**Minimum Age of Driving Independence**

This data collection and cleaning project seeks to provide a panel dataset covering the 50 United States and the District of Columbia from 1967 to 2017 that answers the following: “What is the minimum age at which a person not experiencing hardship can drive alone during most hours of the day, with a reasonable training requirement?” This number is meant to capture the age at which most people can begin driving independently (unsupervised) if they have taken a driver education class.

Data come from a number of sources, but the key components of are:

* Federal Highway Administration. “Driver License Administration Requirements and Fees.” Year 1967, 1972, 1980, 1982, 1984, 1986, 1988, 1994, 1996.
* Insurance Institute of Highway Safety. Spreadsheet covering graduated driver licensing law adoption in the United States since 1995 (1990).

I also draw from a variety of other sources, see sources files. Some are state specific.

**Usage Notes**

In general fields are only populated if their value is known with relative certainty. Note that:

* For time variables, years are always reported, while month and day are only reported if known.
* When using the data file to create a balanced, longitudinal database, unknown month and day can be treated as 1/1 for years 1967 and 2017. The panel covers 1/1/1967 to 1/1/2017.
* For certain age variables, it is difficult to create a series. These values are omitted.

See codebook file for more details.

**Data Notes**

**General**

The FHWA documentation style change after 1967, leading to some inconsistencies in the 1967 and 1972 and later reporting. The most significant aspects are: (1) the 1967 table reports whether or not parental affidavits are required while 1972 and alter do not, and (2) 1972 and later tables report whether or not driver education is required to receive a license before the age of 18 while the 1967 table does so only spottily.

Driver Education requirements are not consistently reported for intermediate driver licensing in the IIHS dataset, and therefore are uncertain after 1996. Generally, I code them as continuing whatever was in place during 1994 or 1996, but this may misclassify states that have change these requirements.

FHWA minimum ages may in some cases reflect partial years, instead rounding or using a floor function. I have provided alternatives where I believe they may appropriate.

**State Specific**

**Colorado**

Differences in license type at age 18 and 21 that seem to change over time, but don’t impact functional driving allowances.

**Connecticut**

Places particular insurance requirements on under 18 drivers, license provisional until 21.

**District of Columbia**

Under age 18 cannot operate motor vehicle for compensation. There is a 2 passenger under the age of 21 limit for drivers between 17 and 18.

**Georgia**

At some point between 1988 and 1994, Georgia began requiring an Alcohol and Drug Awareness Program for a Class C license. As this is not driver’s ed, I exclude it from consideration.

**Hawaii**

IIHS and FHWA sources conflict for 1995-7, as to whether intermediate stage license minimum age is 15 or 15 and 3 months. Likely, IIHS interpreted the 90 day learner permit term as a minimum holding length in order to qualify for an intermediate stage license. Leaving at 15. Also, unsure about parental signature requirement post 2006.

**Idaho**

Confusing history that is not well documented. Several questions are unanswered:

* Were there nighttime restrictions on under 16 driving before 1972? When did it take effect?
* Were nighttime restrictions back in effect in the 1991 change? (Seems like it)
* Was driver’s ed required for young drivers post 1972?

**Illinois**

Unsure about driver education requirements prior to 1980.

**Louisiana**

Assumed 1968 curfew law passed at same time as drivers ed requirements

**Maine**

Cannot find date minimum driver age changed from 15 to 16, likely 1994.

**Maryland**

Intermediate (junior) stage seems to drop from 16 to 15-9 mo between 1967 and 1972, then revert to 16 between 1984 and 1986. Cannot find additional documentation.

**Michigan**

IIHS document conflicts about when the 2010/2011 law (or laws) was passed.

**Minnesota**

Cannot verify pre-1980 changes in driver licensing requirements, nor find precise dates.

**Nevada**

IIHS gives 15 yr 9 mo in 1990s and earlier as minimum driving age, but this is not reflected in FHWA. Williams et al (2016) suggest this is due differences in the minimum intermediate stage age and the minimum learn permit minimum age plus minimum learn permit mandatory holding period. But it seems to me that the minimum intermediate stage age would still be binding.

**New Hampshire**

IIHS has unchecked references to nighttime restrictions in late 90s and early 00s. NH is excluded from federal evaluation of GDL because it changed its laws twice since 1996. Supports IIHS.

**New York**

Nighttime driving restrictions enforced until age 17 with driver ed, until 18 without driver ed before GDPL adoptions in 00s. Difference rules generally for NYC and Nassau County, including no 16 year old drivers.

**North Dakota**

Minimum age 14 (15) years old for intermediate license by parent request before (after) 2012. Seems similar to hardship license with restricted privileges. Potential recode?

**Pennsylvania**

Minimum intermediate stage is currently 16 yr 6 mo (after 6 mo of mandatory learner permit time), and minimum age for nighttime and passenger restriction recension is 17 yr 0 mo, but this seems to also require a year of driving. May or may not conflict.

**South Carolina**

Generally unsure about what precisely 1998 law changed.

**South Dakota**

License awarded to 14 yo restricted to daytime driving, but otherwise seems full privilege. Potential recode.

**Virginia**

Appears to have raised minimum age to obtain license without driver’s education from 18 to 19 between the year 1986 and 1988.

**Washington**

Driver’s ed likely required for under 18 licensure between 1967 and 1972.