

## Transport Select Committee Ideas for future inquiries, March 2013



Submission by: **Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety (PACTS)**

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### About PACTS

The Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety (PACTS) is a registered charity and an associate Parliamentary Group. Its charitable objective is "**To protect human life through the promotion of transport safety for the public benefit**". Its aim is to advise and inform members of the House of Commons and of the House of Lords on air, rail and road safety issues.

### Introduction

PACTS welcomes the Transport Committee's invitation (1 March 2013) to suggest subjects for future inquiries for the Committee to undertake. PACTS would like to propose the following.

### Suggested subjects

#### 1. Designing safer cars for the future

Modern cars offer substantially greater protection to their occupants than those of ten years ago and more. The European new car assessment programme (Euro NCAP), under which cars are awarded 1-5 stars for occupant and pedestrian safety, has helped to drive up standards. The UK was a leading player in the development of Euro NCAP. However, since 2010, the UK's input has been scaled back and the opportunity to influence the design standards reduced. This is regrettable because: it is claimed that some manufacturers are "designing to the test" rather than designing to maximise safety; the standards of protection for pedestrians lag behind those for occupants; and there are a range of innovative technologies that offer potential benefits but need to be carefully considered. In addition, self-drive cars (the Google car in the US and alternative technologies in Oxford, UK) may provide potential for dramatic improvements in terms of safety, the environment and efficiency of road use. The Committee could investigate these opportunities and whether the Government (DfT and Department of BIS) are planning for them and playing an appropriate role in their development.

#### 2. Road casualty statistics – fit for purpose?

In its 2008 report, *Ending the scandal of complacency: road safety beyond 2010*,<sup>1</sup> the Transport Committee questioned the robustness of the casualty statistics reported by the DfT (based on Police records). The Committee invited the UK Statistics Authority to investigate. As a result, the DfT made a number of significant changes.

Fundamental questions remain, however, about whether the reported statistics meaningfully reflect the real world. The National Travel Survey shows that the number of casualties is more than three times that recorded by the police. This suggests scope for substantial variability from year to year in reporting rates. In addition, as the number of

deaths has dramatically declined, the policy focus has moved to trends in serious injuries. Yet this category is very broad and may also be giving a misleading image of real world events. Other countries, such as the Netherlands, are concerned and are proposing changes.

The UK Statistics Authority is now conducting a follow up study. This gives the Committee an opportunity to question stakeholders, safety experts, UKSA and DfT on the adequacy of the statistics, the real world trends and whether the DfT's casualty statistics are now fit for purpose.

### **3. Accidents at level crossings**

Britain's railways have a generally good safety record. Only one rail passenger (at Grayrigg) has died on board a train as a result of a train accident since the Potter's Bar accident in 2002.<sup>2</sup> Fatal accidents at level crossings, however, continue to occur and remain a serious concern, in the UK and across Europe. There are between 7,500 and 8,000 level crossings in Great Britain. Level crossings represent the largest single risk of catastrophic train accident on Britain's rail network. In 2012, six people died at level crossing accidents (three in motor vehicles and three pedestrians). This excludes deaths due to trespass or suicide.<sup>3</sup>

Safety at level crossings is a complex matter and requires coordinated action from Network Rail, ORR, TOCs, the highway authorities, the local police, British Transport Police and other agencies. Network Rail has a programme of safety measures. In addition to traditional treatments (underpasses and overbridges), new technologies and safety management techniques are being developed.

The law governing level crossings is considered outdated and in need of reform. The Law Commission has consulted<sup>4</sup> and, according to its website, "We are drafting instructions to Parliamentary Counsel for work on our draft Bill and expect to report our recommendations in the first quarter of 2013."

The Transport Committee might wish to investigate whether level crossing safety is receiving the attention and urgency that it warrants from all agencies and whether there is scope for improvement. An inquiry would also highlight the importance of this issue.

PACTS would be happy to further discuss or develop these ideas with the Committee.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.rssb.co.uk/RGS/Documents/Overview%20of%20safety%20performance%20for%202012.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.rssb.co.uk/RGS/Documents/Overview%20of%20safety%20performance%20for%202012.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [http://lawcommission.justice.gov.uk/docs/cp194\\_Level\\_Crossings\\_Consultation.pdf](http://lawcommission.justice.gov.uk/docs/cp194_Level_Crossings_Consultation.pdf)