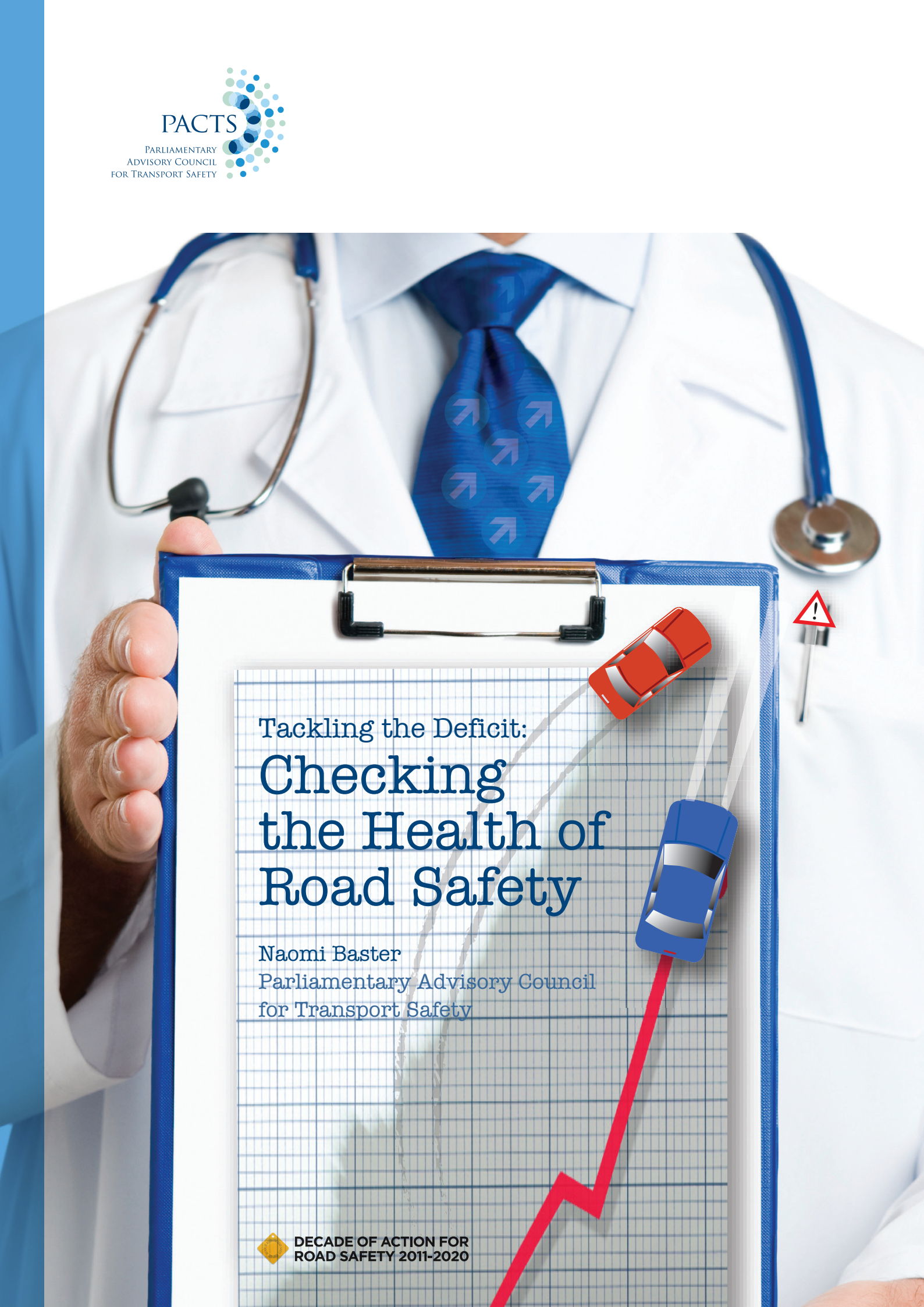


Tackling the Deficit:
**Checking
the Health of
Road Safety**

Naomi Baster
Parliamentary Advisory Council
for Transport Safety



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The conclusions outlined in this report are those of the author and of PACTS.

THE PARLIAMENTARY ADVISORY COUNCIL FOR TRANSPORT SAFETY (PACTS)

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CONTENTS

FOREWORD

1	EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
2	1. INTRODUCTION
2	2. THE SITUATION FOUND IN MARCH 2011
3	3. RECENT POLICY DEVELOPMENTS
6	4. THE CURRENT SITUATION FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES
14	5. IMPLICATIONS AND MOVING FORWARDS
18	6. CONCLUSIONS
19	REFERENCES

FOREWORD

This is the third PACTS report in the series *Tackling the Deficit*. I am grateful to Naomi for the work she has done in compiling the report and to ADEPT and TAG for their help in circulating the questionnaire.

The key principle that has underlined these reports is the need to monitor the effects of government policies and actions on road safety activity. As an independent charity and in its role of “critical friend” of government, PACTS is well placed to undertake this role and will continue to do so.

This report, therefore, highlights the key policy developments over the last eighteen months and offers an interpretation of how these have affected both the organisation and provision of road safety. It also identifies the impact of budget reductions on local authorities in England.

The picture is not one of doom and gloom. Nor is it one of perfect harmony. Those local authorities that are committed to road safety are attempting to find the resources to continue their work. What is unclear is how they will continue to do so as money and people become more scarce over the next few years.

2010 saw the lowest number of road deaths since records began. The first nine months of 2011 saw those numbers begin to rise. The final figures, to be published in June, will give us all plenty to think about. What is clear is that consistent investment in road safety over the last 20 years has borne fruit. Reducing that investment will result in, at best, a slowing of progress and, at worst, a complete reversal.

Robert Gifford

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The third in the *Tackling the Deficit* series, this report outlines the policy context and analyses the current situation for local authorities in England. The report series aims to give snapshot views of the road safety profession. The first was published in October 2010 following the election of a new government, and the second in March 2011 following the 2011/2012 Local Government Finance Settlement. This third report of May 2012 comes at a time when local authorities have experienced budget cuts, and we can begin to study how they are coping and what support they require to move forwards.

Methodology

This report is a combination of desk-based research and analysis of survey responses, which were collected in an online survey circulated to members of ADEPT and TAG.

Key findings

The policy context of road safety is positive at an international and European level, but less so at a national level. Europe has adopted the 2010 target of a 50% reduction in road deaths by 2020, with the aim of moving 'close to zero fatalities' in road transport by 2050. The new ISO standard for road traffic safety management is being developed, and on May 11th 2011 the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety was launched across the world. Meanwhile in the UK, the government's *Strategic Framework for Road Safety* proved a disappointment for local authorities awaiting a strong document to help them prioritise road safety. Ministerial use of the phrase 'end the war on the motorist' combined with cuts to specific road safety budgets and a lack of progressive policies gives the overall impression that road safety is no longer a priority for the government. This is further illustrated by the highlighting of the importance of deficit reduction within the executive summary of the road safety strategy.

