

PACTS Parliamentary Briefing: Next Steps for Road Safety

Prepared for a Lords Debate on Road Safety introduced by Baroness Scott, 17 December 2003

Introduction

Major progress to make roads safer and to reduce the number of people killed and injured on the roads has been made in recent years. Despite increases in traffic, Killed or Serious Injuries have been reduced by 17% over the 1994-98 average^[i], and the UK now has some of the safest roads in Europe.

However, there is still much that must be done. Nearly 3,500 people are killed and over 35,000 people are seriously injured on the roads every year^[ii]. This occurs at a cost to society of over £16,000 million^[iii]. In particular, the UK's record at preventing child pedestrian death and injury is poor compared to similar European countries: every year, nearly 80 children die and more than 2,700 are seriously injured while walking^[iv].

In *Tomorrow's Roads: Safer for Everyone*, the Government has set a target of a 40% reduction in KSI and 50% in child pedestrian casualties by 2010, compared to the 1994-98 average^[v]. While progress has been made, further efforts will be required in order to meet these targets. *This document outlines PACTS' viewpoint on the next steps for road safety, and highlights in particular key areas where improvement can be achieved.*

Speed Management

Speed management is central to road safety. Speed is the biggest single contributory factor in road crashes, and *a strategic speed management policy that reduced the speed of the fastest drivers would have the biggest effect in reducing road casualties*^[vi]. Detailed analyses on road traffic speed and speed management are contained in [PACTS Parliamentary Briefing on Road Traffic Speed](#) (March 2003) and [PACTS Policy Paper Speeding: The Continuing Challenge](#) (January 2002). Areas of particular interest for PACTS are speed cameras and enforcement, 20mph zones, speed management hierarchies and intelligent speed adaptation.

Speed cameras

The safety camera hypothecation scheme, introduced in 2001, has proven to be extremely successful: a two-year trial of the scheme showed average reductions in KSI at camera sites of 35%. Despite this, there has been significant criticism of speed cameras in some sections of the media (see PACTS Research Briefing: ['Speed Cameras: 10 Criticisms and Why they are flawed'](#) [December 2003] for an evidence-based refutation of some of these claims). *Greater education of the public about the need for cameras and why they are sited where they are is needed.*

At PACTS' 14th Westminster Lecture, chair of the Commission for Integrated Transport David Begg called for *an extension of the hypothecation scheme, so that all revenues raised by speed cameras get reinvested in road safety and in traffic policing in particular*. This call has also been repeated by motoring organisations such as the RAC Foundation.

20mph zones

20mph zones have been shown to be remarkably effective ways of reducing road deaths and injuries in urban areas, and may also have positive impacts in improving the quality of urban environments. A [recent study by the Health Development Agency](#) found that the expansion of 20mph zones could prevent 13,000 child pedestrian deaths and injuries – equivalent to two thirds of the total. Currently, introducing 20 mph zones is the responsibility of Local Authorities. Even though the cost-benefit ratios of creating 20mph zones has shown to be extremely favourable, however, many councils lack the funding or skilled staff to make these zones more widespread. *Leadership and support from central Government on this area would be desirable.*

Child pedestrian casualties five times more likely to occur to children from disadvantaged areas than to those from better-off areas. In this context, it is clear that road risk forms one element of multiple disadvantage. However, traffic-calming measures are not always targeted towards the most vulnerable. DfT's Dealing with Disadvantage pilot project attempts to deal with . *PACTS would like to see such targeted projects continued and expanded across other areas.* For further information, read PACTS Parliamentary Briefing on [Dealing with Disadvantage](#) (October 2003).

Speed management hierarchy

The concept of an urban hierarchy of roads was raised in the Government's road safety strategy, Tomorrow's Roads - safer for everyone (DETR, 2000). In the chapter on safer speeds, reference was made to the current limit of 30mph remaining the norm in urban areas accompanied by wider use of 20mph zones and speed limits in residential areas. In addition, "it would be intended in the longer term to develop an urban hierarchy of roads to provide clearer guidance in this area, in a similar manner to that proposed for rural roads" (paragraph 6.29). A revised version of Circular 1/93 (which advises on speed limits) is expected to be published by DfT by spring 2004, nearly four years after *Tomorrow's Roads: Safer for Everyone* was first published. A rural speed management demonstration project has also been long awaited. *PACTS believes that both urban and rural speed limit hierarchies need to be set by type of road, level of risk and desired function and usage, not 85th percentile speeds, and new guidance on both urban and rural speed management hierarchies should be issued.* For more information on the need for urban speed hierarchies, read [PACTS Parliamentary Briefing on Urban Road Hierarchy](#) (June 2003).

