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AA calls for action to curb road toll

The Government should adopt new policies on road safety to cut the growing number of deaths and injuries in traffic accidents, Hongkong Automobile Association executive direc-

tor Phil Taylor said yesterday.

If it fails to act positively, he said, casualty figures on the roads could be around 10,000 by 1990.

Mr Taylor, addressing a lunch meeting of the Lions Club of Victoria, noted that 6,782 people were killed or seriously injured on the roads last year.

"If we measure Hongkong's record of deaths on the road per 1,000 licensed vehicles and compare it with other countries we find that Hongkong is twice as bad as Singapore and Malaysia, five times as bad as Britain and eight times as bad as Japan," he said.

He called for a Governor's Committee to be set up to formulate a programme of road safety measures and provide the funds to ensure they are implemented.

"Road safety requires action — it is not a matter to be left to an advisory committee — which by its very nature can do nothing but give advice or rubber stamp civil service recommendations," he said.

With a Governor's Committee, he said, Hongkong could look forward in the next decade to a 50 per cent reduction in death on the roads and a proportionate reduction in the amount of human misery that goes with it.

At present, the road safety programme is developed by the Standing Conference on Road Safety which is chaired by the Deputy Commissioner of Police.

"But either it is not allowed or is not capable of making policy," Mr Taylor said.

"Having had a working acquaintance with the conference for the past four years I can state that it has made no contribution whatsoever to developing an overall road safety policy.

"Attempts to get a Road Safety Strategy Paper moving have taken over a year and have been successfully thwarted by the Secretariat Environment Branch.

"This internal bickering and game playing within Government should not be allowed to continue," he said.

In Japan, two traffic safety programmes were implemented in 1971 and 1975 and a third is under way.

The programmes were carried out by the Central Traffic Safety Measures Conference, the chairman of which is the Japanese Prime Minister.

Although the number of vehicles in Japan has increas-

ed by 260 per cent during the past 10 years, the number of deaths last year was only 50 per cent of the 1970 figure.

"If a very busy Japanese Prime Minister can find time to chair a safety conference, so can the Governor of Hongkong, and until he does and gives the matter positive direction nothing worthwhile will happen," Mr Taylor said.

In his opinion, a Governor's Committee should cover several main areas: road traffic environment, traffic safety education, safer driving, vehicle safety and prevention of accidents.

Speaking on road traffic environment — the setting up of pedestrian bridges, tunnels, traffic signals, road signs and pavement markings — Mr Taylor said that Hongkong does most of these things but usually in a half-hearted and ineffectual way.

This meant that the provision of facilities is constantly lagging behind the need for them or where they have been provided they are flagrantly misused.

"Our traffic signs, signals and road markings are a veritable jungle of difficult to read information for our drivers and this is undoubtedly contributing to the general tendency to ignore them altogether," he said.

On road safety education, he said Hongkong's activities do not get down to local community level.

There are only a handful of police officers who lecture at schools and there are the school safety patrols which, after many years, only exist in half the schools.

On driving tuition, Mr Taylor said there are 2,500 instructors locally.

They have only once been tested once — when they received their permit.

After a nine-month waiting period for a test 90 per cent fail and have to retake all or part of the test again.

On average they take two years to get a licence.

"The standard of the test is as low as it can possibly be without making it quite meaningless," he said.