The survey of English local authorities finds that most have seen budget and staffing reductions in recent years. In response to the question 'Do any of the following factors put your statutory duty to promote road safety at risk?' half of the respondents answered 'yes' to at least one factor in four: staff numbers, staff skills, finance or organisation. The survey also shows a concerning reduction in engineering measures where three in five respondents indicated a reduction in budget and output. The government should take note of opinions expressed on the strategic framework: 44% of respondents said it had no effect on road safety in general, and 39% said the effect had been negative.

The general feeling appears to be that local authorities are prepared to work hard to overcome the current financial challenges and adapt to organisational changes, but they do still need leadership and recognition from central government. Therefore to move forward the government needs to find a meaningful way to give leadership, vision and encouragement, within their agenda of decentralisation and localism. PACTS recommends developing a vision for British road safety, which would give a common and ambitious goal at which the entire road safety community could aim. It would give local authorities motivation and show that road safety is highly valued, and government could then focus on how they can support stakeholders in achieving this goal.

1 INTRODUCTION

Publishing *Tackling the Deficit: Checking the health of road safety* has been timed to coincide with the first anniversary of the launch of both the UN Decade of Action for Road Safety and the UK *Strategic Framework for Road Safety*. This report gives another snapshot view of the road safety sector, reflecting extensive deficit cutting measures undertaken by the new government since its election in May 2010 and taking into account the current policy context. It is the third in the *Tackling the Deficit* series, which is available on the PACTS website. The first report - *At what cost to road safety?* - was published in October 2010 and the second - *Where next for road safety?* - was published in March 2011.

This third report begins with a reminder of the situation as it was when the second report was published over a year ago, and then explores the policy context for road safety today. Chapter 4 recounts the results from a survey sent out to members of the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) and the Local Government Technical Advisers Group (TAG). Chapter 5 analyses these results and discusses their implications.

2 THE SITUATION IN MARCH 2011

In the second report the following issues were highlighted:

- Road safety deliverers were facing difficulties due to **the lack of a road safety strategy**. *Tomorrow's Roads: safer for everyone* was the road safety strategy from 2000 to 2010. A *Safer Way* was to be its replacement, but the document was not taken further than consultation stage due to the change in government in May 2010. The road safety sector endured one year with no leadership or vision for the future.
- The Localism Bill became an Act of Parliament in November 2011, though aspects of **decentralisation** had already trickled down to a local level by March 2011, through the Spending Review and the Local Government Finance Settlement. Local authorities assumed more decision-making powers with budgets no longer being ring-fenced. There was some confusion as to the definition of 'local' and as to what contribution was expected from whom.
- Road safety sat in a **complex financial context, with increased competition for reduced funds**. In the questionnaire issued by PACTS at the time, 92% of local authorities respondents answered 'negative' or 'potentially negative' to the question 'With regard to the Budget and Spending Review, how do you view the impact on road safety in 2011?'. They reported already having been affected by major budget cuts, job losses and a reduction in activities. These effects were partly attributable to the perception that road safety was not a priority for central government, and that funding was consequentially being directed towards other services.
- Research for the second report found **widespread support for a nationwide vision and target**, to demonstrate to local decision makers that road safety was a priority, giving road safety greater backing at a local level when competing for funding. It was also thought that providing this direction would help slow the rapid loss of skilled and

experienced professionals from the sector. Research found support for a cross-government vision which focused on better, safer communities where the road environment invites active travel and encourages people to share responsibility for it.

The second report made a number of **recommendations** including:

- Local authorities should be engaging with civil society through the dissemination of useful and accessible information;
- Local authorities should be ready to develop new relationships and to draw on available resources, for example by co-ordinating and supporting the Fire and Rescue Service, which could take on a more active role in delivery of road safety;
- Central government in particular has key responsibilities, which it cannot devolve to local authorities. Only central government has the ability to provide an overview, and to advise, co-ordinate, monitor and encourage consistency between local authorities;
- The UK has a wealth of information, which would be best managed centrally by the establishment of an accessible central source of data and research; this would also facilitate the sharing of both successful and less successful practice.

3 RECENT POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

EUROPE AND INTERNATIONAL

Following the adoption of the 2010 EU target of a 50% reduction in road deaths by 2020, the European Parliament published the Koch report on European Road Safety 2011 – 2020 (Koch, 2011). This document called on the Commission to adopt a long-term vision of preventing all road deaths, which it did in the white paper *Roadmap to a Single European Transport Area* (European Commission, 2011), where it confirmed the goal of moving 'close to zero fatalities' in road transport by 2050.

On an international level, the ISO standard for road traffic safety management is in the process of being developed. The ISO standard brings together the requirements needed to reach a target of zero death and injury, guidance on how these can be implemented and on the management structure and competences required.

The UN Decade of Action for Road Safety was launched worldwide on May 11th 2011. Its goal is to stabilize and then reduce the forecast level of road traffic fatalities around the world by increasing activities conducted at the national, regional and global levels. It draws attention to the fact that road crashes are the number one cause of death of young people worldwide, and that 90% of road casualties occur in developing countries.

THE UNITED KINGDOM

Recent months have seen a Transport Committee inquiry into the Government's *Strategic Framework for Road Safety*. The Committee received around 50 submissions of written evidence, including a joint response from 16 organisations coordinated by PACTS (PACTS, 2011a). The organisations represented the key deliverers of road safety at national and local level, the transport research sector, and the professional bodies representing highway engineers and planners. They chose to make a joint submission as the organisations share the belief that improvement in road safety is a collective responsibility, the

achievement of which is attained most successfully through joint partnership working. The importance of the partnership approach has been acknowledged in a report for the Department for Transport (DfT) entitled *Delivery of Local Road Safety* (AECOM, 2011).

In mode specific safety, the DfT has continued its policy focus on motorcycle safety with its only currently publicised Think! campaign being 'Named Riders'. Additionally, in response to rising cycling levels and casualties, the DfT set up a cycling stakeholder forum whose aim is to look into how best to tackle the issue of real and perceived dangers of cycling. A subgroup, the cycle safety stakeholder forum, was established in response to media pressure and public concerns for cycle safety. However, the Department has not renewed funding for Driving for Better Business, a campaign to **'raise awareness of the importance of work-related road safety in the business community and public sector by using advocates drawn from these communities to promote the business benefits of managing it effectively'** (RoadSafe, 2012).

To contribute to making use of the wealth of research knowledge in road safety, the government has begun compiling a central source of data and research. The Road Safety Observatory is intended to be an independent source of research evidence for the road safety profession and other interested users. It will provide syntheses of research reports and links to the original reports to enable those interested to access the material on which policies are based. It is overseen by a Management Board comprising road safety professional organisations and the Department for Transport.

