

## Transport Safety Commission

### Evidence session summary – 17 September 2014

#### Session 5: Media/Digital Democracy; EC and vehicle safety; and Accident Investigation

##### Panel 1

**Witnesses:** Christian Wolmar, Transport Writer and Broadcaster

##### Panel 1 Starts:

Christian initially started writing about aviation safety. Safety in aviation and rail have improved immeasurably. There seems to be an inverse relationship between media coverage and risk levels. For example on roads there are many more accidents but these receive very limited coverage. Aviation incidents seem to receive the most attention.

Christian likes the “zero tolerance” approach of Sweden and New York to transport casualties and fatalities.

Media reporting of incidents has changed significantly over time. It is much more immediate now and the agenda moves much faster. There is also pressure on reporters to give explanations. Incidents are now first reported on Twitter, then TV and radio and finally in print. The first tweet of the Hudson River crash was actually from the plane. Now accidents get more coverage faster but the coverage may not last as long as it might have done in the past. This immediate coverage can be helpful in piecing together what happened, as we have seen recently with the Spanish rail accident.

The focus on cycle safety has been helpful but has resulted in probably disproportionate pressure on Transport for London. Accident rates have not increased but awareness certainly has increased.

*“The [safety] terms of trade between cyclists and other road users need to change”*

There needs to be serious consideration of how to allocate a finite safety budget between cyclists and other road users. This may include 20 mph zones among lower cost measures.

Although some feel that independent road accident investigation would take safety responsibility away from highways bodies, this has not been the experience with other transport modes. When the RAIB was new there was some opposition to it but it has proved itself to be useful and respected.

*“We need a kick-butt road accident investigation agency, modelled on the RAIB and AAIB”*

##### Panel 2— EC and Vehicle Safety

**Witnesses:** Richard Cuerden, Technical Director for Vehicle Safety, Engineering and Assurance, TRL

Ellen Townsend, Policy Director, ETSC

## **Panel 2 Starts:**

*Ellen Townsend*

PIN results and feedback.

It is important to have binding targets. The European Commission has a road deaths reduction target. The UK does not. Sweden has a vision zero target, with management by objectives. In the Netherlands there are 6 government bodies responsible for transport safety.

One of the first EU Citizens' Initiative petitions related to transport safety. It was a proposal to introduce 30 km/h (20 mph) zones.

Within the European Commission, transport safety legal duties include vehicle construction and use regulations. Road safety is led by DG MOVE. The road safety budget provision has reduced to ????. DG MOVE makes an annual Call for transport safety best practice.

Social media can play a role in drawing attention to accident blackspots but also in advancing policy more generally. The cycling lobby is probably the most active on social media.

*"Twitter is a policy-making tool in Brussels."*

*Richard Cuerden:*

TRL very much supports having targets because they have been shown to focus attention – for all stakeholders. However, compared to 2010, there is less applied research being undertaken in the UK today, with the consequence that there is also less learning. In my opinion, the lack of targets and learning mean that casualties are not reducing as fast as they could be, because we are not routinely assessing the road injury evidence to prioritise collision and injury prevention countermeasures; and equally importantly more needs to be done to evaluate what has worked. Without this systematic approach, good practice with regard to road and vehicle design, effective technologies, education and enforcement strategies can go unnoticed and subsequently knowledge may not be shared, ultimately resulting in more preventable deaths and injury on our roads.

I believe the starting point is to have a clear unambiguous vision and aim, for example the European Commission has stated that road deaths in Europe should half in this decade. This is a concise and measureable policy, which to be effective must be based on wide stakeholder acceptance and national responsibility and accountability. Further, a target alone is not enough, there must be a framework and identifiable tasks that will deliver the casualty savings. I suggest that failure to meet casualty reduction targets should have consequences.

The casualty reduction targets must be supported by a detailed breakdown of how they will be achieved. For example, in the UK we know that improvements in vehicle safety have significantly contributed to the reduction in vehicle user deaths and serious injury that we experienced till 2010. In this time frame European front and side impact legislation and the Euro NCAP programme collectively instigated a step change in vehicle crashworthiness. Understanding who the road casualties are in

Britain today and how they may change as our society ages and new vehicles, roads and technologies are introduced is an essential part of planning a safe and sustainable road transport network. What will be the next step changes or evolutionary processes that are necessary to further improve safety on our roads?

