

Road Safety Statement 2019 – Comment by PACTS

19th July 2019

PACTS welcomes publication by the Government of its refreshed road safety policy and action plan, *The British Road Safety Statement 2019. A Lifetime of Road Safety*.¹ In this exceptionally difficult and unstable period in British politics, it is a sign that road safety is still seen as an important issue. A lot of work went into the Statement by the former road safety minister Jesse Norman and DfT staff and it is reassuring that the new minister Michael Ellis is also backing it. This Statement focuses on actions for the next two years and accepts that it does not cover the full range of issues.

PACTS particularly welcomes the endorsement of the *Safe System* approach, the new emphasis on improving data quality (e.g. CRASH) and on in-depth collision investigation to improve learning and provide much better information about the underlying causes of death and serious injury. This will help to design more effective interventions.

There are 74 actions and some of these could address significant numbers of casualties. The joint DfT, Home Office, National Police Chiefs Council and Highways England review of roads policing is much needed and particularly welcome. We are also very pleased that measures to increase seatbelt wearing feature so prominently, based on the recent PACTS / Direct Line report.²

There is also a commitment to properly investigate the feasibility of graduated driver licensing for novice drivers. The government promised a Green Paper on young driver safety in 2013. Although the number of deaths involving young drivers has been reducing, they are still a high-risk group. PACTS looks forward to taking part in work to find measures which are effective, workable and acceptable.

There is recognition of the continuing serious problem of drink driving and the growing problem of drug driving. THINK! Campaigns alone will not solve this. Investigation of the feasibility of alcohol interlocks in the rehabilitation of offenders, equipping police with mobile evidential breath testing equipment³ and research⁴ into the nature of the current problem are all welcome.

Education feature prominently a "*lifelong learning*" approach is a foundation for the Statement. Among actions we would highlight are:

- better training for young children, to support their safe, independent and sustainable mobility;
- more rigorous Compulsory Basic Training for new riders of powered two wheelers
- advice and support for older road users.

¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/817695/road-safety-statement-2019.pdf. Published 19 July 2019

² PACTS, in association with Direct Line, *Seat Belts: The Forgotten Road Safety Priority*, April 2019

³ [PACTS MEBTI project](#), funded by DfT

⁴ PACTS research project in partnership with University of Stirling, funded by DfT Road Safety Grant. Started May 2019.

Despite these and other positive aspects, the Statement is still not all that PACTS would like to see or what the Government could have announced. It falls well short of the more ambitious, structured, outcome-focused approach recommended in its Road Safety Capacity Management Review.⁵

There are no casualty reduction targets, let alone Vision Zero, even though the Government has endorsed UN and EU targets, set them for Highways England and adopted them in many other areas of government policy, such as vehicle emissions and climate change where zero seems an acceptable number.

Despite the endorsement of *safe system*, there is no commitment to monitor and report on the system – the safety of the infrastructure, vehicles, speeds, users and post-crash response.⁶ At the end of the period, how will success or failure be measured? There is, however, a plan to conduct a review of the case for targets and indicators.

The Statement focuses on groups with high casualty rates – but these groups may be small in number, cover few miles and account for relatively few casualties. The way to reduce large numbers of deaths and injuries is to address population-wide safety aspects. It is unclear how many casualties are in the scope of the actions proposed.⁷

Many safety experts would point to vital role of speed management in the reduction of UK road deaths and injuries (prior to the 2010 stagnation). The Statement acknowledges speed as one of the five key “pillars” of safe system. However, unlike vehicles, infrastructure and users, there is no section in the Statement on speed and little to offer.

On urban roads and 20 mph limits, important to promoting active travel and safety of vulnerable road users, there is nothing to assist local authorities or ensure that limits are implemented effectively. For rural roads, an advisory panel is to be established so we will have to wait to see what recommendations emerge. The UK 60 mph national speed limit now looks high by European standards.

Driver distraction is rightly highlighted as a major safety concern. Yet the focus is on hand-held mobile phones (illegal) when it is now well known that the use of hands-free phones is equally risky. There are also growing concerns about the in-built distractions of modern cars. The emphasis should be on safety and not limited to legality.

The Government has signalled a willingness to engage with other countries, to share UK know-how and to learn. The DfT is holding an international road safety conference in London in September, to be led by the Secretary of State for Transport. This will be a chance to test the Statement against international best practice. PACTS will work with the government to make a success of what is proposed.

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⁵ Systra, [Road Safety Capacity Management Review](#), DfT, June 2018

⁶ [Developing safe system road safety indicators for the UK – a report by PACTS in association with Ageas](#), 2018

⁷ [Refreshing the 2015 Road Safety Statement – PACTS letter to Roads Minister](#), August 2018

