



**A Safer Way:**  
Consultation on Making  
Britain's Roads the  
Safest in the World

April 2009

## **Executive Summary**



The Department for Transport wants your views on how to make our roads the safest in the world. Join the debate at:  
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*Department for*  
**Transport**

1. The consultation seeks views on the vision, targets and measures for improving road safety in Great Britain for the period beyond 2010.
2. We have made good progress in reducing road casualties over the last decade. In 2007, the number of people killed or seriously injured on British roads had dropped by 36% from the average of 1994-98 and we are on course to meet our target of a 40% reduction by 2010.
3. However, nearly 3000 people still die on the roads each year, and there remains a great deal to do to improve road safety further. The consultation document includes proposed targets for reductions in deaths and serious injuries to be achieved by 2020.
4. The consultation covers the following areas:
  - The context
  - Our vision for the future
  - Our approach to road safety
  - The road network
  - Safer vehicles
  - Road user behaviour
  - Targets and ensuring success

### **Background and context**

5. The Department for Transport's publication *Towards a Sustainable Transport System* in 2007 and consultation *Delivering a Sustainable Transport System* in 2008 established 5 key goals: health, safety and security, supporting economic growth, tackling climate change, quality of life & the natural environment and equality of opportunity. The proposed road safety strategy has been developed within this context.
6. The strategy needs, therefore, to consider any potential impacts on all of these goals. This means we need to be sure that our approach does not, for example, have a detrimental effect on greenhouse gas emissions, or lead to disproportionate economic impacts, and has a positive impact on public health.
7. A thorough review of the evidence underpins the proposals in this strategy. We have been particularly keen to understand where collisions happen, who is involved (age, gender, socio-economic group), what they are doing and why, which types of vehicle are involved and what the consequences are.

## The challenges

8. This analysis of the evidence has led us to identify the following key challenges for the new strategy:
- **reducing the number of road deaths**, which have fallen at a slower rate than serious injuries;
  - **pedestrian and cyclist casualties in our towns and cities** – particularly in deprived communities;
  - **protecting children**, particularly in deprived areas, and **young people**, who are greatly over-represented in the casualty statistics;
  - **protecting motorcyclists**, who represent 20% of road fatalities but just 1% of traffic;
  - **safety on rural roads**: 62% of all road fatalities in 2007 occurred on rural roads, which carry only 42% of traffic;
  - **variations** in safety from area to area and road to road;
  - **poor road user behaviour** amongst a minority, where drink-driving and failure to wear a seatbelt remain a problem;
  - **illegal and inappropriate speed**: excessive speed was recorded as a contributory factor in 26% of road fatalities in 2007.

## A vision for the future

9. Wider factors, notably the environmental, economic and social context, will influence what we will be able to achieve over the period of the strategy. The further ahead we look, the harder it is to predict the impact of these factors. It is however likely that we will be living in a more carbon-constrained world, but with a continued increase in demand for travel over the longer term.
10. We propose to set targets over a 10 year time period, long enough for changes to make an impact, but not so far that the impact of external factors is too hard to predict. However, many changes, particularly in areas such as vehicle technology or road design, may not begin to significantly affect casualty outcomes for a number of years. We are therefore proposing that the period of the strategy should be 20 years, to encourage longer-term steps.
11. We feel that a vision for road safety will be an important factor in enabling a diverse range of road safety stakeholders to work effectively together. We feel that any vision should be credible, challenging and engaging for all concerned. We are proposing a long-term vision of **'Making Britain's roads the safest in the world'**.

## Delivering our goal - the overall approach

12. We have recently consulted on a package of possible changes to road safety enforcement, including improvements to the enforcement of speed and drink and drug drive laws. The results of this consultation will be reflected in our final strategy.

13. Beyond this, and after two successful road safety strategies, we believe that we now have a legal and regulatory framework that is broadly fit for purpose for delivering improved road safety. A first key focus of this strategy is on improving the delivery of road safety, through better use of data, more systematic information sharing, better evaluation, supporting skills development and new arrangements for national reporting and scrutiny.
14. A second key focus is on dealing with certain dangerous road user behaviours, which persist despite generally good levels of compliance with road traffic law. We aim to work smartly to understand the motivations behind the most dangerous road user behaviours, and the characteristics of the individuals undertaking them.
15. We want to work with our delivery partners to deliver a safe, holistic road safety system where road design, vehicles and education work in combination to minimise the risk to road users. We recognise that human beings make mistakes, and the holistic system needs to reduce the chances of mistakes on the roads having serious or fatal consequences.

## **Strengthening the weak links in our road network**

### *Rural roads*

16. On the whole, the British road network is relatively safe by international standards. Nevertheless, there are considerable variations of the levels of safety on different parts of the network. Of particular concern are rural roads; over 60% of all deaths occur on rural roads but they account for just over 40% of traffic.
17. Many of these roads are single carriageways where the national speed limit applies (60 mph). We know that speed is a factor in many of the fatalities, but compliance with the speed limit on these roads is good. The high casualty figures suggest therefore that speed limits are not at the appropriate level on some of these roads.
18. The characteristics of single carriageway roads vary greatly and can offer very different levels of safety. Some are well engineered; others are not suitable for high speed limits. For this reason it is important to get the right speed limit for each road.
19. However, our research has shown that reducing speed limits on the most dangerous of these roads could save a great number of lives. Highway Authorities are currently responsible for reviewing speeds on these roads and we believe that this remains the right mechanism for delivering change. Progress with reviews has however been patchy and renewed efforts are needed to bring everywhere up to the standard of the best.

