Both parties were required to actually sign this, and in the parent doing so, they were confirming their permission for their child to become a learner driver. A comprehensive guide was also published to help advise parents on how to help keep their teenagers safe whilst driving.

I was also very interested in the fact that the on-road driving test in New York State typically lasted just 15 minutes! When making comparisons with our test in the UK, lasting forty minutes, Chuck and his colleagues pointed out that that due to the sheer volume of demand for test-examiners would often conduct around 28-30 per day, compared with seven or eight in the UK, it was not viable to make it longer, much as they would like to!

Other key points from Albany on the process for learning to drive in New York State:

- A learning to drive permit can be applied for by people at age 16 and above. To get this, they must go to their local DMV office with valid ID and be accompanied by their parents who are required to give their permission for their child to apply for the permit.
- In order to obtain a permit, the person must firstly take a theory test comprising 20 questions on various subjects such as road signs.
- The first permit is valid for six months. During that time, the holder is authorised to drive with their parents or an ADI. They must have 50 hours of practice, with 15 of those being during hours of darkness.
- As part of the graduated driving licence (GDL) law passed in 2003, parents and teenagers must sign a contract (see above for details, a copy of this has kindly been provided for reference) on how the learner will conduct themselves whilst driving.
- There are around 100 examiners in the state with 22 state offices, 12 testing units and 150 road test sites. Each site manages its own area-bookings etc.
- Examiners mark the test using a hand held device which sends information automatically to the office so licence can be issued if candidate is successful. Devices have reduced costs.
- The road test comprises two main elements- interaction with traffic and vehicle control and right of way and lane selection. The test lasts around 15 minutes. This is based on AAMVA guidelines set out in the 1960s.
- Examiners conduct around 28-30 tests per day.
- In order to obtain a permit, the person must firstly take a theory test comprising 20 questions on various subjects such as road signs.
- Once schools have been in operation for five years or more, they are authorised to train ADIs.
- The DMV don't set curriculum for driver training, apart from the pre-driving course.
- There are 660 driving schools in New York State. Around 100 of those are authorised to self-certify.

## **Michigan**

Telephone conference with Kirk Ferris, Director of the Driver Programs Division in the Department of State (where all driver training and licensing programs are located). Kirk oversees the driver education programme including the approval of driver education providers and instructors.

- Road test conducted by third party companies.
- Tests for each category follow the same format, except the tractor test takes almost an hour to complete and the motorcycle test is not done on-road.
- The test comprises the examination of basic control skills in a car park, three exercises-forward stop, reversing into parking space/garage (marked out with cones for the test) and a blind side/parallel park.

- If a candidate successfully completes the above three elements, they can proceed to the on road test where they will have to demonstrate their ability to drive in multiple lanes and on expressways.
- Due to the nature of the roads within the state, pupils may have to travel for around an hour to be tested in a location where it is possible to demonstrate the above skills.
- The on road test takes around 30 minutes.
- Third parties sign a contract with the department on how they will conduct tests. They send scoring sheets each month and these are monitored by staff at the Department for discrepancies. If these are found, they are discussed with the company. This is also the case if the company does not fulfill their contracted obligation.
- The Department carries out covert monitoring of the companies' testing activities.
- To become certified as a driving instructor, an individual must prove they have a good driving record, have held a driving licence for at least five years and complete the instructor preparation programme at a university or through a certified company.
- Driving instructors must renew their registration every two years by submitting fingerprints and a criminal records bureau certificate.

## **Missouri**

Meeting with driving test supervising examiner at testing office, part of the Missouri Department of Revenue in Kansas City.

- Under the Missouri GDL law, (I have been provided with an explanatory booklet but the main points are as follows) an instruction permit can be applied for at the age of 15 and is valid for 12 months. This allows the learner driver to drive when accompanied in the front seat by a qualified driver, such as a parent or grandparent or a qualified driving instructor.
- From the age of 16 to 18, an intermediate licence can be applied for. This is valid for two years and allows the holder to drive unaccompanied, provided they abide by the restrictions of the licence, which include not driving alone between the times of one and 5am, except to and from a school activity, job or for an emergency.
- At age 18, teenage learner drivers can apply for the under 21 full driver licence which is valid for three years. This is granted only if the learner has satisfied the requirements for the intermediate licence.

