

Beyond 2010: The Challenges Ahead: A PACTS Perspective

On March 1st 2000 the Department for Transport published the road safety strategy 'Tomorrow's Roads - Safer for Everyone'. As the decade anniversary approaches, and we await the new strategy for beyond 2010, it is important to look at the accomplishments road safety has made in the last 10 years and at the challenges facing us now and in the future.

'Tomorrow's Roads - Safer for Everyone' called for a 40 per cent reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured in road accidents, a 50 per cent reduction in the number of children killed or seriously injured and a 10 per cent reduction in the slight casualty rate against the 1994/98 baseline.¹ By the end of 2008 these targets had already been achieved with Great Britain seeing a 40 per cent reduction in the number of people reported killed or seriously injured in collisions, a 59 per cent reduction in children reported killed and seriously injured and a 36 per cent reduction in the reported slight casualty rate despite a rise in traffic levels of 16 per cent.² It is vital that these significant reductions are championed and learnt from over the next decade and that credit is given to road safety professionals who have played a significant role in realizing them. The combination of progress within the fields of vehicle design, road engineering and road user behaviour should be joined-up and built on as we work towards the next round of targets.

In 2008, the Transport Select Committee published 'Ending the Scandal of Complacency: Road Safety Beyond 2010'³ which highlighted some of the divergences and areas for concern within the larger context of what is generally good progress towards casualty reduction targets.

PACTS has spent some time looking into a number of the issues which continue to withstand current approaches to road safety in the UK.

It is true that road safety has continued to improve over the last (15???) quarters, however, in 2008, 2,538 people died on British roads, a number which doesn't begin to illustrate the magnitude of people who suffer as a result of those deaths. Furthermore, although 230,905 injuries as a result of conflicts on the road were reported to the police last year, the Department for Transport (DfT) estimates that the actual number may be closer to 800,000 when cross-checked against other data sources such as Hospital Episode Statistics and Self-Reported Injury Accidents in the National Travel Survey. It is important that better data-linkage and more efficient means to record collision and injury details will bring these two numbers closer.

For young people, the picture and the outlook are mixed. Between 2006-2007, there was a substantial drop in the numbers of killed and seriously injured (KSI) young drivers and passengers of young drivers over the Blood Alcohol (BAC) Limit - an important step for a figure which has tended to stagnate over the last 5 years. Despite a fall in the number of deaths in collisions involving young drivers of 22 per cent in 2008, the 16-25 age group remains a high-risk road user type: more than 41 per cent of male driver deaths of this age were in collisions where excessive or inappropriate speed was a factor. It is essential

¹ <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/roadsafety/strategytargetsperformance/tomorrowsroadsaferforeveryo4865>

² <http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/accidents/casualtiesgbar/rrcgb2008>

³ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200708/cmselect/cmtran/460/460.pdf>

that young, particularly male, drivers be given specific attention over the next 10 years. PACTS would like to see 'young drivers' placed within the DfT's list of key challenges for the next strategy.⁴

It is evident that the use of targets has supported the drive to cut child KSI over the last ten years. However, the DfT definition of a child (0-16) falls just short of protecting those most at risk. In 2008 the highest numbers of reported KSI across all modes were seen among 17-18 year olds and it is clear that a more targeted approach should be extended. PACTS would like to see the DfT move in line with the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda which works to promote the well-being of children and young people from birth to age 19 - This extension would include a significant group of drivers and pre-drivers. It would be equally encouraging to see a targeted approach extended within the 20 -24 age group which is extremely overrepresented in crash statistics.

Not only an issue for young drivers; speed continues to be a factor in 27 per cent of male and 19 per cent of female casualties. Enforcement, engineering and education should be used together to maximize reduction in excessive and inappropriate speed across the board. It is important that government expands the scope for industry to make ISA available for voluntary use, funding local authorities to enable the provision of accurate speed limit data across the country.

Alcohol continues to feature heavily in collisions. In 2007, 17 per cent of road deaths were linked to drink-driving. A firm decision to lower the current BAC from 80mg to 50mg per 100 mg of blood should be taken quickly.

Motorcycle traffic increased from the 1994-98 average baseline until 2003. Since 2003, the growth has been fairly volatile, with the 2008 traffic figure being at a similar level to the 2006 figure, 33 per cent greater than the 1994-98 average baseline. Motorcycle deaths were 8 per cent lower than in 2007 but saw a 6 per cent rise against the 1994/98 baseline. 65 per cent of those deaths occurred in rural areas and 70 per cent were on motorcycles which were bigger than 500cc. It is important that we monitor the effects on safety of the new motorcycle riding test using a rate-based figure to account for the unpredictable economic climate.

It is important that road safety be aware of the changing contextual setting and acknowledge wider policy issues. With local and national government placing a strong focus on counteracting the growth in obesity and the emissions of carbon and other fossil fuels, it is likely that more active transport and lower carbon vehicles will be encouraged. A focus on accurate data collection will play an important role in monitoring rate-based safety of active travel modes and in understanding the effect of perceptions on those who currently are deterred from walking and cycling. The push to encourage lower carbon vehicles should be accompanied by a general insistence that manufacturers to meet pedestrian and occupant protection requirements. PACTS would like to see government encourage a greater safety focus in general for the rapidly developing vehicle design industry. An ageing population will have implications on road safety which should be treated before they become an issue.

In Beyond 2010, PACTS called for the next stage of road casualty reduction to be based on a more holistic approach towards the ultimate achievement of risk on the roads not being more than twice that experienced elsewhere in everyday life.⁵ The challenge ahead is to ensure that within the next ten years, GB delivers the safest roads in the world, by at least ten per cent, for all classes of road user. It is vital that we look to and work with our European colleagues to encourage the transfer of knowledge and good practice as we move into a more systematic approach to road safety over the next ten years.

⁴ <http://pacts.org.uk/docs/pdf-bank/SaferWay%20Response.pdf>

⁵ PACTS (2007) Crawford E. 'Beyond 2010 – a holistic approach to road safety in Great Britain'