



Getting people out of 1- and 2- star cars

Many New Zealand vehicles have low star safety ratings. How can we help Kiwis get into safer cars?

Over the past 30 years, road safety has greatly improved in New Zealand and other developed countries. As the rules for new and imported used vehicles become stricter, our vehicle fleet will continue to get safer.

This study directly supports the New Zealand Government's Road to Zero action plan, which aims to reduce our number of serious crashes. What measures could reduce the demand for cars that have a safety rating of only 1 or 2 stars?

To answer this question, the researchers:

- conducted a literature review
- surveyed current car owners and potential car purchasers
- interviewed car dealers and representatives of motor vehicle trade/importer associations.

The researchers looked at:

- used car safety ratings (UCSRs) - these come from real-world crash data
- new car assessment programme (NCAP) ratings from laboratory tests of the crashworthiness of new vehicles, and information on vehicle crash avoidance features.

They found our national vehicle fleet's older age means UCSRs are more important here than in countries with a higher fleet turnover. These ratings are more aligned with the Safe System approach of Waka Kotahi.

Overall, the researchers found that the factors considered most important when choosing a vehicle were price, the vehicle's purpose, and then safety. Buyers of used cars valued safety less than buyers of new cars.

Results of the surveys

The car owner's survey was completed by a random selection of people from the Waka Kotahi Motor Vehicle Register who:

- owned a car with 1 or 2 stars (Group 1 = 12,364 respondents)
- owned a car with 3 to 5 stars (Group 2 = 1,387 respondents).

A third group of 1,020 potential car purchasers were recruited through a market research company.

The surveys found that:

- Group 1 was more likely than Group 2 to be young, female and earning less than \$50,000 per year.
- When choosing a vehicle, the highest-ranking factor across all three groups was price (this was consistent with the literature review findings).
- Group 1 was less likely than Group 2 to prioritise vehicle safety ratings or features when choosing a vehicle, and were less likely to trust vehicle safety ratings.
- Group 1 vehicle purchasers were most influenced by friends and family, and 86% didn't know their vehicle's true star safety rating.
- Of those in Group 1 who did understand their vehicle's star safety rating, 95% intended to buy a safer vehicle next time. They were also likely to be influenced by vehicle safety facts and to scrap their car, rather than sell it on, when they next upgraded.

Interviews with industry

Six phone interviews were conducted with car dealers and representatives of motor vehicle trade/importer associations. These interviewees:

- didn't believe safety was a big factor in customers' vehicle-purchasing decisions, nor in their own decisions about vehicles they were buying to sell on

- were all aware of safety ratings, but didn't see them as essential to vehicle safety and had different views on their usefulness
- mentioned their own lack of trust in the star safety rating system and customers lacking understanding of the safety ratings
- felt the safety of our light vehicle fleet would improve naturally through more new cars entering the fleet (rather than trying to remove 1- and 2-star cars from it).

Awareness, education and trustworthy information

Overall, this research found that it's important to:

- increase public awareness of a vehicle's star safety rating at the purchase point (to increase the demand for safer cars)
- educate owners of cars with 1 or 2 stars at appropriate points such as getting a warrant of fitness and vehicle registration
- direct vehicle buyers to reputable, up-to-date information, and encourage their informal advisors (friends and family) to do the same.

Recommendations

The researchers made the following recommendations for Waka Kotahi.

Improving the current Waka Kotahi star safety rating system

1. Give consistent, evidence-based messages: explain the need for ratings and make sure people understand why a vehicle's rating can decline over time.
2. Ensure that a vehicle's star rating doesn't increase over time. Instead of giving one prematurely, delay until its rating is confirmed.
3. Avoid making large changes in a vehicle's star rating when switching from NCAP ratings to the UCSR system.
4. Capture any variances in vehicle ratings (eg large changes) before they're added to the Rightcar website, which gives safety ratings for various vehicle makes and models (www.rightcar.govt.nz).
5. Consider adjusting historical Australasian NCAP ratings to estimate vehicles' scores under the updated system.
6. Provide more education to dealers on using the Rightcar website.

Shifting people out of vehicles that are less safe

1. Give car owners information on their vehicle's current safety rating at vehicle registration, Warrant of Fitness and servicing times.
2. Run campaigns encouraging people to check their car's current safety rating – it might not be what they think it is.
3. Run interventions to shift car purchasers' preferred information sources away from informal ones (eg family and friends) and towards factual ones (eg Rightcar website).
4. Emphasise crash avoidance and protection features that purchasers should search for, through awareness campaigns (eg TV, radio, social media) and at point of purchase.
5. On the Rightcar website, highlight and explain priority safety features when these are listed for a particular model.
6. On the Rightcar website, provide information on the crash avoidance and crash protection features of older vehicles.
7. Promote using public transport where possible, as it is safer.
8. Monitor and detect any move towards increased motorcycle use due to car safety campaigns, and promptly make appropriate changes to advertising if this occurs.
9. Give information about Japan's NCAP ratings through the Rightcar website, so that an owner of an imported used car can learn about their car's level of safety.
10. Target interventions towards those who are more likely to be driving a less safe car (ie females under age 30 whose household income is less than \$50,000).
11. Consider an incentive scheme to help shift people into safer cars.



RR 705: *Getting people out of 1- and 2- star cars*, Waka Kotahi NZ Transport Agency research report. Available at www.nzta.govt.nz/resources/research/reports/705