Another positive move made by the UK government was the inclusion of the indicator 'Killed or seriously injured casualties on England's roads' for the objective 'Improving the wider determinants of health' in *A public health outcomes framework for England, 2013 – 2016* (Department of Health, 2012). In addition an indicator on 'Hospital admissions caused by unintentional and deliberate injuries in under 18' draws attention to younger road users.

This inclusion is fortunate, given the lack of a numerical objective in the *Strategic Framework for Road Safety*, published in May 2011. The omission of casualty reduction targets in this document was a disappointment for the whole road safety sector, where the consensus is that such targets have helped the UK become one of the safest countries in the world. International evidence supports this view (OECD, 2008). The PACTS response to the strategic framework concludes that with the status of a world leader in road safety come clear responsibilities to take a leadership role in the EU, and to make a strong contribution to the 2020 targets of 50% (PACTS, 2011b). This point was reiterated in a letter to the Times which was printed on the 11th July 2011. The letter, organised by PACTS and signed by four former road safety ministers as well as a number of representatives of the road safety community, urged the Government to implement strategies that will meet the European target of reducing deaths by 50% by 2020.

The PACTS response to the strategic framework also notes the tension in the framework between the aspirations of being the best in the world and adopting comprehensive approaches on the one hand and the agenda of localism on the other. What if local councils are not interested or do not have the money to help be the best in the world? How do we encourage the under-performing local authorities to improve their achievements without some kind of central support or monitoring of performance? The government has taken certain steps to enable and monitor localism, by announcing a local authority road safety comparison website.

This website, the format of which is as yet unknown, will aim to allow easy comparison of local authority performance, in a time when local authorities and residents have the freedom to decide their own priorities. The Department has also launched the Local Sustainable Transport Fund funding local projects which aim to support economic growth and sustainable transport modes. A useful tool for supporting localism is the Road Safety Knowledge Centre, which has a help forum where users can ask their peers for advice. This can be very effective, particularly when best practice and experience are passed on from high-achieving local authorities to support those that are under-performing.

In addition to localism, transparency is high on the current government's agenda. To this end the Department has published speed camera data, in the form of a list of links to information on specific speed camera sites (DfT, 2011a). While it is useful to have links to all the road safety partnerships in one place to access, it is less clear if any real conclusions can be drawn from the information provided in its present state. With each partnership publishing the information in a different format, it is almost impossible to draw any real conclusions about the effectiveness or otherwise of cameras in any specific locations. It is also unclear as to what individual citizens can understand from the tables provided. This illustrates one of the challenges of transparency: making information available is only useful and meaningful when it is in a format that can be understood.

Individual citizens are also the target audience for 'crash maps' which show the exact area where a casualty occurred, much like the crime map on the police.uk website does for crimes. Three different versions have been produced by the BBC, the Guardian online and crashmap.co.uk. They make information available in an accessible format, though they do rely on the data being of good quality.

The Association of Chief Police Officers has published a *Roads Policing Strategy 2011 - 2015* (ACPO, 2011). It includes an outline of their approach, priorities and challenges. The existence of such a document shows that the police take roads policing seriously, though it could be made more visible to the public.

Though the moves described above are mainly positive or constructive for road safety, the government has been giving the overall impression that road safety is no longer a priority. Within a few days of the government coming into power the then Secretary of State promised he would 'end the war on the motorist', and went on to propose both increasing the motorway speed limit and reducing the frequency of the MOT test. The Department has ended revenue and capital funding for safety cameras, the road safety partnership grant, and cut the road safety research budget. This government failed to opt in to the EU Directive on Cross Border Enforcement, which would have given UK citizens greater protection both on roads in the UK and elsewhere in Europe when on holiday. Although positive steps are being taken to address driving under the influence of drugs, the government failed to act on Sir Peter North's recommendation to lower the drink drive limit to 50mg of alcohol in 100ml of blood, even though academic research and both public and professional opinion supported it. The Times printed a letter on 6th March 2012, signed by PACTS and 12 representatives of the health sector, urging the government to reconsider their decision not to implement the recommendation made in the North Review to lower the drink drive limit.

Amongst a backdrop of a growing acceptance around the world of the safe systems approach, the government has provided an unsatisfactory strategic framework based on the 'blame and train' philosophy (Carsten, 2012). Rather than seeking to blame and punish, a better approach – not highlighted in the framework – would be to ensure that collisions involving a fatality or serious injury should be followed by an analysis to determine what went wrong, and how it could be avoided in the future. The government's vision for road safety should be akin to the safety culture of the rail industry, where risk should be as low as reasonably practicable. Meanwhile the European Commission has estimated that the UK 2011 fatality rates will show an increase for the first time since 2003 (European Commission, 2012).

THE DEVOLVED ADMINISTRATIONS

The survey discussed in the following chapter was sent to English local authorities only, as they are the only ones who receive all their leadership from Westminster. In Northern Ireland road safety is the responsibility of the Department for the Environment, which has published a Road Safety Strategy to 2020. In Scotland local authorities deliver road safety education, training and publicity, overseen by Road Safety Scotland, and the legal system is different. The Welsh Department for Transport provides annual grants to their local authorities to address road safety issues. Therefore professional opinion on road safety in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales reflects on both the devolved administrations and the UK government.

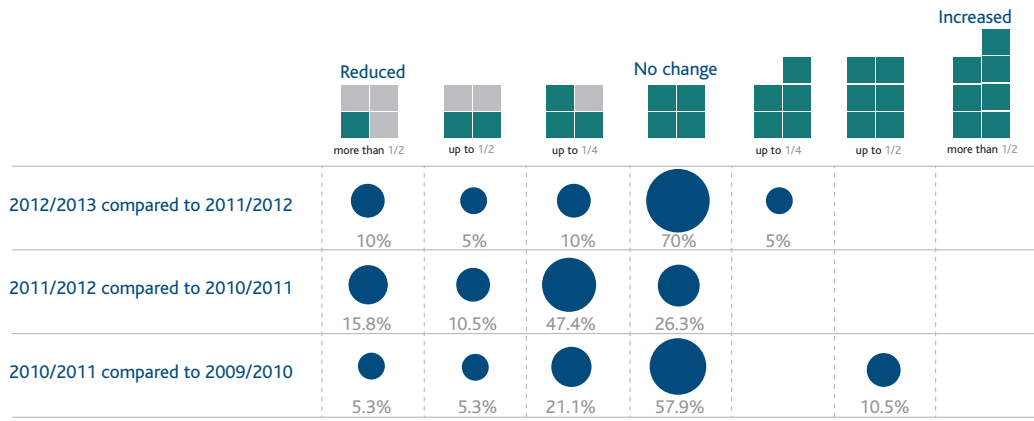
4 THE CURRENT SITUATION FOR ENGLISH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

This fourth chapter will discuss the results of a survey which was circulated to members of the Association of Directors of Environment, Economy, Planning and Transport (ADEPT) and the Local Government Technical Advisers Group (TAG). The aim of the survey was to begin to build up a snapshot picture of the current situation for English local authorities. The devolved administrations and London were not included: given the differences in administration, it would not have been a fair direct comparison. The respondents include a wide range of representatives from rural, unitary and metropolitan authorities throughout England. At the same time, it is important to note that this is a self-selected sample of local authorities which may (or may not) be representative of all levels of performance in reducing casualties. The survey was not intended to inform a complete assessment of the state of the nation, but to identify the current difficulties and opportunities for local authorities, and what kind of support they require from the government.

