

Road safety vision

The Strategic Framework for Road Safety has a long-term vision of ensuring that Britain remains a world leader in road safety. It commits the Government to ensuring that the existing downward casualty trend is maintained and that the high risk experienced by some groups (e.g. cyclists and children in deprived areas) is reduced more quickly.

In the preamble to the report the Secretary of State recognises both the human and economic burden associated with road accidents and states that the UK will do all it can to avoid complacency. The Government's belief in localism comes across very clearly and it is stated that the document aims to provide clarity to stakeholders on their roles and responsibilities.

How the strategy was formed

The strategy is built on the Coalition's five key principles, which can be summarised as:

- A commitment to **ending decision making that is imposed from above** which assumes one size fits all;
- **Freeing local authorities from central government control** to let them determine their own solutions as set out in the spending review;
- **Improving transparency** by ensuring information is made available to enable local citizens to get more involved in decisions and hold local service providers to account;
- **Focusing on capability building and empowerment**, including providing people with the powers, tools and funding flexibility to deliver locally; and
- **Restoring the public finances** and returning the economy to stable and secure economic growth.

Key road safety themes

The key road safety themes identified in the strategy document are:

- **Making it easier for road users to do the right thing** and going with the grain of human behaviour;
- **Better education** for children, learner and inexperienced drivers;
- **Remedial education** for those who make mistakes and for low level offences where this is more effective than financial penalties and penalty points;

- **Tougher enforcement for the small minority of motorists** who deliberately chose to drive dangerously and extending this approach to cover all dangerous and careless offences, rather than just focusing on speeding;
- Taking action based on **cost benefit analysis**;
- More **local and community decision making** as a result of decentralisation and providing information to citizens to enable them to challenge priorities; and
- **Supporting and building capability** by working with the road safety community on better tools to support the road safety profession.

Main areas of Government responsibility

The framework document highlighted a number of key areas of responsibility for Central Government. These are to:

- Provide leadership nationally;
- Set the legal and regulatory framework for road safety;
- Negotiate, agree and implement international (including European Union) standards, including for vehicles;
- Manage the strategic road network;
- Set national standards for safe and responsible driving, and provide national services, such as driving tests, licensing and vehicle checks;
- Provide public information and educational materials, such as the Highway Code; and
- Undertake and share research, good practice and data with professionals, local bodies and the public.

Targets

The document clearly states that the Government does not believe that central persuasion is needed for road safety to remain a priority in the UK, which is why no road safety targets *per se* are included within the strategy. The expectation is that central and local government will continue to prioritise road safety and that Central Government should be judged on the actions committed in the Road Safety Action Plan ([See: Annex A, p.69](#)) and the Road Safety Outcomes Framework ([See: Annex B, p.72](#)).

It is suggested that road casualty projections indicate that fatalities could fall around 37% to 1,770 by 2020 and from 2020, with improvements in local authority performance, it is expected that deaths could reduce by 57% to around 1,200, with KSIs falling. It is also suggested that KSIs could be 14% lower than observed (3,500 KSI casualties per year) if lower performing authorities had the same performance of those at the median point, illustrating the importance of Central Governments continuing role in sharing best practice and supporting local authority delivery.

Actions for Government

The document sets out the key actions for Central Government in its Road Safety Action Plan. The details of this are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1: Actions for Government

