

Road Traffic Law Enforcement Debate on 23rd February 2017 – Briefing



On Thursday 23rd February, Parliament will debate the second report from the Transport Committee on Road Traffic Law Enforcement.¹ This briefing has been produced to inform Members of the House and to highlight a number of points regarding the report.

In 2015, there were **1,730** reported road deaths and **22,144** people reported seriously injured in road traffic accidents.² Provisional estimates from the Department for Transport suggest that the number of fatal road deaths in 2016 may be higher.³

Road traffic law enforcement is crucial to the efficient operation of the road system, to road safety, and to wider crime prevention and law enforcement.

The number of motoring offences detected has more than halved between 2004-2015

The Transport Select Committee recommended that the Government aim to support local police forces in maintaining the number of specialist road traffic police officers.

The Coalition Government's Road Safety Framework placed considerable weight on road traffic law enforcement. However, the resources to carry it out are limited.

In evidence given to the Road Traffic Law Enforcement Inquiry, the NPCC stated that road policing is a specialist skill set and a highly technical specialism that cannot be replaced by a 'regular front-line operational officer.'⁴

The number of specialised road policing officers has been falling consistently over the past decade. The number of full-time traffic police officers has fallen from 7,104 to 4,356 in 2014.⁵

The number of motoring offences detected in England and Wales has more than halved between 2004 (4.33million) and 2015 (1.57million).⁶

The need for a skilled and adequate road policing presence remains, not least to protect vulnerable road users.

Q: Have cuts to specialised road policing officers led to fewer traffic offences being detected?

The 'Fatal Four'

The Transport Select Committee recommended focusing on the fatal four: speed, drink-driving, seat-belts and mobile phones.

Road traffic law enforcement requires the active collaboration of several government departments in order to tackle the big issues in road traffic law enforcement. Greater input is needed from the Home Office and Ministry of Justice (MoJ) in support of the road safety objectives set by DfT. There is much to do to tackle the 'fatal four':

Speed: Exceeding the limit is a contributory factor in 15% of all fatal collisions. In 2015, 222 fatalities involved a driver exceeding the speed limit.⁷

Q: The deployment of average speed cameras can contribute to speed limit compliance. Will the Government review existing average speed camera schemes for their long-term effectiveness?

¹ <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201516/cmselect/cmtrans/518/518.pdf>

² [Department for Transport, Reported Road Casualties in Great Britain, Annual Report 2015.](#)

³ [Department for Transport, Provisional estimates, 2016.](#)

⁴ [Written Evidence by the National Police Chiefs Council](#)

⁵ [Parliamentary Question, Police: Road Traffic Control: Written question - HL4998](#)

⁶ [Department for Transport, Motor Vehicle Offences: Table RAS61001](#)

⁷ [Department for Transport, Reported Road Casualties in Great Britain, Annual Report 2015.](#)

Drink Driving: In a press article in December 2016, the Transport Secretary stated that the drink drive limit would not be cut as ministers do not want to penalise motorists for simply having 'a glass of wine at the pub'.⁸

Q: Previous Government policy has maintained that it is safest if people do not drink and drive at all. Based on recent comments by the Secretary of State for Transport, has this policy changed?

Seat-belts: The Transport Select Committee have recommended an educational campaign on the dangers of not wearing a seatbelt (due to the difficulty in enforcing the issue.)

Q: PACTS, the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety, came into being in 1981 under the Chairmanship of Barry Sheerman MP during the debate about making mandatory the wearing of seatbelts in the front seats of cars. An amendment to what became the 1981 Transport Act ensured that such seatbelt wearing became a legal obligation. What is the Government doing to ensure that seatbelt wearing is still enforced and still remains a priority today?

Mobile phones: On 1 March the penalties for using a hand held mobile phone whilst behind the wheel of a car will increase to six points and a £200 fine. Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) for illegal mobile phone use have lowered down from 123,100 in 2011 to 16,900 in 2015.

Q: Will the Government consider the Transport Select Committee's recommendation to fund research into technology to prevent and detect illegal mobile phone use whilst driving?

Research by the RAC shows that most offenders are currently offered educational courses rather than given penalty points and fine.⁹ However, the Government appears to now say that in future courses will not be offered.

Q: Is the Government now discouraging the option of offender education courses for illegal mobile phone use?

Enforcement Technology

The Transport Select Committee recommended that if enforcement levels continue to fall, technology will become more essential in road traffic law enforcement.

Technology has already automated many aspects of road traffic law enforcement. The Government must review procedures, including Home Office Type Approval (HOTA) to enable wider application and efficiency.

The use of Mobile Evidential Breath Tests Instruments (MEBTI) would enable police officers to take evidential samples at the roadside. This would be much quicker and more efficient for the police.¹⁰ Provision for use of such equipment was made in the *Serious and Organised Crime Act 2005*.¹¹ However, the Home Office has not yet given type approval for the equipment. This is badly needed. The number of drivers breath tested by the police dropped by just almost half from 70,796 in 2015 to 49,440 in 2016.¹² The number of convictions for driving with a blood alcohol level above the prescribed limit fell from 74,055 in 2004 to 37,853 in 2014.¹³

Q: When will Home Office Type Approval be given for Mobile Evidential Breath Test Instruments (MEBTI)?

Enforcement technologies now offer wide ranging potential applications and high standards of accuracy and reliability. Currently HOTA permits enforcement equipment to do only one thing at a time – i.e. an Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) camera used for average speed enforcement cannot simultaneously identify a wanted vehicle, or provide journey time information. This legislative impediment increases costs and stops better use being made of existing technology.

Q: Will the Government proactively consider ways to enable wider use of enforcement technologies?

PACTS is the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety. PACTS provides the Secretariat to the Transport Safety APPG. For further information or to become a member of the All-Party Parliamentary Group please contact katy.harrison@pacts.org.uk or visit the PACTS website at www.pacts.org.uk.

⁸[Daily Mail, 2016. 'Transport Secretary confirms ministers do not want to penalise motorists having 'a glass of wine at the pub''](#)

⁹[RAC, 'Most Illegal phone drivers get courses not points' 2017](#)

¹⁰[Home Office and The Rt Hon Mike Penning MP, 2014. Guidance: Evidential breath-alcohol analysis instrument](#)

¹¹[HM Government, Serious and Organised Crime Act 2005](#)

¹²[National Police Chief's Council \(NPCC\) 2016. Intelligence led approach to combatting drink and drug driving](#)

¹³[Ministry of Justice, Criminal Justice System statistics](#)