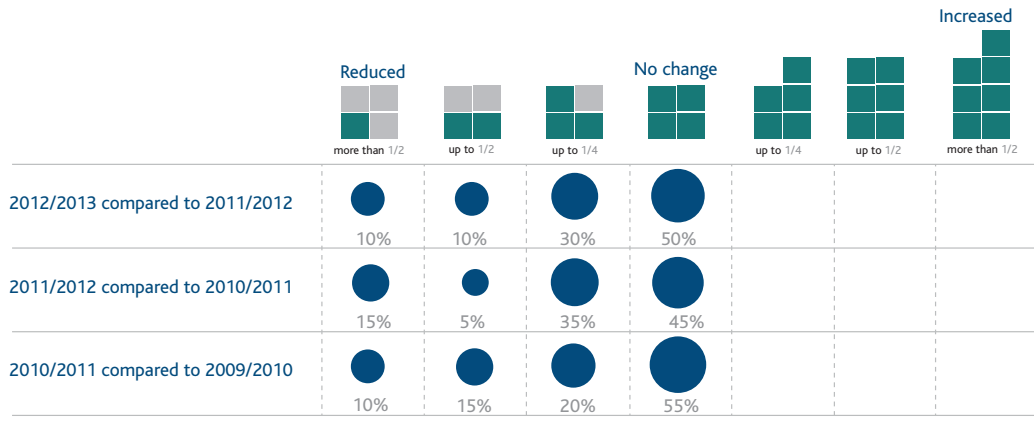
BUDGET CUTS

In the questionnaire which informed the second *Tackling the Deficit report*, 92% of local authorities answered 'negative' or 'potentially negative' to the question 'With regard to the Budget and Spending Review, how do you view the impact on road safety in 2011?'. Understandably road safety could not escape budget cuts: this following question was asked in order to begin to ascertain the extent of budget reductions.

1. Compared to previous years, what is the change in your capital road safety budget?



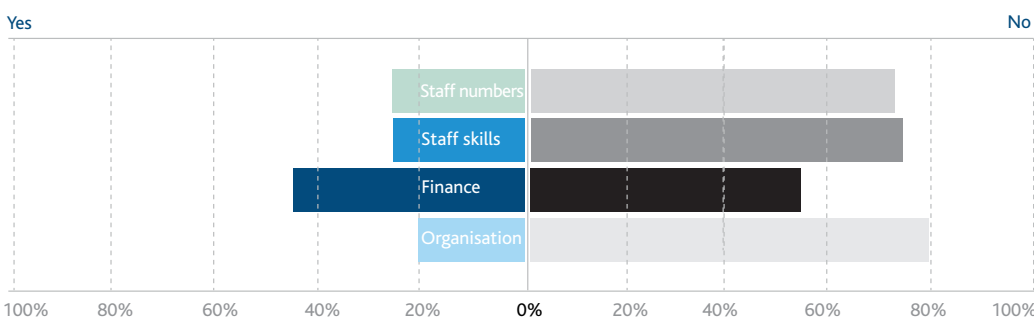
2. Compared to previous years, what is the change in your revenue road safety budget?



Both budget streams appear to have been hardest hit in the year 2011/2012. However it is worth bearing in mind that this is a year by year comparison, therefore some authorities may have seen their budgets becoming smaller each year. For example one in five authorities had their 2010/2011 budget reduced by up to a quarter. These same authorities faced the same reductions in 2011/2012, further reducing their budgets.

IMPACTS

3. Do any of the following factors put your statutory duty to promote road safety at risk?



The 1988 Road Traffic Act put a statutory duty on local authorities to promote road safety, to investigate any accidents which occurred on their roads and take steps to prevent further accidents.

SECTION 39 (ROAD TRAFFIC ACT, 1988)**(2) Each relevant authority -**

(a) if it is a local authority, must prepare and carry out a programme of measures designed to promote road safety, or

(b) if it is Transport for London, may prepare and carry out such a programme, - and may contribute towards the cost of measures for promoting road safety taken by other authorities or bodies.

(3) Each relevant authority

(a) must carry out studies into accidents arising out of the use of vehicles

(i) if it is a local authority, on roads or parts of roads, other than GLA roads or roads for which the Secretary of state is highway authority (in Scotland, roads authority) within their area or

(ii) if it is Transport for London, on GLA roads or parts of GLA roads,

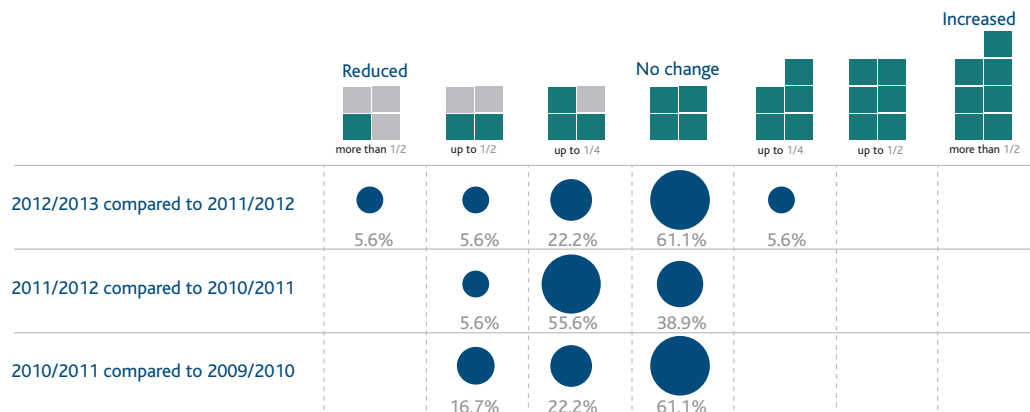
(b) must, in the light of those studies, take such measures as appear to the authority to be appropriate to prevent such accidents, including the dissemination of information and advice relating to the use of roads, the giving of practical training to road users or any class or description of road users, the construction, improvement, maintenance or repair of roads for the maintenance of which they are responsible and other measures taken in the exercise of their powers for controlling, protecting or assisting the movement of traffic on roads, and

(c) in constructing new roads, must take such measures as appear to the authority to be appropriate to reduce the possibilities of such accidents when the roads come into use.

This question was asked as research for the second *Tackling the Deficit* report found that many local authorities were concerned about the loss of staff and, in some cases in particular, the loss of experienced staff. It was thought that this, coupled with the financial situation and internal reshuffling of responsibilities, might jeopardise local road safety.