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|---|
| Empowering local citizens and service providers |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralising funding and removing targets |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring local authorities can make full use of their powers (e.g. setting speed limits and speed enforcement) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Updating speed guidance |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting the provision of information to the public on comparative performance etc |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making links with other local agendas (e.g. public health and sustainable travel) |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supporting the development of better tools for road safety performance |
| Education – developing skills and attitudes |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing a new post test vocational qualification with trainers, insurers (to ensure market confidence in new qualification) and young drivers to be an effective successor to PassPlus |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing more targeted and effective marketing building on the best behavioural science |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improving initial training and providing better consumer information about instructors |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing the range of educational courses offered instead of fixed penalty notices to encourage safer and more responsible driving behaviour |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing courses the court can offer instead of losing licence where it is a more effective intervention |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reforming the regime for re-testing disqualified drivers |
| Targeted enforcement and sanctions |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introducing a fixed penalty notice for careless driving |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increasing the level of fixed penalty notices for traffic offences to bring the £60 into line with other fixed penalty notices. Consider changing the fixed penalty notice for the uninsured. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Making full use of existing powers to seize vehicles through working with the police and within Government on the procedures. |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • On drink driving: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Removing the option for drivers who fail an evidential breath test by 40% or less to request a blood or urine test; ○ Mandating the drink drive rehabilitation courses for disqualified drink drivers; ○ Working to type-approve portable evidential digital breathalysers to make it possible for the police to get the evidence at the roadside and other locations; ○ Getting drug screening authorised for use in police stations and then on the road side; ○ Considering a new drug driving offence if the current offence of driving while impaired cannot be made to work more effectively and the research on impairment and technology on detection allows this; and ○ Working towards tightening enforcement against vehicles, where it is not possible to identify or trace the driver. Particularly for foreign vehicles. Innovative ways to recover unpaid fines will be looked. There will also be a review of how to enforce against vehicles where it is not possible to identify the driver |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reducing uninsured driving through improving enforcement against unlicensed vehicles |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing an economic toolkit and guidance to local authorities to help them take account of the same range of factors when setting local speed limits |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HA to continue to work towards a more reliable and safe strategic road network |

DfT's Strategic Framework for Road Safety

RAC Foundation Critique

Road Safety vision

The Government's vision for road safety vision is appropriate and one which the Foundation can support. However the Foundation does not necessarily agree with the way in which the Government intends to deliver on this vision.

Government positioning

There is a great deal in the Strategic Framework that can be welcomed by the Foundation. Throughout the document the economic impacts of road casualties are strongly emphasised. It is clearly stated that high value for money measures are possible and that robust analysis is central for achieving this outcome. Accidents on the road network are also explicitly described as an avoidable cost rather than an inevitable part of the road network. There is recognition of the disproportionate effect of road collisions on the young, along with an appreciation of the impact of road collisions on the general operation of the road network, particularly its resilience. The document explicitly states that the UK should avoid complacency, but there is some doubt whether the recommendations and actions outlined in the strategic framework will ensure the continued improvements needed.

National Government's stated role is to provide leadership in road safety, deliver better driving standards and testing, enforcement, education and managing the strategic road infrastructure. These roles are to be supported by research and research collation along with the provision of public information to support local delivery. This provides a clear mandate and a reasonably complete list for the areas of National Government responsibility. What is missing is a clearer directive on strategy at the local level, which may well hinder the delivery of road safety in the local authority setting. It is also interesting that the document lists past trends and the factors that have contributed to the considerable reduction in deaths – safer vehicles, road engineering and reductions in speeding – which are subjects that are only mentioned in passing by the Framework document.

Localism

The document emphasises the importance of localism to the coalition Government as a whole and the road safety strategy in particular. In the Foreword the Secretary of State says that the framework aims to provide the freedom for local decisions to be made that best suit communities. He also states that the framework aims to provide clarity to stakeholders on their role and responsibilities and in particular mentions the importance of providing transparency of information at the local level. The document clearly provides the message that central Government believes road

safety to be an important issue, but initiatives need to be set in the local context and delivered within resource constraints.

It is positive that National Government has reaffirmed their commitment to road safety and will endeavour to provide the tools needed at a local level, but the lack of financial resources and guiding framework for implementation of road safety at this level is a concern. The Strategic Framework essentially sets out National Government's action plan and priorities for a non-specific period of time (latest deadline included is 2015). Whilst the document provides some general strategic pointers for local level decisions, such as emphasising the importance of targeting at risk groups through education and enforcement, there is no real basis upon which local authorities can build.

The framework emphasises the importance of providing more public information on road safety performance which can be used for comparative analysis, making links with other agendas (e.g. health and sustainability) as well as providing better tools for road safety professionals. These are all important components of delivering successful 'localism' and the Foundation will watch the development of these initiatives with interest.

