

PACTS Conference

Improving Safety on UK Roads

Baroness Vere

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Introduction/Safe System

Thanks Matthew and let me also thank PACTS for organising this event.

Road accidents take the lives of 1.3million people annually around the world.

To put that another way...

Imagine if 19 fully-loaded airbus a320, the aircraft used by easyjet, crashed every single day for a year with no survivors.

We wouldn't tolerate that...

And nor would we likely board any plane, anywhere in the world, any time soon.

Many road deaths are preventable, especially when you move away from outdated thinking which pins sole blame on driver error and move instead towards the Safe System approach as the UK has done, and I know PACTS has long called for.

We know that building forgiving road infrastructure,

Implementing safer speeds aligned to road design...

Educating those road users at greater risk...

And ensuring effective vehicle standards and post-crash care...

All mean that while human error is inevitable, road deaths don't have to be.

We want more people to walk away from incidents rather than be carried away.

The key to the Safe System is shared responsibility.

From those making policy and those policing it...

To those designing roads and those driving on them.

So that if one element of our approach fails, the others kick in.

And this goes beyond motorists.

All road users should be able to travel knowing that there are layers of safeguards in place to minimise injury and maximise their safety.

UK record

I'm proud that the UK has some of the safest roads in the world.

We have made great strides in reducing fatalities over the past 30 years.

But since 2010, that trend has plateaued, as it has across much of Europe.

We sadly lose almost 1800 people a year on our roads...

Nearly 5 per day.

With around 70 suffering serious injury daily.

As Roads Minister, those numbers keep me up at night.

And whilst there is no silver bullet to get to zero deaths, all interventions are incremental no intervention is 100% effective. But that's no excuse for inaction.

So, I will continue to do everything I can to make our roads safer for all road users.

Today, I want to outline some of the progress we've already made...

Focussing on all aspects of the Safe System approach.

Safer roads

Let's start with safer roads, specifically improving rural roads on which the highest number of fatalities occur.

In June 2018, with help from the Road Safety Foundation and the RAC...

We identified the top 50 most dangerous A roads in Britain and made a £100 million Safer Roads Fund available for specific safety interventions, as recommended by local authorities.

This can involve clearer signage, new pathways and cycle lanes...

All of which I saw on my visit to the A1290 in Sunderland last year...

One of 12 schemes already completed.

And I'm **delighted to confirm** that the final £35 million was awarded last month...

Meaning that all 50 roads have now been funded.

You'll hear more about this later from Claire Rees, one of my team.

Safer people/speed

Turning to the safer people strand...

With a focus on those more likely to be involved in serious accidents.

If you look at a graph of casualties shown by age...

It's a classic U-shaped curve.

With the youngest and oldest drivers most at risk.

Indeed, 17-24 year-old male drivers are four times more likely to be killed or seriously injured.

This terrifies me – not just as a Minister but also as a parent.

Even during the pandemic, we've seen people taking risks on our roads, we've seen an increase in the proportion of cars speeding.

So we recently launched our latest THINK campaign – “Be the mate who won't speed.”

It's targeted at young men working in jobs where travel is essential during lockdown – such as manufacturing or construction.

So, this campaign is timely.

As is our consultation on banning all use of a handheld phone while driving....

Given 35% of younger drivers admit to using their mobiles while driving.

Sending a short text behind the wheel is like driving the length of a football field blind-folded.

We all probably know people who do this...

Yet these are accidents waiting to happen.

At the other end of the spectrum, drivers over 75 are not only more likely to be involved in a collision, but they are also at a higher risk of sustaining serious injury when they do.

We must get the balance right between keeping our roads safe whilst supporting independence and quality of life into older age.

That's why we've helped fund 13 mobility centres to support elderly drivers who may have medical conditions or disabilities...

And provided training and education, in partnership with RoSPA and BRAKE, to give elderly drivers the confidence to get behind the wheel safely.

Safer Vehicles

Education and safer roads must be supported by safer vehicles.

Last year, I attended the Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety and heard first-hand how different nations are coping with the challenges of improving road safety.

It's right that the UK is a signatory to the UN agreements on vehicle standards.

But there's more we're doing.

We've worked with industry to improve technology around vehicle design, such as sideguards on HGVs...

And banned tyres which are over 10 years old from lorries, coaches and busses.

Ensuring that any vehicle on the road is fit for purpose.

Post-Crash Care

But despite our best efforts, incidents will happen...

So our post-crash care must be underpinned by the best data possible.

In our recent review of STATS19, the limitations of the current approach were clear.

A future data strategy will maximise the completeness of the data...

Without putting undue burdens on attending officers.

That should involve a variety of data sources so we can give road casualties the best care possible.

For instance, linking STATS19 to Hospital Episode Statistics...

So healthcare teams have a full picture about the victim they are treating.

Or linking to the Trauma Audit and Research Network...

So ongoing care can be as effective as possible.

Looking to the future

Before I finish, I want to talk about future-proofing road safety.

The last 12 months has seen the biggest disruption to transport in my lifetime.

And I am determined that as we build back better and greener...

We protect the new wave of cyclists and walkers who have taken to the roads in greater numbers since the pandemic.

Last year, we announced a £2 billion package, supporting our ambition to double cycling and increase walking by 2025.

£200 million has already been spent on cycle lanes, walking programmes and creating low traffic neighbourhoods.

However, if we are to create mini-Hollands up and down the UK...

The law must keep pace.

Therefore, we've consulted on the biggest shake up of the Highway Code in five years...

To put cyclists, pedestrians and horse-riders on equal footing with motorists.

I want to see widespread adoption of measures such as the Dutch reach method of opening a car door.

And an end to dangerous close passing, which puts vulnerable road users at risk.

We've already consulted on these and other changes to the Code...

Receiving over 20,000 responses.

And you'll hear our next steps later this year.

Conclusion

I started by saying that road deaths are preventable.

Each life cut short on our roads is a collective failure...

And it's all our responsibility to implement the Safe System.

As we come out of the pandemic, there is an opportunity to redouble our efforts on road safety.

We're all working towards the same goal and I am very keen to hear as many ideas as possible as to how we make our roads safer...

Because together, we can ensure travel for all road users is convenient, enjoyable and, above all, safe.

Thank you.