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Washington State Graduated Driver Licensing (GDL) Program
Attitude and Behavior Survey Results

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14. ABSTRACT Future policy changes to Washington's Graduated Drivers Licensing (GDL) Program should focus on the ultimate goals of: 1) Increasing the number of young people who go through driver training/education prior to getting their license; and 2) Increasing the number of young people who get licensed under a GDL program, so they can gain independent driving experience while gradually being exposed to more risky driving conditions. To help inform these policy changes, a statewide survey of young individuals ages 16-24 was conducted during the spring of 2020. This report summarizes those survey results and highlights significant and relevant findings.					
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Washington Traffic Safety Commission & Washington State Department of Licensing

Graduated Drivers Licensing (GDL) Program Attitude & Behavior Survey Results

Background

The Washington Traffic Safety Commission (WTSC) and Washington State Department of Licensing (DOL) are preparing for future policy changes to Washington's Graduated Drivers Licensing (GDL) Program, with the ultimate goals of: 1) Increasing the number of young people who go through driver training/education prior to getting their license; and 2) Increasing the number of young people who get licensed under a GDL program, so they can gain independent driving experience while gradually being exposed to more risky driving conditions. To help inform these policy changes, DOL and WTSC conducted a statewide survey of young individuals. The survey was designed, fielded and analyzed by communications consultant C+C. The primary purpose of the survey was to determine why young people are waiting until they are 18 or older to get their driver's license and what barriers they may have to going through the GDL program or getting a license.

A study of 18–20-year-olds, conducted across the U.S. by AAA in 2012, indicated that 17% of the respondents did not have a driver's license or learner's permit at the time of the study. The results also indicated that the following groups tended to have a **higher incidence** of 18–20-year-olds without a driver's license or learner's permit:

- Those who live in cities
- Those who have a household income of less than \$40,000
- Hispanic and African American individuals

The AAA study also studied reasons for the delay in licensure. Among the reasons cited for delay, the WTSC noted that:

- 19% said they delayed so they did not have to take driver education
- 28% said they delayed because they were required to complete a driver education course first

The DOL and WTSC survey was modeled in part after this AAA survey to explore specifically the timing and rationale for delay of licensure with young people in Washington State. The results will be used to:

- Benchmark current attitudes and behaviors regarding the delay of licensure in WA
- Identify potential program changes, offerings or policies that can mitigate the root causes of delays in licensure that ultimately result in fewer licensed drivers on the road who do not have formal driving training/education
- Provide rationale for policy/program changes to key decision makers

Research Objectives

The overall research objective was to collect data that enables DOL and WTSC to tailor policies to the needs of young drivers. To meet this overall objective this study provides:

- Benchmarks of the current rate of licensure delay and the reasons for the delays

- An understanding of the differences / similarities in the above benchmarks based on demographics: ethnic identity, geography (rural, urban, suburban) and gender
- The level of interest in potential types of policy/program changes, such as subsidies for driver training or online training courses
- An understanding of how the interest in these potential policy/program changes varies based on demographics and geography.
- An understanding of how potential new restrictions may impact delay in licensure

Target Audience

The overall target audience was 16–24-year-old residents of Washington. It explored two sub-populations:

- 16–17-year-olds
- 18–24-year-olds

Methodology

This was a quantitative survey deployed to 1,050 individuals across Washington State by C+C using the Ask Your Target Market (AYTM) platform.

- To ensure a strong sample of Hispanic/Latino/Latinx individuals, the survey had a recruitment quota of at least 100 youth.
- To ensure an adequate number of 16-17 year old individuals, the survey had a quota of 150 youth.

As shown in the respondent demographics section, we exceeded both of these quotas.

In addition, in order to analyze results by geography, we collected respondent zip codes and categorized them into either urban, suburban or rural based on the information collected from [this website](#).