20. We propose to tackle this problem by revising our existing guidance to highway authorities, recommending that lower limits are adopted where risks are relatively high and there is evidence that a lower limit would reduce casualties. To support the review process we will – with the Road Safety Foundation - provide clear comparative information on the safety performance of rural 'A' roads.

#### *Pedestrians in urban areas*

21. Pedestrian and cyclist deaths are, unsurprisingly, concentrated in urban areas. Engineering measures (e.g. crossings, traffic calming) can reduce pedestrian casualties, but too many pedestrians are hit by vehicles in residential streets at speeds causing serious injury or death.

22. In order to improve safety on the streets where people live, we are proposing to amend our guidance on speed limits, recommending that highway authorities, over time, introduce 20 mph zones or limits into streets which are primarily residential in nature, or other areas where pedestrian and cyclist movements are high (for example around schools or markets) and which are not part of any major through route.

#### **Supporting the choice of the safer vehicle**

23. Improvements in vehicle safety, particularly in the protection they offer in the event of an accident, have played a crucial role in delivering the casualty reductions we have seen over the last decade. Vehicle manufacturers have also implemented innovative technologies that help people drive or ride more safely and avoid collisions.

24. To achieve further improvements in vehicle safety, we need to understand the main issues and prioritise our work. Our research programme provides these insights and we will look to extend and improve our evidence base both to analyse the effectiveness of existing measures and to target areas where technology can deliver improvements. We aim to do this through exploring trialling or piloting new systems and working in international circles to obtain the best available data. We will put a particular emphasis on the development of advanced crash avoidance systems, which we think will become more important over the period of the strategy.

#### *Delivery*

25. Regulations for vehicles are set at a European and increasingly global level. This can be a lengthy process, but it is appropriate in certain circumstances. We will continue to promote regulatory solutions where this brings the greatest benefit in a timely manner.

26. However, with technology developing at an ever faster rate, regulation is not always the most effective method of effecting change. Over the last decade we have seen an increasing role for independent consumer testing programmes which can play an important complementary role to regulation in improving market penetration of safety technology. We will continue to support market-based measures, and explore ways to develop new opportunities in areas such as providing better consumer information and raising awareness among the motoring public.

### **Responsible and irresponsible road use**

27. We aim to support responsible road use and to tackle irresponsible behaviour.

#### *Supporting responsible road use*

28. Following the *Learning to Drive* consultation, we will take forward a programme of measures that will strengthen the way that people learn to drive and are tested, and create a culture of continued and lifelong learning.

29. We will continue to raise awareness and improve road user behaviour through the award winning *THINK!* campaign. The campaign has previously addressed specific dangerous behaviours, including speeding and drink-driving. As well as continuing this approach, we will also consider a future campaign based on a wider theme of road user responsibility, to challenge complacency about road safety and encourage people to make positive safety choices.

30. We are also developing a suite of road safety educational materials for everyone from toddlers to young adults and we will promote these materials to schools. As many parties are involved in delivering road safety education, we will encourage local authorities to ensure work is co-ordinated to form a high-quality whole.

#### *Tackling irresponsible road use*

31. We aim to reduce further the prevalence of behaviours that, whilst seen to be unacceptable by the vast majority, persist in causing death and serious injury; notably drink-driving, failure to wear a seatbelt, and careless or dangerous driving. We also believe that drug driving presents a significant danger. We consulted on a package of measures to address these issues in our recent road safety compliance consultation. The responses are now being considered and will be reflected in our final strategy.

32. Excessive speed also remains an issue. We need to improve compliance with limits if we are to improve our casualty record.

33. We estimate that uninsured and untraced drivers kill 160 people and injure 23,000 every year. Working with the police, we will therefore continue to vigorously pursue our programme of seizure of untaxed and uninsured vehicles and of the vehicles of unlicensed drivers.

## **Measuring and ensuring success**

### *Targets*

34. We believe that our key national target should be to reduce deaths, since we have been less successful in reducing deaths than serious injuries over the last decade. At the local level, as road deaths are much rarer occurrences, it is more reliable to address the combined number of deaths and serious injuries. We will monitor local progress against this benchmark.

35. We are therefore proposing the following targets:

- to reduce road deaths by at least 33% by 2020 compared to the baseline of the 2004-08 average number of road deaths;
- to reduce the annual total of serious injuries on our roads by 2020 by at least 33% compared to the baseline.

36. We also consider it important to maintain our progress on child road safety and to tackle the pressing problem of young people's safety, and therefore propose a more challenging target for children and young people:

- to reduce the annual total of road deaths and serious injuries to children and young people (aged 0-17) by at least 50% against a baseline of the 2004-08 average by 2020

37. To improve health, the environment and congestion, we are keen to encourage more walking and cycling. We wish to reduce the risk to the individual walker or cyclist, and to take into account expected growth in activity; we are therefore proposing a target based on the *rate* of casualties:

- to reduce by at least 50% by 2020 the rate of KSI per km travelled by pedestrians and cyclists, compared with the 2004-08 average.

### *Performance indicators*

38. We also intend to maintain further performance information. We will publish annually a set of key indicators of progress on road safety, showing a range of measures of casualties, behaviours and trends. A full list of these indicators is at Annex A.

### *Ensuring delivery*

39. We will appoint an independent expert panel to advise us on road safety trends and policy. We will also draw up a new integrated national road safety delivery plan, and ask the Road Safety Delivery Board to manage its delivery.
40. We will also submit to Parliament an annual report about road safety in Great Britain. This will assess progress against our targets and the national indicator set.