

Putting Safe System into Practice: A local perspective.

Matt Staton, December 2022

Matt Staton is Head of National Road User Safety Delivery at National Highways, having joined the company in November 2022 from Cambridgeshire County Council where he spent nearly 15 years working in local road safety. During this time Matt progressed from a Road Safety Officer, focusing on education, training and publicity activity around safe and sustainable travel, to managing a service delivering the county's local highway projects programme, including up to 200 projects across road safety, structures, local highway improvements and major surfacing schemes. In his last role prior to moving to National Highways, Matt spent two years as the Vision Zero Partnership Delivery Manager, coordinating strategic and frontline activity on road safety across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough – the experience on which this article is based.



Introduction

There are a number of Local Highway Authorities (LHAs) and Road Safety Partnerships (RSPs) around the country developing and adopting strategies based on the Safe System Approach. At a strategic level, this is excellent news for the industry, with local decision-makers clearly adopting international best practice when it comes to road safety but what does this actually mean in practice? Is this just a case of rehashing what we already do into a new strategic document or does this bring with it fundamentally different ways of doing things?

This piece explores the case of Cambridgeshire and Peterborough and the development and first two years of implementation of a new Vision Zero strategy, underpinned by the Safe System Approach. The case study is by no means perfect, and still in its early days, but hopefully provides inspiration and some valuable lessons for others embarking on a similar journey.

Strategy Development

Before examining the practical delivery it is important to acknowledge the process the partnership in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough went through in developing their new strategy, as every LHA or RSP will face their own unique challenges, and will therefore operate in a different context. The partnership in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough was heading towards the end of a 5-year strategy to 2020 and also saw a number of personnel changes at a strategic level. This led to a review of the existing partnership arrangements to understand what was working well, what could be improved and the level of understanding of current best-practice. Having started this process, the partnership realised that it was necessary for the review to be undertaken independently, in order to develop a truly collaborative approach as opposed to being led by one partner. The review was undertaken by Agilysis and Traject and included a specific focus on community engagement both as part of its development, but also its implementation.

One of the big discussions as part of the review was about ambition: did the partners want to aim high, challenge the status quo and try to change the stagnating trend in casualty reduction with ambitious targets? The decision was unanimous and the partnership adopted the #50by30 reduction targets and committed to adopting lead safety indicators, based on those proposed by PACTS in 2018¹, to drive the partnership's activity moving forward.

The resulting strategy was adopted across the partnership in Summer 2020 and is available at www.cprsp.co.uk.

¹ PACTS (2018) Developing Safe System Road Safety Indicators for the UK. Available at: https://www.pacts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/PactsReport_-_Developing-Safe-System-Road-Safety-Indicators-for-the-UK_Oct18-FINAL.pdf

Putting Safe System into Practice

There is a well-known saying that states:

“Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results.”

Following a decade of stagnation in road casualty reduction we cannot expect that doing more of the same will result in anything different for the next decade, so to do something about it we need to enact a step-change in approach to our interventions.

So how do we do that? Well, while the Safe System Approach provides us with some fundamental principles to implement in our interventions, one weakness of the approach is that it does not give us a comprehensive toolkit to use, albeit some tools and interventions exist that align to the approach. Therefore, it is up to practitioners to determine how to implement the principles in practice, but it is important we keep in mind the need for this to enact a step-change.

True collaboration

To do this, the traditional 3E's of education, engineering and enforcement become enablers across all the safe system components instead of individual workstreams, and subtle differences between partnership working and true collaborative working are exposed. This is one area the partnership in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough has really focused on and it involved bringing in external support in the early stages of their strategy development to enable a collaborative strategy to emerge, rather than protecting the brand of any one individual partner. The work is less about “the Council”, “the Police”, “the Fire and Rescue Service” or any of the other partners involved, but about what “the partnership” is doing collaboratively.

In a Safe System Approach it is also important to recognise that collaboration extends to the road user too, in establishing a relationship of shared responsibility. Therefore, the partnership embedded a locally developed community engagement approach called Think Communities² within its strategy and has seen a number of community groups receive funding for initiatives in their community alongside utilisation of the Special Constabulary to enhance local enforcement activity.

Coordination

To collaborate effectively and break down existing silos, coordination is key, and the partnership in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough recognised the need for a strategic Partnership Delivery Manager role to support senior officers and politicians in influencing strategy but also to coordinate activity across the partners at a tactical level. This change in governance to joint ownership of the tactical activity and a role working across all the partners to support them both strategically and tactically was the catalyst for putting the strategy into practice.

Across the partnership, delivery champions were identified for each of the Safe System components recognising the expertise, skills and statutory duties within each organisation. For example, the Local Highway Authority Road Safety Manager leading on Safe Roads and the Inspector with a portfolio for partnerships in the Police leading on Safe Speeds. These delivery champions formed a tactical group chaired by the Partnership Delivery Manager, which became the hub for delivery across the Safe System components, reducing the risk of each component acting as a new silo.

Delivering a Safe System

Recognising that change can be challenging, and the new approach was required to be embedded across several different organisations the partnership was very conscious of bringing people along on a journey. Therefore, a series of workshops was held with staff relevant to the delivery of each

² <https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/council/communities-localism/think-communities>

Safe System component to map out what was currently being delivered, what best-practice looked like, and what gaps this identified. A workstream approval process, owned by the partnership board and the Partnership Delivery Manager, was used to ensure each activity to be taken forward clearly identified how it was designed to support one or more of the new safety performance indicators, what outcomes were expected and how these would be evaluated. For new activities these are presented to the board for challenge and a decision to proceed.

Activities without existing evidence of effectiveness were not automatically discounted, but staff were encouraged to explore how evidence would be collected going forward in order to understand whether further investment should be made.

Alongside this, key new activities were identified which were directly rooted in evidence and underpinned by the Safe System principles. These were:

- iRAP star rating for the (non-trunk) A-road network, in order to inform future infrastructure investment plans
- no-blame investigation to ensure the partnership learn as much as possible from collisions that occur and use this to inform future activity
- a revised speed management strategy to support decision-making on speeding issues, and introduction of a programme for 20mph limits across Cambridgeshire
- enhanced local speed (and other offence) enforcement and advice through the establishment of a new Vision Zero Special Constabulary team comprising a Special Inspector, two Special Sergeants and six Special Constables
- engagement of partners and local SMEs in the Driving for Better Business programme to improve their management of work-related road safety

Funding

The final change that was enacted was to start lobbying local and national leaders for funding and providing evidence to support or oppose policy change, recognising where the partnership had strength in a collective voice on road safety issues. To date this has been a resounding success, with additional funding of up to £7m committed to road safety projects, and new staff roles across the Council, Police and Fire Service.

It is recognised that this is just the start of a long journey towards zero deaths and serious injuries, but overall I think it can be considered a very positive one.



[Road Safety Partnership - Road Safety Partnership \(cprsp.co.uk\)](http://cprsp.co.uk)