Approach to Analytics

Many of the survey's questions ask respondents to use a 7-point Likert scale to indicate the relative importance of factors associated with the decision to delay licensure until 18+ years-old. For example, it asks respondents how important the required driver's education classes were in their decision to delay licensure on a 7-point Likert scale from "not at all important" to "extremely important." The top three responses were: moderately important, very important and extremely important.

When analyzing results, we combined the top three responses (moderately, very and completely important) of the 7-point Likert scale for each of the eight reasons. We then used this metric to identify significant differences in the importance of reasons across the eight reasons they might delay their licensure.

We also tested for significant differences in demographics (geography, ethnicity and gender) among research participants who selected a response within the top three choices on the 7-point Likert scale. For example, we analyzed the population of people who indicated that the required driver's education classes were moderately, very or extremely important in their decision to delay licensure until 18+ years-old to determine if that had significant differences in the demographics.

We used a 90% confidence level when measuring statistically significant differences.

Respondent Demographics

Geography		
A1: Urban	851	81.0%
A2: Suburban	92	8.8%
A3: Rural	106	10.1%
	1050	100.00%

Ethnic Identity		
A1: American Indian or Alaska Native	23	2.2%
A2: African-American or Black	95	9.0%
A3: Hispanic, Latino, Latina, or Latinx	131	12.5%
A4: Asian	99	9.4%
A5: Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	18	1.7%
A6: White	558	53.1%
A7: Two or more ethnicities	93	8.9%
A8: Other	33	3.1%
	1050	100.00%

Gender		
A1: Male	503	47.9%
A2: Female	519	49.4%
A3: Non-binary	23	2.2%
A4: Other	5	0.5%
	1050	100.00%

Age		
16 - 17	248	23.6%
18 - 24	802	76.4%

Household Size		
A1: It's just me	158	15.0%
A2: 2	152	14.5%
A3: 3 - 4	439	41.8%
A4: 5 or more	301	28.7%
	1050	100.00%

Executive Summary of Key Findings

Who waits to get their license?

More people who are not yet licensed are waiting until they are at least 18 years old to get their license

- Of licensed respondents (N=621), 27% (N=169) waited until 18+ to get it
- Of those who do not yet have a license (N=442), 62% (N=274) intend to wait until 18+ to get it
 - Anecdotal comments attribute some of that to COVID-19

There are significant differences in demographics between those who wait or intend to wait to get their license until 18+ years-old and those who don't

- Those who identify as a person of color are more likely to wait than those who identify as white
- Men are significantly more likely to wait or intend to wait than women

Those who wait or intend to wait identify with the following characteristics significantly more than those who don't:

- More Spontaneous vs. Organized
- More Short-term planner vs. Long term planner
- More Learn by watching vs. Learn by doing
- More Insecure vs. Confident
- More Free time vs. Scheduled activities
- More Old school vs. Modern
- More Artistic vs. Scientific

Why Do People Wait to Get Their License?

Of the eight reasons provided to respondents, 91% (N=403) of respondents selected at least one of them as moderately, very or extremely important in their decision to delay licensure until 18+ years-old.

Within this population, four of the eight reasons (below) were identified significantly more often as moderately, very or extremely important in the decision to delay. And three of the four reasons are directly related to financial barriers:

- (Classes) Required driver's education classes (53% N=213)
- (Expenses) Expenses associated with being a licensed driver (53% N=213)
- (Auto Access) Don't have access to a vehicle (50% N=201)
- (Driving Hours) No one available to do practice driving with them (48% N=193)

Key Findings: Required Driver's Education Classes

For those who selected "Required Driver's Education Classes" as moderately, very or extremely important in the decision to delay, the expense of the class was significantly more important than the other six reasons included in the study (N=213)

- Hispanic youth were more likely than white youth to select "classes are too expensive" as a reason that required driver's education classes was moderately, very or extremely important.

