

**Straits Times, 9 Jul 2019, From the Gallery: A larger stick to tackle dangerous driving behaviour**  
(<https://www.straitstimes.com/politics/a-larger-stick-to-tackle-dangerous-driving-behaviour>)

In January 2013, a motorcyclist in her 30s was knocked down by a car making a right turn from Lentor Avenue onto Yio Chu Kang Road, even though the traffic lights were in her favour.

She was killed in the accident. Grief-stricken, her mother fell ill and died soon after. The errant driver was subsequently fined \$8,000 and had his driving licence suspended for five years.

Ms Lee Bee Wah (Nee Soon GRC) cited this incident during the debate on the Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill to show how penalties for dangerous driving were "simply disproportionate" to the impact such acts can have. She was among 12 MPs who spoke in support of the Bill, which will raise the maximum jail terms and fines for dangerous driving, among other changes to the law.

Mr Christopher de Souza (Holland-Bukit Timah GRC) recounted how a delivery driver failed to keep a proper lookout on the expressway and hit the car ahead of him. A five-year-old boy sitting in the back of the car was hospitalised for more than 100 days and ended up being permanently paralysed on the right side of his body. Mr de Souza shared this case to highlight the importance of driving responsibly, and how failing to do so can have severe consequences.

As MPs and Second Home Affairs Minister Josephine Teo noted, the Bill is timely and will hopefully encourage safer driving practices through deterrence. Those who commit dangerous or careless driving offences while under the influence of drugs or alcohol will get even heavier punishments.

She cited a motorist who drove his car at high speeds on the Central Expressway in 2013. He killed four people and was given the maximum five years in jail. "The court could not mete out higher penalties, even though he had knowingly consumed drugs before driving and was a recalcitrant offender," she said.

With changes passed yesterday, the maximum jail term for causing death by dangerous driving while under the influence will be raised to 10 years, compared with eight for causing death by dangerous driving. The heavier penalties come on the back of a 17.3 per cent rise in drink-driving accidents, from 150 cases in 2017 to 176 last year.

Mr Melvin Yong (Tanjong Pagar GRC) suggested taking a leaf from the book of countries such as Australia and America, and mandating the installation of devices that require convicted drink-drivers to take a breathalyser test before being allowed to start their vehicles.

Ms Joan Pereira (Tanjong Pagar GRC) called for other preventive measures to minimise the likelihood of drivers committing offences in the first place. She said the traffic light system at all junctions should be changed so that motorists making a right turn have to wait for a green arrow to do so - a call Mr Yong echoed.

In April last year, the Land Transport Authority (LTA) announced it would eliminate discretionary right turns at the vast majority of Singapore's 1,600 junctions.

Calling for the LTA to shorten its timeline for doing away with junctions that allow discretionary right turns, Nominated MP Lim Sun Sun recounted how a bus hit her on June 13 when she crossed a junction

near the Singapore University of Technology and Design. She was thrown on her back and hit her head on the road, but escaped largely unscathed.

"Clearly, such junctions that allow cars and people to cross simultaneously present distinct hazards," she said.

But stiffer penalties and various traffic schemes are ultimately not enough to make the roads safer. Citing a recent nationwide Traffic Police study, Mrs Teo noted it found road users tend to prioritise their own needs, and feel that the onus is on others to make the road safer: "We have some way to go before the culture of responsible and gracious road use takes root among Singaporeans."

The Government is also looking at stiffer punishments for errant drone use, Senior Minister of State for Transport Lam Pin Min told MPs who asked about drone intrusions over two nights at Changi Airport that led to 55 flight delays and eight diversions.

While Dr Lam said the impact was moderate, such intrusions pose a safety hazard to flights and could cause severe disruption to airport operations.

Just as punishments will be raised to deter irresponsible driving, it is necessary to signal to errant drone users - like the yet-unknown culprits behind the Changi incursions - that rash actions will draw severe penalties.