### **Driving test**

- The driver examination consists of four elements:
  - A written test on traffic laws and rules for safe driving
  - A vision test
  - A road sign test

-A driving skills test

- During the test, candidates are required to demonstrate their ability to start and stop the vehicle, park parallel to the curb, reverse, make at least two right and two left turns, park on a hill, enter and leave intersections and understand and obey traffic signs and signals.
- The grade will be determined by how many points the examiner has deducted for any driving errors made. If this totals more than 30 points, the result will be a failure.
- Around 50 per cent of candidates throughout the state fail the driving test on their first attempt.
- If a person fails the test three times, no further attempts will be allowed without written permission from the Department of Revenue.

## **Nevada**

Meeting with Manny Locsin, an Investigator within the Nevada DMV Compliance Enforcement Division

- Potential driving instructors must complete a 40 hour course which can be done either in the classroom or online.
- There are no actual colleges that run driving instructor courses in Nevada so people tend to train in neighbouring states such as Arizona and California.
- The DMV are working towards a standard course for instructors.
- A workshop is held around once a year for driving instructors in order to refresh their skills and update the on any new teaching initiatives and changes in laws which may affect them.
- Private driving schools can train commercial driver but examiners administer the test.
- The driving test lasts around 20 minutes.
- Driving examiners are required to retrain every three to four years.
- Website-DMV NV.gov.
- Potential driving instructors must have held their driving licence for at least five years and be over the age of 21.
- They are required to submit fingerprints as part of their identity check as well as have a criminal records bureau certificate issued. The cost of this is covered by the FBI.

### **Reference materials provided from each visit**

AAMVA, Washington DC:

- Booklet detailing evaluation of Driver education, written by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation.
- Supplementary Driver Training for New Drivers booklet
- 'Move' magazine, produced by AAMVA for Motor Vehicle & Law Enforcement Officials

- AAMVA's 'Roadmap', a summary of the organisation's key purposes and objectives
- A summary of online basic driver education programmes available throughout the US
- Details of a contact from the American Driver and Traffic Safety Education Association for follow up questions on driver education. Details of a contact in Arizona so follow up can be carried out for information on that State.
- The US Motor Vehicle Reference Book, a national guide to State driver and vehicle licensing regulations
- Various documents detailing statistics on driver safety throughout the US

#### **New York State DMV**

- The parent's guide to teen driving
- Resource guide for teen driving

#### **Missouri**

- Department of Revenue driver guide-details of driver licensing law and the driving test
- A guide to Missouri's graduated driver license law

#### **Conclusion**

Since returning from my trip, I have been busy working with management at the DSA to find ways of sharing the above information with my colleagues. An article has also been published on the Department for Transport's intranet site and on the Civil Service Local website. I hope that this can help open up channels of sharing information with departments within the US who are involved with driver safety, particularly in light of the recent announcement by the Transport Secretary to consider proposals around restrictions for new drivers. I have in depth material on this subject as part of my research on graduated licensing in the States I visited.

I am also hoping features on my trip along with those of my fellow 2012 scholars will be published in local press.

On a personal note, I feel the trip has opened up a whole new world for me, I believe in the saying travel broadens the mind and completely agree with Franklin D Roosevelt's quote: "The more you circulate on your own travels, the better citizen you become, not only of your own country but of the World as a whole".

I would like to say a big thank you to everyone who's given support and helped me enjoy and get the most out of this trip, too many to name individually but these include all my family and friends, Servas hosts, business contacts (in particular Kara who helped me make so many useful connections within the State Offices), my management at DSA, Heather, 2010 Scholar for all the advice and reassurance and of course the Trustees for giving me the opportunity to have this fantastic experience.



Just some of my many personal highlights, at the Grand Canyon with new friend Michelle from Australia and in Las Vegas with Jake from Chicago. Far right-the Dwight D Eisenhower Executive Office Building in Washington DC

Thank you.

Sarah Edwards

26<sup>th</sup> November 2012