There is interest in programs that would make the required driver's education classes more affordable and accessible among respondents who indicated that "required driver's education classes" were moderately, very or extremely important in their decision to delay:

When asked about their interest in **financial aid** (where qualified):

- 72% (N=152) were moderately, very or extremely interested in financial aid (38% extremely)
- There were no significant differences in the demographics (gender, ethnic identity and geography)

When asked about their interest in **online classes**:

- 67% (N=140) were moderately, very or extremely interested in online classes (41% extremely)
- There were no significant differences in the demographics (gender, ethnic identity and geography)

Key Findings: Practice Driving Hours

There were no significant differences in demographics for people who indicated that "No one was available to do practice driving with them" as moderately, very or extremely important reason in the decision to delay. (N=193)

- However, those who plan to get their license at 18+ years-old were more likely than people who had obtained their license at 18+ years-old to indicate practice driving hours were an important reason for delay

There is interest in programs that would make mentors available for practice driving hours among respondents who indicated that "no one is available to do practice driving with them" as a moderately, very or extremely important reason to delay

- 65% (N= 110) were somewhat likely, very likely or definitely would take advantage of a mentor driver program (23% definitely)
- There were no significant differences in the demographics (gender, ethnic identity and geography)

Key Findings: Expenses Associated with Being a Licensed Driver

There were two significant differences in those who selected "Expenses associated with being licensed driver" as moderately, very or extremely important in the decision to delay. (N=213)

- Hispanic youth (H) were significantly more likely than Asian youth (AS) to delay because of expenses
- Those who intend to get their license at 18+ years-old are significantly more likely than those who got their license at 18+ years-old to indicate expenses as a reason for delay

For those who selected "Expenses associated with being a licensed driver" as moderately, very or extremely important in the decision to delay, the two expenses below were more important than the other four expenses included in the study.

- Insurance
- Cost to purchase a vehicle and/or monthly car payments

There are significant differences in those who identify insurance as moderately, very or extremely important in the decision to delay.

- Urban dwellers (U) are significantly more likely than Suburban dwellers (S)
- Female (F) are significantly more likely than Male (M)
- Hispanic youth (H) and Asian youth (AS) are significantly more likely than White youth (W)
- Asian youth (AS) are significantly more likely than African American youth (AA)

There are significant differences in those who identify insurance as moderately, very or extremely important in the decision to delay

- Urban dwellers (U) are significantly more likely than Suburban dwellers (S)

Key Findings: Don't Have Access to a Vehicle

There are no significant differences in demographics of people who selected that they do not have access to an automobile as an important reason in the decision to delay licensure until 18+. (N=201)

- However, people who intend to get their license at 18+ years-old were more likely than those who got their license at 18+ years-old to indicate that access to an automobile is an important reason in the decision to delay getting a license

Key Findings: Potential New Restrictions

80% (N=354) of people who don't yet have a license indicated that at least one of the six potential new restrictions would be somewhat, very or completely likely to deter from licensure until they were 18+ years-old.

Within this population, four of the six new restrictions (below) were identified significantly more often as somewhat, very or completely likely to cause a delay in licensure until 18+

- Current restrictions would apply to all new drivers, not just 16 – 17 years-old drivers
- Increase the number of supervised driving practice hours from 50 to 80
- Restricting new drivers to have no non-family member teen passengers for the first six months; and then no more than 1 non-family teen passenger for the next 6 months
- Require a log book of practice hours that is signed by a parent / guardian to be submitted when applying for a driver's license

Within some of the potential new restrictions there were significant differences in the demographics:

- Suburban dwellers (S) were significantly more likely than rural dwellers (R) to indicate that **“Current restrictions would apply to all new drivers, not just 16–17 years-old drivers”** is somewhat, very or extremely likely to deter them from licensure until 18+
- Females (F) were significantly more likely than males (M) to indicate **“Increase the learner's permit holding period from 6 months to 1 year”** is somewhat, very or extremely likely to deter them from licensure until 18+ years-old
- Hispanic (H) were significantly more likely than African American (AA), Asian (AS), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (NHOPI) and White (W) to indicate **“Require a log book of practice hours that is signed by a parent / guardian to be submitted when applying for a driver's license”** is somewhat, very or extremely likely to deter them from licensure until 18+

Among those who don't have a license, and intend to get it at age 16 or 17 (N=44):

- 75% (N=33) indicated that **“increasing the minimum age for a learner’s permit from 15 to 16”** is somewhat, very or extremely likely to deter them from licensure until 18+
- 59% (N=26) indicated that **“increasing the minimum age for a driver’s license from 16 to 17”** is somewhat, very or extremely likely to deter them from licensure until 18+

The sample size is too small to determine any significant differences between these two restrictions.

