

Justice Committee's inquiry into the Coroner Service

Evidence from the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety (PACTS)

August 2020

About PACTS

The Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety (PACTS) was formed in 1982 by parliamentarians and experts from a range of disciplines who had amended what became the Transport Act 1981 to make seat belt wearing compulsory.

Today, PACTS is the only NGO which:

- addresses transport safety (road, rail and air) across the UK;
- focuses on parliament, government and key stakeholders;
- has a wide membership base across the modes and the public, private and third sectors;
- has no commercial or sectional interests.

PACTS has provided the secretariat to the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Transport Safety.

Our strapline is *Safe Transport for All*. Our principal objectives is to reduce the number of people killed or seriously injured on the roads in the UK.

PACTS and the Coroner Service

PACTS is not routinely involved with the Coroner Service. In recent years, we have had two specific areas of engagement.

- Research into suicides on roads in the UK
- Prevention of future deaths

We will limit our evidence to these areas and to question 3.

We are aware that the families of people killed in road crashes, as well as organisations which work with them, see the Coroner Service as very important. Some have views on how well it serves them and how it could be developed. We collaborate with these groups on road safety matters, but we leave them to respond to the Justice Committee as we do not have that direct experience.

Q3. Ways to strengthen the Coroners' role in the prevention of avoidable future deaths

Improve the Coroner's ability to provide information

In 2016-17 PACTS undertook research into suicides on roads in the UK, in collaboration with Samaritans. We requested information from coroners and received responses from a number, of varying quality and detail. We followed up with the coroner where possible. The Chief Coroner

kindly agreed to speak at our conference but, in the event, was unable to because his High Court case overran.

The results are published in our report [Suicides on UK Roads – Lifting the Lid](#). In brief, many coroners showed a clear wish to provide information but were simply unable to due to insufficient support services and record systems which were not designed to provide this sort of information. Given the unique role of coroners in investigating and determining the cause of these deaths, it was disappointing that more information was not available. Better systems to store and process information would aid research and potentially help prevent future deaths.

Clarify role of prevention of deaths reports and accident investigation branch reports

We also take an interest in the coroners service with regard to prevention of future death reports – on rail and on roads particularly. PACTS strongly advocates more in-depth, expert investigation of road accidents, in order to provide more learning and prevent future deaths. (This would be in addition to any police investigation which is geared to prosecution.) The UK has a number of Accident Investigation Branches including air and rail and we believe that much better procedures are required for roads where most deaths occur. We have pursued this with the Department for Transport which signalled a move in policy in the *British Road Safety Statement 2019*.

The Department is now supporting the Road Collision Investigation Project being undertaken by the RAC Foundation. PACTS is on the steering board.

We realise that this potentially overlaps with the coroner's roll in issuing prevention of death reports. We believe that more clarity is needed on how the two investigation and reporting processes should relate in order to avoid duplication and to obtain maximum benefit. The Rail Accident Investigation Branch is used to prevention of future death reports from Coroners but the situation seems more ad hoc in relation to road collisions.

Further information

PACTS would be pleased to provide supplementary information and to give oral evidence if the Committee wishes.

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