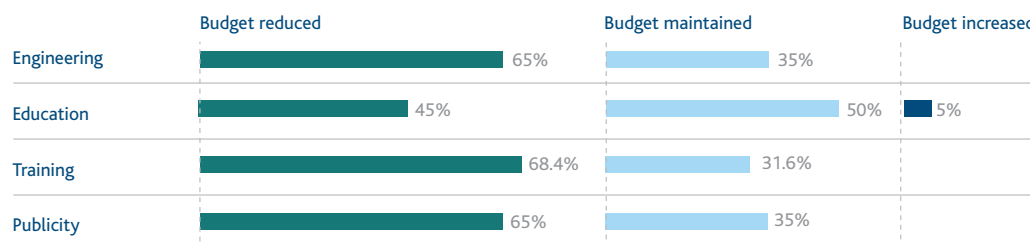
These responses show, perhaps unsurprisingly, that the financial situation is causing most concern in terms of fulfilling the statutory duty. In addition to the overall patterns illustrated in the graph, when analysed individually the survey responses show that half of the respondents answered 'yes' to at least one factor in the above question, indicating that half thought at least one factor was putting their statutory duty at risk. It is not an ideal situation when any local authority gives a positive answer to any section of this question. However the current climate is evidently not ideal. It will be important to keep an eye on how local authorities respond to changes and ensure they maintain their responsibility.

4. Compared to previous years, what is the change in number of road safety staff?

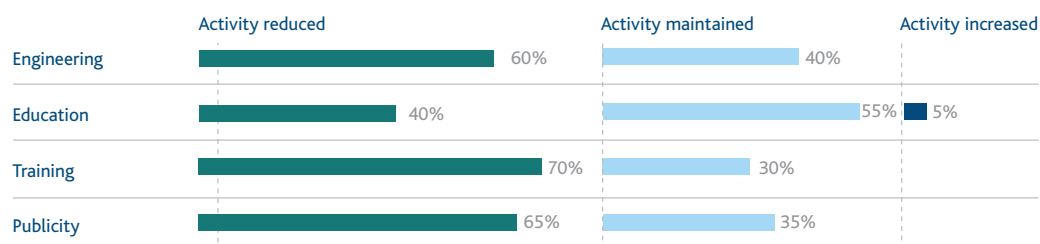


Similarly to budget reductions, 2011/2012 appears to be the most difficult year, though one local authority stated that their staff numbers had reduced by up to a quarter for all three years running. Another showed reductions of up to a half in both 2010/2011 and 2011/2012.

5. Compared to this time last year, which areas have been most affected in terms of budget?



6. Compared to this time last year, which areas of activity have been most affected in terms of output?



The two questions above were asked to ascertain what changes were going on in which areas, and to discover if any local authorities were managing to maintain output while budgets were reducing. When asked for further details, a quarter of respondents specified reductions or complete cuts to programmes focusing on the safety of children and young people, such as education in schools or school crossing patrols. Engineering schemes have also been badly affected with one local authority reporting a reduction from £2 million to £200,000 in this area.

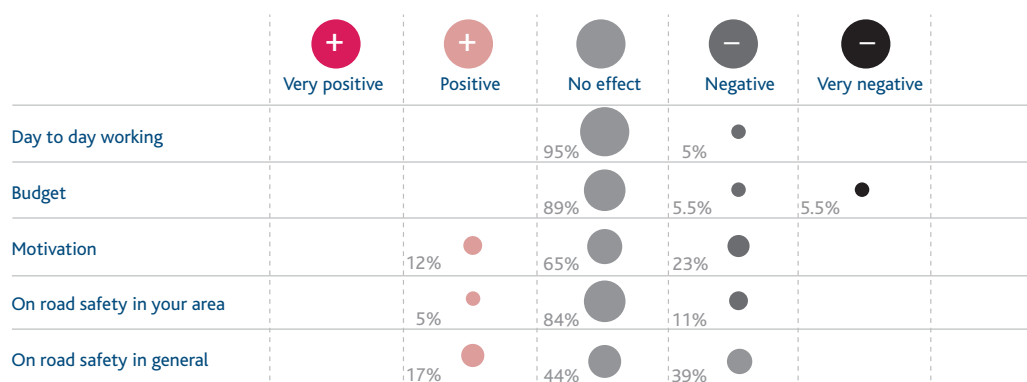
Some respondents reported having maintained budgets but reduced output in certain areas, and others had managed to maintain output while their budgets were reduced. One such example is explained:

'Because of the loss of a Road Safety Officer, we restructured our target areas and rather than delivering road safety to any school who asked for it, we drew up a priority list based on the schools within an area that suffer the greatest child KSIs (killed and seriously injured), those within, those within the top 14 deprived wards and all high schools. This approach has for the past year meant we could maintain a similar service to previous years, however, this is not sustainable as we move forward.' (PACTS survey, 2012)

By focusing on priority areas, this local authority was able to continue providing road safety education in schools. Analysis and identification of the main concerns may allow a more targeted, less costly approach.

WAYS OF WORKING

7. What effect has the Strategic Framework for Road Safety had on road safety output?

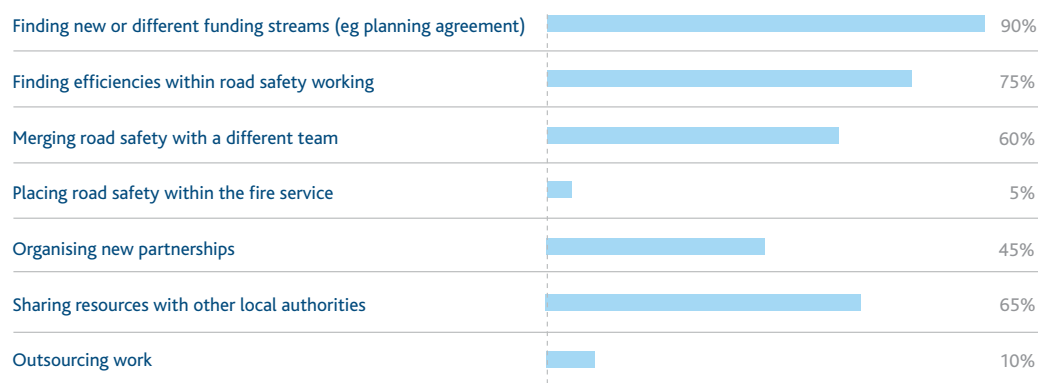


In the previous two *Tackling the Deficit* reports, the road safety community was awaiting the publication of a new strategy for road safety. It was hoped that it would be similar to the 2009 consultation *A Safer Way*. However the strategic framework was disappointing – a critique is available on the PACTS website (PACTS, 2011b).