Detailed Findings

Licensure Statistics

Licensure status

- 58% (603) of the respondents had already obtained their license
- 15% (152) have a learner's permit
- 24% (249) don't have a permit or license
- 4% (46) had a permit or license that was suspended/revoked or expired
 - N=28 had a permit that was suspended/revoked or expired
 - N=18 had a license that was suspended/revoked or expired

Those who waited or intend to wait to get their license until they are 18+

42% (N=442) of all respondents either waited or intend to wait until they are 18+ to get a license

- 62% (N=273) were those who do not yet have a license
- 38% (N=169) were those who do have a license

Demographics of those who intend to wait/ waited to get their license until 18+ years-old

- Males (M) are significantly more likely than Females (F)
- African American (AA), Hispanic (H), American Indian / Alaskan Native (AIAN) are significantly more likely than White (W)
- African American (AA) and Hispanic (H) significantly more likely than Asian (AS)

Identity characteristics of those who intend to wait/ waited to get their license until 18+

- More Spontaneous vs. Organized
- More Short-term planner vs. Long term planner
- More Learn by watching vs. Learn by doing
- More Insecure vs. Confident
- More Free time vs. Scheduled activities
- More Old school vs. Modern
- More Artistic vs. Scientific

Breakdown of **Reasons** People Delay Getting Their License Until 18+ y/o

Reasons for waiting until 18	% Moderate, Very, or Extremely Important		
	L18+	P18+	TOTAL
N=403 – of the 442 people (91%) who selected at least one reason as at least moderately important			
(Expenses) Expenses associated with being a licensed driver	18	35	53
(Restrictions) Restrictions placed on 16–17 y/o	12	21	33
(Priority) Not a priority	17	25	42
(Parents) Parents/guardians won't allow	11	19	30
(Failed) Failed the test	12	19	29
(Classes) Required driver's education classes	20	33	53
(Auto Access) Don't have access to a vehicle	17	33	50
(Drive Hours) No one available to practice driving with	15	32	48

*More significant than all other reasons at the 90% confidence level

* More significant than reasons in black at the 90% confidence level

L18+ is the number of people who have their driver's license but did not get it until 18+ years old

P18+ is the number of people who do not yet have their driver's license and plan to wait until 18+ years old to get it

Significant differences in the sample population associated with **EXPENSES** as a moderate, very or extremely important reason for delay

- Hispanics (H) were more likely than Asians (AS) to delay due to expenses

Significant differences in the sample population associated with **RESTRICTIONS** as a moderate, very or extremely important reason for delay

- Suburban (S) and Rural (R) more likely than Urban (U)
- Males (M) more likely than Females (F)
- African American (AA) and Hispanic (H) more likely than White (W)

Significant differences in the sample population associated with **PRIORITY** as a moderate, very or extremely important reason for delay

- Suburban (S) more likely than Rural (R) and Urban (U)

Significant differences in the sample population associated with **PARENTS** as a moderate, very or extremely important reason for delay

- Suburban (S) and Rural (R) more likely than Urban (U)
- Hispanic (H) more likely than White(W)

No significant differences in the sample population associated with **FAILED** as a moderate, very or extremely important reason for delay

- Suburban (S) and Rural (R) more likely than Urban (U)

No significant differences in the sample population associated with **CLASSES** as a moderate, very or extremely important reason for delay

No significant differences in the sample population associated with **AUTO ACCESS** as a moderate, very or extremely important reason for delay

No significant differences in the sample population associated with **DRIVE HOURS** as a moderate, very or extremely important reason for delay

