

## *Safe System: principles and practice*

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### Introductory remarks

I'm going to start by acknowledging that the current context for road safety work in the UK, particularly in England, is very challenging. In recent years, and unlike other parts of the UK, we've lacked a strongly led national framework for road safety, spearheaded by goals and targets, consistent with what is recognised as best practice. We've seen successful activity achieving good results undermined by policy changes and budget cuts and reluctance to introduce key interventions which have been widely implemented, affordably and acceptably, in other countries and with positive results.

I'm reminded in this respect of the early 1980s when I left the Road Accident Research Unit at Birmingham University to help formally establish PACTS which, around the campaign for seat belt use and other key measures, had been confronted by a general lack of appetite for road safety intervention. A broad coalition of professionals, legislators, researchers, user and safety organisations, insurers, media went on to challenge this scenario successfully. Following persistent presentation of the safety case and concerted all party backbench Parliamentary activity, a range of measures were introduced. This kick-started a long period of substantial progress in road safety performance across the UK. Our first road safety targets were introduced by a Conservative government a few years later in 1987, followed by subsequent targeted plans (at least until 2010) orchestrated very effectively by the lead agency – the Department for Transport.

We need to intensify that resolve again now to help push road safety back up on the political agenda and I believe that Safe System provides the glue to bind all the necessary elements together. Safe System is promoted as best practice to all countries by the leading international organisations concerned with road safety. Safe System is seen as the most direct means yet of preventing death and serious injury on the road for all road users, including the most vulnerable.

If we look at the increasing take-up of Safe System abroad or in other parts of Britain, or in some of the cities that we'll hear from today, or from Highways England, we'll see there's plenty to inspire. I hope that the ambitious Safe System goal and targets set for our strategic road network mark the start of

new leadership in support of a roll-out of Safe System to all UK roads and traffic.