The response regarding day to day working may have been expected, as the strategic framework mainly consists of actions for central government. It is disappointing however that the strategy did not have a positive effect on budgets. One finding in the second *Tackling the Deficit* report was that local authorities were looking to the strategic framework to provide a strong vision for road safety. Road safety officers expressed the opinion that having casualty reduction targets would be proof of the importance of road safety to central government, and enable them to negotiate better budgets from the non-ring-fenced local authority funds. Therefore, with the majority of respondents reporting that the strategic framework has not helped them to retain their budgets, and a minority even reporting a negative effect, one purpose of the document was not achieved. It did not fully convince that the government considered road safety to be a priority.

The most telling result from this question is the unfavourable response regarding the effect of the strategic framework on road safety in general. Five respondents in six thought the framework had no effect or a negative effect on road safety in general.

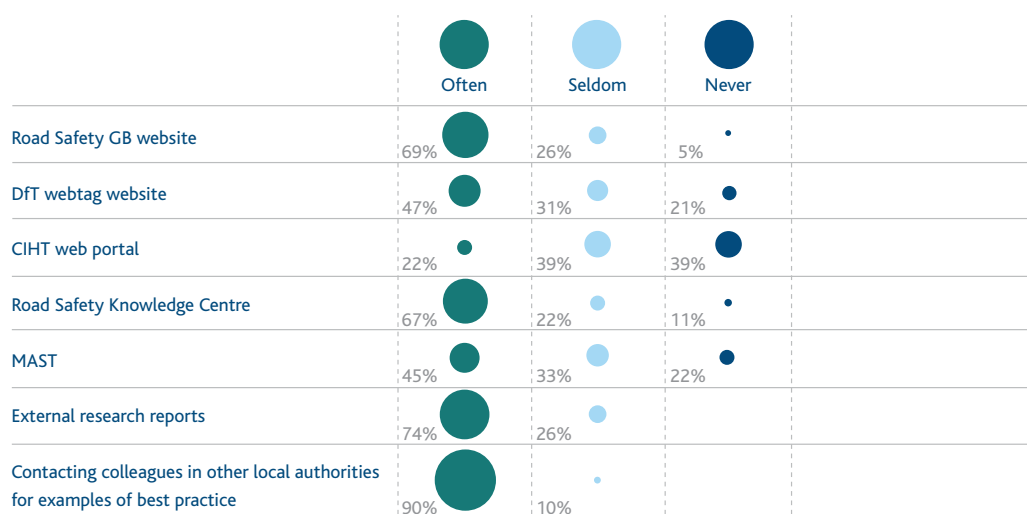
8. Has your local authority undertaken or does it intend to undertake any of the following?



The results to this question are encouraging. They indicate that directions which have long been promoted, such as working with colleagues in public health, are being moved towards at a local level. These connections will be particularly important as public health becomes more localised and whilst working towards the road safety indicators in *A public health outcomes framework for England, 2013 – 2016* (Department of Health, 2012).

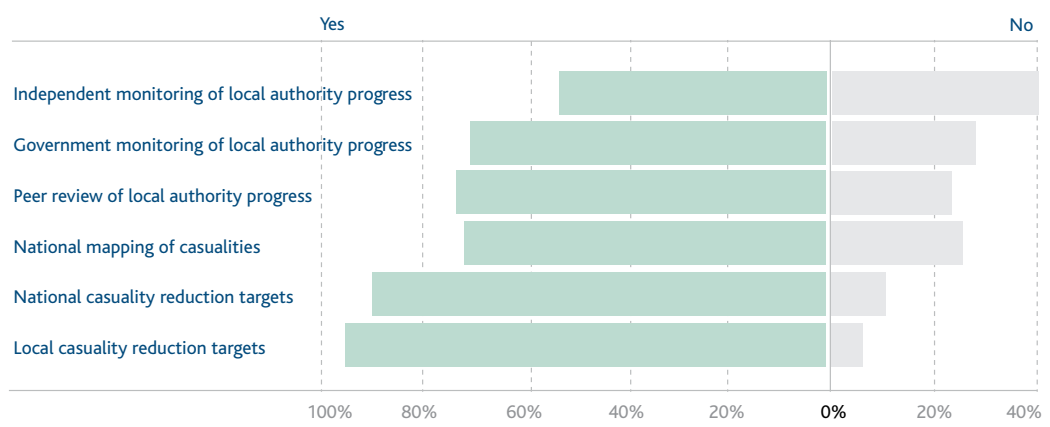
The elements in this question will require follow up. For example, the majority of respondents indicate that they have undertaken or intend to undertake finding new or different funding streams. The achievements of this should be monitored and experience shared, not just successes but also failures. Local authorities will need to share their experience as well as resources with others in order to gain efficiencies.

9. Which of the following resources are most often used within your directorate?



This question was asked to determine which resources were currently most useful to local authorities. The strong response to 'contacting colleagues in other local authorities' demonstrates the philosophy of sharing best practice and learning from the experience of others which has been present in road safety for a long time. The first *Tackling the Deficit* report argued that road safety was already a 'Big Society', with a coordinated approach involving central and local government, statutory bodies such as the police and emergency services, professional organisations, academic institutions and civil society. The responses to this question show that this peer teamwork is still going strong. However the aspect of 'vertical' teamwork may no longer be as strong as 'horizontal'. Perhaps central government is no longer seen as being an important member of the team. Is it able to regain its position as a visionary leader, on whose aims local authorities can focus their efforts?

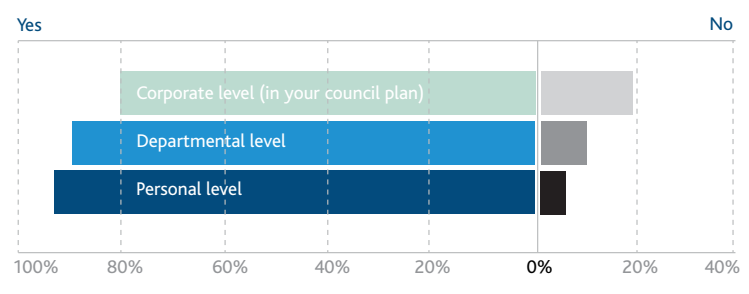
10. Which of the following measures would assist in road safety monitoring?



There is still a role for government to play in monitoring, as demonstrated by the responses to this question. Further comments on this question revealed that the significance of national targets lies in incentivising local target setting and action, in turn raising the morale of practitioners who feel their work is valued. It is interesting to note that peer reviewing of local authority progress was slightly more popular than government monitoring.

THE FUTURE

11. Is road safety a priority in your local authority?



The responses to this question reassure that road safety remains a priority in those local authorities who responded to the survey. As well as keeping in mind that this may not be the case in every authority in the country, it may also be that road safety continues to be a priority in these local authorities as it has always been. However without national drive this momentum may reach a plateau.

Although the positive results could be seen as a sign that local road safety can thrive without strong national leadership, this goes against global evidence, and a caution against complacency is appropriate at this point.