Breakdown of the **Types of Expenses** that Contribute to **Expenses** as a Reason for Delay

Expenses associated with being a licensed driver	% Moderate, Very, or Extremely Important
N=214 – of the 403 people (53%) selected expenses as at least a moderately important reason	TOTAL
Gas	72
(Maintenance) Car maintenance, like oil changes	62
Insurance	82
Car repairs	66
(Admin Costs) Cost of license, registration, fees and/or taxes	66
(Purchase) Cost to purchase a vehicle and/or monthly car payments	83

*More significant than all other reasons at the 90% confidence level

Significant differences in the sample population associated with **TYPES OF EXPENSES** as a moderate, very, or extremely important reason for delay

Identify **gas** as a type of expense

- African American (AA) and Hispanic (H) were more likely than White (W)

Identify **car maintenance** as a type of expense

- Hispanic (H) and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (NHOP) were more likely than White (W)

Identify **insurance** as a type of expense

- Urban (U) more likely than Suburban (S)
- Female (F) more likely than Male (M)
- Hispanic (H) and Asian (AS) were more likely than White (W)
- Asian (AS) more likely than African American (AA)

Identify **car repairs** as a type of expense

- Hispanic (H) were more likely than White (W)

Identify **admin costs** as a type of expense

- Females (F) were more likely than Males (M)
- American Indian or Alaskan Native (AIAA) and African Americans (AA) were more likely than White (W)

Identify **purchase** as a type of expense

- Urban (U) more likely than Suburban (S)

Breakdown of the **Types of Restrictions** that Contribute to **Restrictions** as a Reason for Delay

Restrictions placed on 16/17 y/o	% Moderate, Very, or Extremely Important
N=131 – of the 403 people (33%) selected the restrictions as at least moderately important	TOTAL
(Nighttime) The nighttime driving restrictions that keep you from driving between 1 am and 5 am for the first 12 months unless you are with a driver at least 25 years of age seated next to you.	75
(Cell Phones) You cannot use a cell phone or any other communication device while driving, including hands free devices unless you are calling an emergency service.	71
(Passengers) You cannot have a non-family member passenger under 20 years old during the first 6 months of driving; and then no more than 3 non-family member passengers under 20 years old for the next six months.	66

Note: no significant differences at the 90% confidence level

Significant differences in the sample population associated with **TYPES OF RESTRICTIONS** as a moderate, very, or extremely important reason for delay

Identify Cell Phones as a restriction

- Suburban (S) more likely than Urban (U)
- Hispanic (H) more likely than White (W)

Identify Passengers as a restriction

- Asians (AS) more likely than White (W)

Breakdown of the **Reasons** that Contribute to **Not a Priority** as a Reason for Delay

Not a priority	% Moderate, Very, or Extremely Important
N=170 – of the 403 people (42%) selected it just wasn't a priority for me as a top reason	TOTAL
(Other transportation) I could get where I wanted to go by other means, like public transportation, walking or biking	59
(Ride with others) There was usually someone who could drive me where I wanted to go	74
(Connected) I could stay connected with friends in other ways, such as social media	36
(Nervous) I was too nervous about driving	56
(Risky) I didn't want to risk getting into a crash	50
(Time Commitment) It was too much of a time commitment	42

*More significant than all other reasons at the 90% confidence level

Significant differences in the sample population associated with **REASONS FOR PRIORITY** as a moderate, very, or extremely important reason for delay

Identify **other transportation** as a reason

- Hispanic (H) more likely than African American (AA) and White (W)
- White (W) more likely than American Indian / Alaskan Native (AIAN)

Identify **connected** as a reason

- Suburban (S) more likely than Urban (U)

Identify **risky** as a reason

- Urban (U) more likely than Rural (R)
- African American (AA) more likely than White (W)

Identify **time commitment** as a reason

- Hispanic (H) more likely than White (W)

Breakdown of the **Reasons** that Contribute to **Classes** as a Reason for Delay

