

Roads Minister Baroness Vere's introduction speech to the PACTS 30th Westminster Lecture on Transport Safety, 11th April 2022, Royal Automobile Club. (As delivered)

Good evening, everyone,

I wish I could be with you in person for what I know will be a fascinating event. Unfortunately, it is recess, and even a minister needs a day or two off every once in a while, but I'm sure that tonight's lecture by Simon French will be absolutely captivating.

I've never had the pleasure of visiting the RAIB, but I do remember so vividly my visit to the AAIB during my short stint as aviation minister, and I'm in awe of what it does, and I am sure that the RAIB is no different. The RAIB is also particularly pertinent in my world at the moment as we look to set up a similar organisation for roads – a Road Collision Investigation Branch. We have so much to learn from others as we scope and resource this key step forward to road safety.

Simon has been with the RAIB since its inception in 2005. I don't need to tell any of you that Simon has been an invaluable asset to the RAIB and indeed the wider rail industry. Through his investigations and findings, he has been responsible for so many improvements to rail safety and I'm only sorry that I cannot be in the room to hear Simon's reflections and learnings from his career because safety and transport is of course the chief concern of everyone attending the event this evening.

I'd like to thank you for playing your part in keeping transport safe and of course I especially want to thank the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety for their excellent contributions to reporting on and promoting awareness of transport safety issues.

Everyone relies on the effective operation of transport systems to transport goods to go to work to see our loved ones and it's a massive and hugely complicated system and we know that sometimes things go wrong and when incidents happen, we've got to respond quickly and effectively and we've got to interrogate the circumstances. I would like to pay particular tribute to the tireless work of all those people that do that.

Accident Investigation Branches discover how and why transport incidents occur and very often to little fanfare at all. But their findings and recommendations give us the information we need to protect the public and ensure that similar events do not happen again.

As the UK's Roads Minister, it's always a pleasure to repeat the fact that we do have some of the safest roads in the world but frankly, as the mother of two young drivers, the number of fatalities is still an unending source of worry. More than 1,700 people are killed on our roads every year. That's about five people a day.

We're doing whatever we can to get that number down. Through the Safer Roads Fund, we invested £100 million to improve 50 of the most dangerous roads in England. This alone is

expected to prevent around 1,450 fatal and serious injuries over the next 20 years. We recently created a new hierarchy of road users, prioritising and protecting the most vulnerable road users and placing greater responsibility for reducing danger on those modes of transport that pose the greatest threat. We've recently closed the loophole in the mobile phone offence legislation so that it's now illegal for motorists to use a hand-held mobile phone behind the wheel for pretty much any use at all. To support this the THINK! team has launched an £800,000 awareness campaign to remind drivers of the changes in the law.

Now our next big piece of work is to pull together all the strands of road safety along with all the key people and groups with the right expertise to create the Road Safety Strategic Framework. This framework will set us on the right path for the future and allow us to make further gains in improving road safety.

Of course, Parliament makes the laws, but it really is down to people like you and other people who also have the expertise in safety to come forward with the ideas and for us to get your opinions through consultation, so I'm really pleased that we did quite a lot of consulting recently on the Roads Policing Review and the results of that will be out soon. We've also consulted on the RCIB, and again I'm hoping that we'll be able to draw up legislation to put that into place very soon as well.

Whether you're a rail or an air passenger, a car driver, bus user, cyclist, a pedestrian, we're all affected by transport safety. We must adopt the safety-first approach. Now that sounds like a very cautious strategy. But that's not true because our entire personal lives, our work, our economy is founded on secure, reliable transport networks. But it is not through caution but ambition that we constantly improve safety. So whether you're stepping foot off a train or stepping foot off a bus, safety is an innate feeling, an instinct and not a consumer choice. So when you look at the electric timetable, and you see your bus, or my bus in this case, the number 57 towards Kingston due in 8 minutes, there's no additional column that says, "and this bus will be safe". Because safety is implied throughout our system and it is felt in an almost unconscious way. And that the feeling of safety across the vast majority of our networks is underpinned by the work done by all of you in the audience, and thank you so much.

So, it's a team effort spanning thousands of miles of roads and rail, and defining incredible careers of colleagues like the brilliant Simon French.

I really hope you enjoy the lecture, and I hope to see you all soon.