I believe to begin to answer this question an independent and urgent look at the current road casualty data is needed to identify priorities for future policy with respect to vehicles, roads and road user safety. There might be white spots, but also a critical review of what has been achieved in the last decade and how – where are we now is very important to understand – what has worked?

This approach would effectively subdivide the UK road casualty population into similar groups or categories, where specific interventions could be effective. The groups will change based on the countermeasure and some people could benefit from multiple countermeasures – the effect of any countermeasure will be based on the size of the target population (how many people or collisions may be affected) and the effectiveness of the countermeasure (how often it will be successful and prevent or mitigate the consequences of the collision). This work requires macro (national) and micro (in-depth studies) accident data.

The UK has a number of systems and data sources upon which to build a real world evidence based plan on how road casualty targets should be met. The macro data currently available includes police reported road casualties (STATS19), the NHS records Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) and for severely injured road casualties their injury information is captured in the Trauma Audit Research Network (TARN) database; for road deaths there are coroners' inquiries and police road death investigations.

The Department for Transport has investigated road traffic collisions for many years to support strategies to make our roads safer. These investigations differ from those of the police because they are designed to understand how people are injured rather than necessarily determine responsibility for the collision. These micro studies typically have relatively small sample sizes, but involve detailed in-depth data collection. They have been used widely to improve road safety, including, but certainly not limited to, developing European type-approval regulations and the crash test scenarios used by Euro NCAP, improving the performance of road side vehicle restraints and to promote seat belt use. In 2012 the DfT's Road Accident In-Depth Studies (RAIDS) programme started which has begun to capture valuable information describing how crashes occur and, from this understanding, it is expected to contribute to the development of safer roads and safer vehicles and broader road safety policy. Funding for the RAIDS programme currently ends in the summer of 2015. I work on the study and clearly do not have an impartial view, but I would strongly encourage the DfT to continue with this valuable work, especially given the effort and cost required to set-up such collaborative research – it took nearly two years to establish agreements with police forces, medical ethics committees and to train the data collection teams.

In my opinion, we are simply not doing enough to use and learn from the data we currently have. Also this data is not combined and (other than STATS19) is not readily accessible. As a consequence there is no routine feedback from crash investigations to highway and vehicle design and operations.

*“Many people in the UK are doing a good job– they are dedicated and energetic. They are investigating, collecting and analysing data. But they lack critical review and external assessment. And nobody is bringing their work together”*

In terms of the fundamental question, ‘who is responsible?’ I suggest that currently in the UK we have different stakeholders with different responsibilities. In addition, different organisations ‘own’ or manage different pertinent data resources – these are typically not harmonised or linked. There are different motivations behind why the DfT (HA, DVSA), NHS hospitals, police forces, local authorities and HM Coroners collect data and different policies for the use of the data and dissemination. This results in an inefficient system where valuable data is currently not being used to prevent future fatalities and injury road collisions.

In my opinion, the absence of an independent authority, solely responsible for reducing road deaths and injuries, is the most significant barrier to developing good practice and ultimately building a successful framework with identifiable tasks to deliver casualty savings in the UK. We have successful Air and Rail Accident Investigation Branches, and given that the cost of preventing reported road accidents is estimated to be over £16 billion per year to the UK economy, it is difficult to imagine the cost of a Road Accident Investigation Branch being a deterrent – as funding would depend on casualty reduction targets being met, which would more than pay for the investment.

There is a strong belief that STATS19 forms are not being filled out even for very serious injuries. I have personal experience from RAIDS that for many reasons the police do not always complete STATS19 forms. This high level of under-reporting is not acceptable. Even in cases where STATS19 is completed, independent research teams and police officers report different (and usually narrower) contributory factors. A common difference is that where independent researchers might identify excess speed, police officers identify wet roads and a failure to look. Therefore skill and experience is required when Contributory Factors on STATS19 are analysed. .

The STATS19 data is a good example of where a more integrated and centralised approach to pooling information and providing data with appropriate caveats would be beneficial. As a country we need to identify what data is required to ensure a robust evidence base is available upon which to build future road safety policy aimed at reducing the amount of trauma experienced on our road network.

There is a question around whether manufacturers have learned to pass EuroNCAP tests in a similar way to Euro emissions standards.