12. What is the future for road safety in your area?

'Currently we are in make do and mend mode.'(PACTS survey, 2012)

Responses to this question were mainly optimistic. The general feeling appears to be that the low point has been reached, and though there will still be hard times ahead, road safety will survive if it has strong partnerships and political support. Local authorities are counting their losses and are willing to make the best of what they've got, though they need support and recognition in order to do this. One local authority did express a more pessimistic outlook:

'The apparent lack of interest in road safety per se by Central Government appears to be filtering down to local government elected members. Success in terms of casualty reduction in recent years appears to have been rewarded with reductions in budgets and job losses. Revenue budgets are at an all-time low and redundancies are inevitable with the consequence of a loss of the most experienced staff.' (PACTS survey, 2012)

Recognition and encouragement are two important jobs for a government which does not intend to give more concrete leadership. This government needs to prove that road safety is a priority. This will give local authorities the confidence to strive to improve it, and to explore new ways of working. One local authority stated:

'We are now wedded to sustainable travel and a key purpose of road safety is to help facilitate modal transfer and carbon reduction. We will do that by making people safer – and feeling safer – so there should be no reduction in the integrity of our core work but its purpose will be softened and broadened away from casualty reduction for its own sake.' (PACTS survey, 2012)

Another showed enthusiasm for an integrated approach, an appropriate move in times of austerity where economies of scale could be achieved by combining jobs such as addressing any specific accident issues at the same time as resurfacing roads.

'Road safety here is integral to the implementation of highway improvements and new installations, and the future is to develop this further and to have road safety as not just an 'add on'. Our future improvements would be to extend this to other departments such as education, housing etc. linked through the early intervention programme.' (PACTS survey, 2012)

13. What is the most important step the government could take to improve road safety?

Nearly half of the responses to this open ended question included the need for government to visibly commit to road safety by offering leadership.

'... make it clearer that road safety is everyone's responsibility, but leadership is from central government.'

'Show a stronger commitment to road safety.'

'Promote road safety on a national basis.'

'A clear statement of intent...'

'... take a national lead...'
(PACTS survey, 2012)

'The government would do well to extend its business support to road casualty reduction not to improve road casualty reductions per se, but to facilitate benchmarking and improved processes and outcomes. This would acknowledge that the UK has a mature road safety capability that is capable of addressing future 'technical' problems but that the performance of each individual authority could still be improved – and that improvement may well rest in the sharing of knowledge and expertise with peers'. (PACTS survey, 2012)

Others highlighted the importance of a joined up approach from government.

'Show a stronger commitment to road safety including a joined up message rather than the confused or even detrimental message currently given.'

'Highlight the potential for joined up thinking with health improvement agendas'

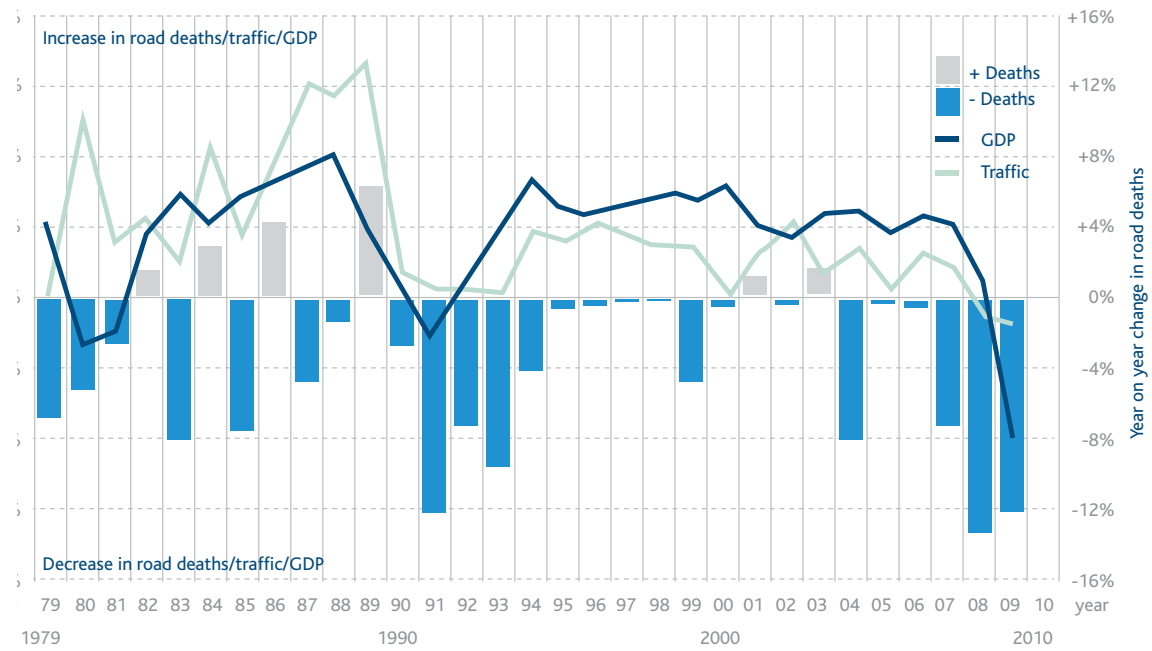
'Government has always expected partnership and non-silo working for local authorities and it would seem that it would be appropriate for central government to do the same. A more joined up approach with Health, Education and the Home Office for example would make a considerable impact in the number of casualties.' (PACTS survey, 2012)

5 IMPLICATIONS AND MOVING FORWARD

THE SHORT TERM FUTURE

The title of the report being *Tackling the Deficit*, this section will first consider the economic situation. In the strategic framework the DfT produced a diagram illustrating the yearly changes in road deaths, traffic and Gross Domestic Product (GDP) over the previous 30 years. It shows that there were greater reductions in deaths during periods of economic downturn.

Year on year change in road deaths, traffic and GDP 1979 - 2009 (DfT 2011c)



These trends bring attention to the link between the three factors, and highlight the risk of stagnation in road death reduction or even an increase as GDP begins to grow. This is a possibility that the government and the wider road safety community need to be aware of so that preventative measures can be taken. This potential threat, and other new challenges arising such as an ageing population, increasing cycling injuries and the advantages and disadvantages of new technologies, need to be addressed before they become real problems. Despite road safety being a national success story, there are still improvements to be made.

Local authorities are very much part of this national success, having contributed to it over many years and being motivated to continue to do so. They are ready to work hard to overcome the current financial challenges and adapt to organisational changes, but they do still need leadership and recognition from central government. Not only will this make their job easier, but help retain a vital element of job satisfaction. One respondent to the survey talked about the morale of practitioners and the importance of feeling their work is valued. Local authorities are willing to play their part, but they want to know that they are contributing to a national priority.

'Road safety is an area where localism has supported and extended the aspirations of central government.' (PACTS, 2010)

Therefore to move forward the government needs to find a meaningful way to give leadership, vision and encouragement, within their agenda of decentralisation and localism. If national targets are definitely off the table as long as this government are in power, ministers need to find a different way of expressing their vision and showing the road safety community what success will look like. From the negative response to the strategic framework in the survey, it can be assumed that practitioners do not think the following statement from the government is sufficiently ambitious:

'Our long term vision is to ensure that Britain remains a world leader on road safety' (DfT, 2011b). A long term vision for road safety is discussed further in the next section.

