

Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP
Secretary of State
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London SW1P 4DR



4th July 2022

Dear Secretary of State

We would like to sincerely congratulate you on your announcement of the establishment of a Road Safety Investigation Branch. This is something which PACTS has long campaigned for as a key priority. The lack of an investigation branch for road collisions and casualties has been a major gap in the UK's road safety machinery. We are extremely pleased that your officials have revisited this issue and your government has taken this major step forward.

We hope the branch can be established rapidly, possibly as a shadow body, with legislation to give it the necessary powers approved in this session of parliament. The challenge for the board will be which of the many areas to address. In our view, one of the most important early tasks will be to bring together as much existing data and information as possible from the various sources, such as the Department for Transport, DVLA, DVSA, police, coroners, NHS, insurers and automotive sector. The excellent work by the RAC Foundation provides guidance. PACTS will do whatever it can to assist.

We have well established Investigation branches for air, rail and maritime accidents, and we have every confidence that the Road Safety Investigation Branch will soon contribute to reducing road casualties in the UK and be recognised as a world leading model.

Given this major step forward, it is all the more disappointing and surprising that the UK is falling behind on vehicle safety standards. As you will be aware, on 6th July this week automotive manufacturers in the European Union and in Northern Ireland will be required to apply the new safety standards of the revised EU General and Pedestrian Safety Regulations. These regulations were fully endorsed by UK government right up until the moment of exiting the EU. Indeed, the UK government and UK agencies such as TRL and Thatcham Research played major roles in developing and evaluating these new safety standards. As we have pointed out previously, not only will these new standards prevent substantial numbers of deaths and injuries but also they are supported by the UK automotive sector and the technologies involved are essential to the development of self-driving vehicles which you see as an important part of the future.

We fully recognise that the UK now has the independence to make its own decisions on such matters but we cannot see any technical case for failing to adopt these higher safety standards and demonstrate that the UK wants be at the forefront of vehicle safety. The government has frequently said that Brexit will

PACTS
Buckingham Court
78 Buckingham Gate
Westminster
London SW1E 6PE

t 020 7222 7732
e admin@pacts.org.uk
w www.pacts.org.uk
twitter @PACTS

not lead to a lowering of standards. I'm afraid currently we can only conclude that these regulations are being held hostage to concepts of Brexit freedoms which simply do not hold water.

Finally, I would like to say how we are very much looking forward to the publication of the Road Safety Strategic Framework later to this month. We have worked with Baroness Vere and officials to help develop this. I set out in a letter to the minister in April what we believe the framework needs to contain if it is to address the plateau in UK road casualties over the past decade. In 2011 the UK had the best road safety performance in Europe, based on the number of fatalities relative to population. By 2021 UK had dropped to fifth. The UK's progress in fatality reduction over this period was well below the European average and the UK is one of the few countries not to have a national road safety strategy or casualty reduction target. We hope that the new Road Safety Investigation Branch and Road Safety Strategic Framework will set the UK on a path to reversing this slide and make the roads safer for everyone in the UK.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David G Davies', with a stylized flourish at the end.

David G Davies,
Executive Director,
david.davies@pacts.org.uk