Unfortunately, some manufacturers will develop vehicles to just pass Euro NCAP and the regulatory standards, whilst others will strive to exceed them. The later often use their ‘safety branding’ as a market differentiator for their products. Looking to the future with increasing driver assistance systems aimed at preventing collisions it will be important to encourage the European Commission and Euro NCAP to respectively legislate and promote vehicle technologies or performance criteria that are shown to be cost-effective at reducing casualties. Arguably there is much more that should be done to protect pedestrians and cyclists in the event of a collision with motorised vehicles. I believe the UK should be at

the heart of these discussions and provide our own evidence to justify proposed changes that would ensure benefits for our road users.

### **Panel 3: Accident Investigation**

**Witnesses:** Carolyn Griffiths, Chief Inspector of Rail Accidents, RAIB

ACC Sean White, Cleveland Police

Richard Cuerden, Technical Director for Vehicle Safety, TRL

Alex Luck, Chair, Institute of Traffic Accident Investigators (ITAI)

#### **Panel 3 Starts:**

*Carolyn Griffiths*

Outline of requirements of a road accident investigation body or system.

The Board of Accident Investigation Branches was established in 2003. RAIB, AAIB and MAIB are members but there is no road representative. Some learning is transferable between modes. For example, human factors in general and in some cases specific learning, such as level crossings.

There is potentially a tension between accident investigation for learning and for prosecution, which is the focus of police investigations and sometimes of the safety regulators. Although the accident investigation branches are obliged to share data with prosecuting authorities, witness names and statements can be kept confidential.

*Sean White*

At the moment around 5 people die on our roads every day, which is completely unacceptable. The police view is that the cause of a collision is usually known quite quickly. Independent investigators have a different view – they want to know underlying causes, rather than immediate causes. They have also found that, where available, STATS19 for slight injuries has unreliable data, even for things like location.

Local police investigations can have benefits, such as sharing findings with local road safety partners (Highways Agency, local authority, etc.?).

STATS19 training for police has been patchy. There is no national training but all investigation training is currently under review.

*“Police officers should know the purpose of STATS19 forms, so that they know why they need to record details.”*

Casualty reduction funding now comes from NDORS, rather than allocated funds.

The police road death investigation manual has been revised: now a “search for the truth”.

*Richard Cuerden:*

To influence national policy, large, consistent data sets are required, analogous to NCAP. The RAIDS – road accident in-depth study – was funded by the Department for Transport and contains data on 1000 well-documented collisions. However, we would like to see a national sample of fatal accidents. Much could be learnt from correlating the coroner’s reports, police forensic collision investigation reports and autopsy reports into a single source relational database. This would overcome the current problems of disparate or stand-alone reports, which are difficult to analyse. Pooling this information into one source would yield a very powerful tool to assess the epidemiology of the collisions, the casualties and their injuries. It would also identify problems early and help share best practice throughout the UK. An ongoing system monitoring road deaths in the UK would allow trends to be tracked and specific intervention to be evaluated, which simply is not possible with STATS19 data alone. The costs of this activity would be largely administrative.

I believe this is a great example of how an independent cohesive team responsible for national road safety in the UK could make a real difference. The fatal accident study could happen without a Road Accident Investigation Branch, for example it could be directed by the DfT. However, the advantage of a creating a specialist branch is that one team would have responsibility to determine how best to prevent future death and injury on the UK’s roads and they would be required, mandated to support or work alongside the existing stakeholders. This level of accountability and visibility would, in my opinion, result in a much clearer and focused national attitude; and importantly would introduce pace and urgency to the task of developing and delivering a meaningful and effective road safety strategy. We should be striving to prevent casualties today and not in ten years’ time. Finally, the UK has a strong history in understanding and preventing road deaths and injuries and this bringing together of existing experts and looking to develop a leading centre of excellence would help position the UK as a world leader in this regard.

*Alex Luck*

Some STATS19 data is sometimes unreliable, e.g. location for slight injuries.

The role of employers has not had enough attention, particularly for employees whose job requires them to drive but for whom driving is not the main task of their job. The HSE is taking a bigger interest in work-related driving. Road deaths should be investigated in the same way as homicide.

There is sometimes a conflict of interest, with the highway authority failing to take account of the need to collect investigation evidence and prioritising the re-opening of the road network instead. Few road deaths go to a magistrates or crown court - they mostly go to coroners courts.

It is important to keep bereaved families informed during what can be quite a long and difficult process.