Reasons driver's education class was at least moderately important in the decision to delay	% Moderate, Very, or Extremely Important
N=210 – of the 403 people (53%) who selected classes as at least a moderately important reason	TOTAL
(Expense) They were too expensive	62
(Locations) The locations were too far away	41
(Times) They happened at times I was unavailable to attend	54
(Transportation) I didn't have a way to get to them	39
(Dislike) I didn't like going to class	36
(Fear of Failing) I was afraid I'd fail	43
(Busy) My schedule was too busy to attend a class	44

*More significant than all other reasons at the 90% confidence level

Significant differences in the sample population associated with **REASONS FOR CLASSES** as a moderate, very, or extremely important reason for delay

Identify **expense** as a reason

- Hispanic (H) more likely than White (W)

Identify **locations** as a reason

- Hispanic (H) more likely than White (W)

Identify **times** as a reason

- Female (F) more likely than Male (M)
- African American (AA) and Hispanic (H) more than White (W)

Identify **dislike** as a reason

- Male (M) more likely than Female (F)
- Hispanic (H) more likely than White (W)

Identify **busy** as a reason

- Hispanic (H) more likely than White (W)

Response to Potential Programs

Of those who indicated the drivers' education classes were moderately, very, or extremely important in their decision to delay:

When asked about their interest in financial aid (where qualified):

- 73% were moderately, very or extremely interested in financial aid (38% extremely)
- No differences in demographics

When asked about their interest in online classes:

- 67% were moderately, very or extremely interested in online classes (41% extremely)
- No differences in demographics

Of those who indicated that having no one available to do practice driving hours with them was moderately, very or extremely important in their decision to delay:

- 65% were somewhat likely, very likely or definitely would take advantage of a mentor driver program (23% definitely)
- No differences in demographics

Breakdown of New Restrictions that Might Deter People from Getting Their License Until 18+ Years Old if One of the New Restrictions was Put Into Place

New Restrictions	% Moderate, Very, or Extremely Important
N=354 – of the 442 people (80%) who do not have a license, 354 selected at least one of the restrictions as somewhat likely to cause delay in licensure	TOTAL
(Restrict All) Current restrictions would apply to all new drivers, not just 16 – 17 years-old drivers	58
(Inc LP Length) Increase the learner's permit holding period from 6 months to 1 year	48
(Inc Drive Hours) Increase the number of supervised driving practice hours from 50 to 80	56
(Expand Night Restrict) Expand the nighttime driving restrictions to start at 10 pm instead of 1 am (until 5 am in both cases)	48
(Passengers) Restricting new drivers to have no non-family member teen passengers for the first six months; and then no more than 1 non-family teen passenger for the next 6 months	51
(Log Book) Require a log book of practice hours that is signed by a parent / guardian to be submitted when applying for a driver's license	53

*More significant than all other reasons at the 90% confidence level

There was no significant difference in how important the various potential new restrictions are as a deterrent. However:

- Suburban dwellers (S) were significantly more likely than rural dwellers (R) to indicate **Restrict All** as a somewhat, very, or completely likely deterrent
- Females (F) were significantly more likely than males (M) to indicate **Inc LP Length** as a somewhat, very, or completely likely deterrent
- Hispanic (H) were significantly more likely than African American (AA), Asian (AS), Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander (NHOPI) and White (W) to indicate **Log Book** as a somewhat, very, or completely likely deterrent

Breakdown of Increased Age Restrictions that Might Deter People from Getting Their License Until 18+ Years Old

	% Moderate, Very, or Extremely Important
N=44 – of the 110 people (40%) who do not yet have a license, and plan to get their license at 16–17, rated at least one of the two increased minimum ages as at least somewhat likely to deter them from getting a license until 18+	TOTAL
Increase the minimum age for a learner's permit from 15 to 16	75
Increase the minimum age for a driver's license from 16 to 17	59

Note: No significant differences at the 90% confidence level

The sample size was too small to detect if there were any differences in increasing the age limits on permits and licenses.