Central government could show leadership and give encouragement in a number of ways. Certain events could be used as platforms, such as the Road Safety Day which was announced in the strategic framework, or the day on which *Reported Road Casualties Great Britain* is published. This day could be used to raise public awareness and help to generate a feeling of unacceptability towards road casualties, as well as celebrate the achievements of local authorities who performed well. In December 2011, a team of BBC reporters shadowed London ambulance paramedics to get an insight into a typical day of incidents on the roads, posting comments on Twitter. This was a good way to bring the statistics to life for members of the public who may not derive much meaning from simply being told the number of people who were seriously injured last year. The following are some comments from Twitter on this day:

Following #crash24, as a London cyclist commuter I'm starting to think I got pretty lucky.

Watched #crash24 coverage today - such an insight into the life of a paramedic. Can the BBC do one in a rural/town mix?

Been following #crash24 coverage all day, all I can say is a heartfelt thanks to the paramedics.

Collisions in the capital are headline news as #Crash24 trends on twitter. (BBC, 2011)

Another example of a media event is the annual *European Night Without Accident* which focuses on young people and drink and drug driving (European Commission, 2010). As has been demonstrated by the Times campaign on cycle safety, a media campaign can attract the public's attention and force discussions at a high level.

Another opportunity for the government to show leadership and give encouragement is the forthcoming local authority comparison website. This website, commissioned by the DfT, should be carefully composed so that the tone is not one of naming and shaming.

'A new website for the comparison of local performance information: This will allow local citizens to easily compare the performance of their area, on road safety, against other similar areas and to compare improvement rates.' (DfT, 2011b)

The website should be a tool for local residents to engage with their council. As well as taking careful consideration in how it is composed, the DfT should monitor use of the website to keep track of who uses it and for what purpose.

Government should avoid pointing the finger at certain local authorities, recognising that responsibility for road safety is shared between central and local government, police, manufacturers, emergency services, engineers and road users.

THE LONG TERM FUTURE

Now that stakeholders are beginning to find their feet again in the new context that the Government has created, it is time to look beyond the immediate to take a longer-term view of safety. At the PACTS March 2012 conference *Aiming for Zero* this idea was developed, and the following declaration emerged from the day's discussions.

This conference acknowledges the significant falls in death and injury on Great Britain's roads that have been achieved since 1987. It further recognises the contribution that a combination of target-setting and an overriding strategy and action plan has made to the achievement of these reductions.

However, it also notes the continuing pain and suffering that are caused by the current levels of road casualties. It believes that even these lower levels are no longer acceptable to citizens.

It notes the progress towards the elimination of deaths that has been achieved through the adoption of a safe systems approach in the Swedish Vision Zero and the Dutch Sustainable Safety. It believes that Great Britain's approach to road safety over the next decade needs to be informed by a similar ethical approach. Where road deaths are preventable and where the means to prevent them is identified and cost-effective where this is measurable, society has a moral and economic responsibility to act for the public benefit. Good safety management places an obligation on those in authority to manage risks and prevent needless incidents and casualties. It also places a responsibility on those using a network to comply with the law and not to import risk into the system.

It therefore calls on Her Majesty's Government to acknowledge its responsibility to minimise risk in the road transport system and to join with road safety professionals, researchers and road users, to develop a British version of Vision Zero

based on the principles above. In measuring progress, it notes the target set by the European Union to halve road deaths by 2020. It believes that this provides a suitable benchmark against which to measure progress.

PACTS has begun to consider the elements that a British vision for better road safety should be centred on. The following concepts are the ones we think should underpin the vision, and should be a starting place for a conversation between stakeholders on the aspirations for road safety in the UK.

- The safe systems approach, where the system is designed so that if human error occurs, it does not result in death or serious injury.
- The belief that the majority of road deaths are preventable and therefore unacceptable.
- A corresponding 'safe culture' approach, where all road users are encouraged by a range of measures – not only system design, but also legal penalties and marketing campaigns – to take their personal responsibility for better road safety much more seriously.
- Risk on the roads should be as low as reasonably practicable, for whichever mode an individual chooses to use.
- The factors contributing to individual road collisions which resulted in a fatality or serious injury should be investigated. Where the prevention of future collisions due to these factors – whether system failure and/or user behaviour - is identifiable and cost-effective where measurable, action should be taken to do so.

These elements would not build a vision identical to the Swedish vision, whose aim is to completely eradicate any road death or serious injury. PACTS believes that British culture does not advocate safety at any cost. In aiming for absolute zero, there is the risk of unintentionally limiting activities which are statistically statistically more dangerous but are beneficial for other policy outcomes: cycling, walking and motorcycling. A British vision should encompass the feeling of freedom of choice. Therefore risk needs to be as low as reasonably practicable for whichever mode people chose to use. Risk should not be a deciding factor in an individual's mode choice.

Developing such a vision for British road safety would give a common and ambitious goal at which the entire road safety community could aim. It would give local authorities motivation and show that road safety is highly valued, and government could then focus on how they can support stakeholders in achieving this goal.

6 CONCLUSIONS

The three *Tackling the Deficit* reports have given a snapshot insight into the state of local road safety. In order to continue monitoring road safety to ensure it does not falter following the recession PACTS would like to see the approach of this series further developed into an annual independent health check. This would build on the outcomes framework recommended in the *Strategic Framework for Road Safety*. As well as including detailed data and local performance monitoring, it would monitor activities and the perceptions of professionals, and share experience and best practice.

This year's survey showed that amongst those local authorities who responded, the low point seems to have been reached in terms of budget cuts and reorganisation. It is recognised that conditions in the immediate future will continue to be tough, but authorities are beginning to take stock of their losses and focus on how to move forward in fulfilling their statutory duty with the resources that they have. This is not to suggest that local authorities are entirely happy with their position.

The government could have made things easier for local road safety. The strategic framework was a missed opportunity to push forward the road safety agenda, and to reassure the road safety community and the wider general public of its importance. The survey showed that the strategic framework has had a negative or no effect on road safety output, locally and nationally. This should be of concern to the government. It could rectify this error by developing a vision for road safety with stakeholders, and using platforms already in place to draw attention to road safety, its achievements and the work still to be done.

While many local authorities may be coping with the budget reductions and hands-off approach of the government, there are still more challenges to overcome. As the economy picks up it is likely that casualties will rise and the government will be under scrutiny, especially as it is committed to the outcomes framework. In commissioning a local authority comparison site, central government is accepting a certain level of engagement with local authorities. It is important that this engagement is positive and supportive, rather than naming and shaming. There is still an important place for government on the road safety team, but it needs to go further in order to fulfil its role and win back the respect of its teammates.

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