Intelligent Speed Adaptation

Intelligent Speed Adaptation (ISA) is an advanced system of in-vehicle speed limitation that can advise or require drivers not to exceed the speed limit. It is currently undergoing road trials in Leeds and in a number of sites across Europe. Initial best-fit estimates indicate a possible casualty saving of over 30% (and a possible reduction in fatalities of over 50%) if ISA was fitted in at least 60% of vehicle fleet. In order to support the development and implementation of ISA, the Government should develop a national digital road map of speed limits and also encourage the automotive industry to support voluntary fitment. For more information see the [PACTS Research Briefing on Intelligent Speed Adaptation](#) (December 2001).

Drink driving

After two decades of sharp reductions in road crashes involving drink driving, the number of casualties involving someone driving above the legal alcohol level has remained fairly constant (at around 550 deaths per year) over the past decade. *Increased enforcement could have a*

major effect in reducing drink driving casualties, as increasing the likelihood of being breathalysed can reduce offending levels substantially (see [PACTS Parliamentary Briefing on Random Breath Testing](#) [June 2003]). Legislation to allow evidential roadside breath testing (first promised in *Tomorrow's Roads: Safer for Everyone*) should be brought forward. PACTS also supports the lowering of the legal alcohol limit from .80 to .50, in line with much of the rest of Europe. More information on Drink Driving can be found in [PACTS Research Briefing on Drink Driving](#) (March 2003).

Enforcement

Effective traffic enforcement is a key element of road safety is essential to deal with both speed and drink driving. However, the number of dedicated traffic police has fallen sharply, as has the number of successful prosecutions for offences such as dangerous driving. *In order to counter this, road traffic enforcement should be made a 'key priority' in the National Policing Plan. In addition, the police indicators listed in the plan should include greater emphasis on road traffic policing. A new evaluation of traffic policing by Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary is also needed.* PACTS published a major research report on enforcement - [Road Traffic Law and Enforcement: A driving force for casualty reduction](#) - in July 1999.

Best Value

In January 2003 PACTS published a major research report - *Best Value, Local Transport Plans and Road Safety: Listening to and Learning From the Profession* - which identified a number of improvements that could be made to the system of Local Transport Plans and Best Value. In particular, best practice and experience of successful road safety initiatives need better dissemination. Both a [summary of the research report](#) and the [full report](#) are available on the PACTS website.

Work-related Road Safety

Nearly a third of all serious and fatal traffic accidents involve someone who was at work at the time. Integrated workplace safety cultures that include work-related road safety would have a major impact on reducing death and injury on the roads and at work. Despite this, however, HSC's recent consultation on 'A Strategy for Workplace Health and Safety to 2010 and beyond' contained no reference to driving at work or work-related road safety. *PACTS believe that stronger action by the HSE and the Government is required in this field.* For more information, read [PACTS' response](#) to the HSC consultation.

Conclusion

While PACTS welcomes the progress towards the 2010 targets for road safety, a longer-term question remains of why so many casualties continue to be tolerated on the roads. The current level of risk on the roads would not be accepted in any other mode. PACTS therefore supports the 'British Road Safety Vision' put forward by Professor Richard Allsop of UCL at the 14th PACTS Westminster Lecture:

That the risk of death or serious injury while using the roads should be no greater than the average risk while engaging in other typical everyday activities.

The long-term aim would be to make travelling by road no more dangerous than travelling by rail or any other mode.

Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety

12 December 2003

contact: mail@pacts.org.uk

[i] National Statistics/DfT. 2003. *Road Casualties Great Britain 2002: Annual Report*. TSO: London.

[ii] National Statistics/DfT. 2003. *op cit*.

[iii] Data for 2000, in 2000 prices. DTLR. 2001. *Highways Economic Note No. 1 (2000): Valuation of the Benefits of Prevention of Road Accidents and Casualties*. DTLR: London.

[iv] National Statistics/DfT. *Op cit*.

[v] DETR. 2000a. *Tomorrow's Roads: Safer For Everyone*. DETR: London.

[vi] DETR. 2000b. *New Directions in Speed Management: A review of policy*. DETR: London.