

The Local Government Technical Advisors Group **Written Evidence to House of Commons Transport Committee Inquiry** **into the government's strategic framework for road safety (SFRS)**

1. Introduction

1.1. We thank the House of Commons Transport committee for the opportunity to submit evidence on this important subject. The Local Government Technical Advisors Group (TAG) represents chief and senior technical officers in a large number of local authorities. These include those with highway and transport responsibilities, such as Transport for London, most London boroughs, Metropolitan, County and Unitary Authorities. TAG has provided evidence to the committee on several occasions; our membership encompasses significant experience and expertise across a wide range of professional technical spheres.

2. Summary

2.1. The government's vision for road safety is to ensure that Britain remains a world leader on road safety. TAG fully support this vision as road safety plays a key role in the health and well being of the nation. However the vision is weak and lacks substance.

2.2. Other key points from this response:

- 2.2.1. Overall the SFRS lacks adequate leadership, clarity and focus – the government must take a strong strategic lead in the deliver of a robust road safety strategy;
- 2.2.2. The portal for signposting key information for road safety professionals is welcomed;
- 2.2.3. The lack of meaningful targets is a significant weakness in the framework;
- 2.2.4. A stronger performance framework is required;
- 2.2.5. The framework states that restoring public finances and tackling the deficit is the overarching priority and not road safety;
- 2.2.6. Commitment to adequate funding and prioritisation is essential if recent successes in casualty reduction is to be maintained in the longer term;
- 2.2.7. Education and training is essential for all road users, particularly vulnerable groups such as children, if attitude and behavioural change is to be embedded.

3. General comment relating to the strategic framework for road safety

3.1. Overall we have to express our disappointment with the framework as it fails to provide any high level leadership, generally lacks clarity and focus

for road safety professionals.

- 3.2. The long term vision to ensure that Britain remains a world leader on road safety is laudable (p20, para 1.28) and supported. Nevertheless it is weak, vague and lacks substance. Also the vision's longer term reliance on improved technology and better driving is short sighted without a clear delivery strategy, which the framework fails to provide.
- 3.3. The SFRS fails to adequately acknowledge the excellent work carried out by local government organisations in reducing killed and seriously injured on Britain's roads.
- 3.4. The SFRS refers to the need for road safety interventions to be evidenced and properly evaluated. This approach is supported by road safety professionals, however it is likely that localism is likely to lead to a plethora of ill-conceived, unstructured, knee jerk road safety interventions that will achieve little in terms of tackling road danger, changing attitude and behaviour and unlikely to provide value for money.
- 3.5. The overarching priority for the SFRS would appear **not** be to road safety but rather to restore the public finances and to tackle the deficit (p7).
4. Whether the Government is right not to set road safety targets and whether its outcomes framework is appropriate
 - 4.1. The outcome framework is unclear on the outcomes to be achieved from monitoring the indicators included.
 - 4.2. Organisations need targets. Previous target framework for reducing road traffic casualties was clearly understood by road safety professionals and provided a mechanism to measure success. In the absence of relevant and realistic targets how is success to be measured?
 - 4.3. How will government compare performance of public sector organisations? How will underperforming organisations be encouraged to improve in the absence of a performance framework?
 - 4.4. Tomorrow's Roads Safer for Everyone set casualty reduction targets that were met through partnership working and coordination of resources. This set clear direction of local government and a framework to deliver. The SFRS does neither.
 - 4.5. Local authorities already publish significant data on casualty rates and safety cameras. The SFRS fails to acknowledge this.

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4.6. Paragraph 17 of the SFRS executive summary states that fatalities could fall by around 37% by 2020. However the document states that this is neither a target nor a hard forecast. Therefore what is it? And why state it?

4.7. The outcomes framework places no ownership for the indicators.

5. How the decentralisation to local authorities of funding and the setting of priorities will work in practice and contribute towards fulfilling the Government's vision

5.1. The government's approach to funding reforms for road safety last year was unhelpful, whilst acknowledging the difficult decisions required by government in managing the country's deficit. It created uncertainty within the road safety sector, for example, direct funding to safety camera partnerships left many local authorities and their partners' significant issues in terms of acquiring alternative funding sources, maintaining stability and retaining public confidence.

5.2. The reduction in road safety budgets and specific grant funding has seen deterioration in road safety functions across the country. Values on road accidents and casualties would suggest that investment in road safety interventions delivers high rates of return for the economy and society as a whole.

5.3. Reference to Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) is relevant, recognizing the symbiotic relationship between sustainable transport, particularly walking and cycling, and road safety. However LSTF is time limited and is a bidding process therefore it is unlikely that all local authority areas will benefit.

5.4. Local authorities already have the ability to prioritise capital resources for road safety through their local transport plan.

6. Whether the Government is right to argue that, for the most part, the right legislative framework for road safety is in place, and, in particular, whether the Road Safety Act 2006 has fulfilled its objectives (see Post-Legislative Assessment of the Road Safety Act 2006, Cm 8141, published by the DfT, July 2011)

6.1. The Act makes a useful contribution to improving road safety.

7. Whether the measures set out in the action plan are workable and sufficient

7.1. The proposed portal for road safety professionals is to be welcomed. A central depository for networking, guidance and sharing good practice will

be a valuable tool in continuing the excellent work in improving road safety.

- 7.2. The emphasis on education and enforcement fails to acknowledge the effectiveness of engineering solutions. With the changing traffic management and road user relationships emerging from new philosophies such as Manual for Streets then highway engineering solutions will continue to be an important tool in reducing road traffic accidents and casualties.
- 7.3. Education is focused on adults, which although important in changing / influencing attitudinal behaviour, does not address the needs of the more vulnerable user groups, particularly children who are generally more open to the road safety message and more likely to respond to the sustainability agenda. Retraining offenders as an alternative to punitive fines is a positive move, however more needs to be done to improve attitude and behaviour of all road users of all ages. This is lacking in the SFRS.
- 7.4. No mention of overarching governance.
- 7.5. No direct responsibilities identified for local government.
- 7.6. Commitment to resources required. Action plan places greater emphasis on police for delivery.
- 7.7. The focus on adult offenders referred to in the main document is not adequately reflected in the action plan. Tougher enforcement for persistent offenders also needs to be addressed to avoid undermining of public confidence in traffic enforcement.
- 7.8. Fails to recognize the different approaches required in tackling road safety on the trunk road network to that on the local highway network, c.f. the relationship between casualty reduction and perception of safety on local roads.
- 7.9. The action plan does not reflect the bullet points on vehicle technology referred to in paragraph 3.29 (page 38)
8. The relationship between the Government's strategy and EU road safety initiatives
 - 8.1. The SFRS makes little reference to European road safety context.

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If you have any queries regarding this evidence please contact me at nickclennett@gateshead.gov.uk or TAG secretary at johnelliott@btinternet.com

Submitted for and on behalf of Local Government Technical Advisors Group

Nicolas Clennett
Vice Chairman, TAG Transport Committee
0191 4332526

Contact address: Gateshead Council, Civic Centre, Regent Street, Gateshead
NE8 1HH

Copy to:
John R Elliot
Secretary, TAG National Transport Committee