Enforcement

The Governments attention on enforcement in the Strategic Framework is a welcome focus, although without adequate resources being devoted to this activity there is a risk that the benefits of the strategy will not be realised. As police resources are a local decision, which are under significant pressure with numerous competing demands, it is not possible to know to what extent the aims of the strategy will be carried forward. Given that enforcement is one of two key planks of the National strategy this is cause for concern.

The focus on tackling 'high end' offenders is a welcome approach which was started by the previous Government through discussions on graduated fixed penalty notices. It is also probably wise, from a public perception perspective, that a wider focus on 'anti-social' driving behaviour is taken, but it will still remain important for speed related issues to be addressed fully. It is also positive to see that the Government intends to undertake a speed review to provide advice and guidance to local authorities on how best to set limits in a consistent manner.

Increasing penalty charge notices to bring them in line with other similar penalties is a development that the Foundation supports, whereas the benefits of introducing fixed penalty notices for careless driving is less clear cut. This move appears to have been well received by many sections of the road safety community, but there are unresolved issues surrounding how 'careless driving' should be defined and appealed. Having the appropriate resources to enforce against this type of behaviour is also another consideration. Mobile phone use and seatbelt penalty charges are a case in point where it has been difficult for Police officers to enforce this activity given limited resources.

The action proposed against drink and drug drivers are a positive development, but there are certainly questions around whether the Government has gone far enough in this particular field. Undoubtedly closing the loop holes that exist and making it easier for police officers to convict at the scene will help.

The intention to work towards making drug driving as socially unacceptable as drink driving and increasing the likelihood of detection is an important development. However, in focusing on the high end offenders (i.e. drug users and drinkers significantly over the limit), there remains a risk that the remainder of the population might feel that their behaviour will go unchecked. The government's decision not to reduce the BAC limit from 80mg/100ml to the common European level of 50mg/100ml was a missed opportunity, especially given the increased level of impairment which occurs between these two limits. Focusing on and targeting the high risk offenders is undoubtedly one of the most cost effective approaches, but there are questions left unanswered about what effect this approach will have on the attitudes of the law abiding majority over time.

Education

The Government's approach to education is generally a good one which the Foundation endorses. The coalition's decision to go 'with the grain of human behaviour' is a less confrontational approach than the one taken by the previous Government and may well help secure greater public support for the issues that need to be addressed. Targeted and effective marketing will also make up an important part of the framework.

Where formal education and testing is concerned the Government's intention to improve initial training is a good one as is the development of a new post-test vocational qualification (post Pass Plus). The evidence demonstrates that experience is more important than age in determining accident causation, which is why developing a post-test qualification with advice from trainers, insurers and young drivers based on the best available evidence is likely to be important in delivering the twin benefits of reduced casualties amongst the young and reduced insurance claims and insurance premiums.

Remedial education linked with offences has been extremely effective at reducing reoffending and changing behaviours. It is good to see that is being developed further in the framework. What is missing however is a more coherent approach to lifelong learning, as based on the current programme of activity the only educational intervention drivers will experience will be any remedial education course they are sent on as a result of minor offences. Given the practical level of detection possible for these types of minor offences this will leave a significant number of people who would benefit from courses without access. The approach suggested may be the best way to spend limited resources and target the education available, but it would have been good for the idea of lifelong learning to have been further explored within the framework. Older drivers are only mentioned briefly in the report, with a commitment to work with voluntary groups to develop appropriate education programmes. This development might be helpful, but on its own it is unlikely to address the significant and growing older driver issue.

Targets

There are no formal targets included in the Road Safety Framework as the Government states that they does not believe central persuasion is needed to deliver road safety improvements.

It is their expectation that both central and local government will continue prioritising road safety in any case. The document suggests that Central Government should be judged by actions committed in the road safety action plan (up until 2015) and the road safety outcomes framework, which provides a list of indicators which can be used at the local or national level. Some projections of potential improvements by 2020 and 2030 are included in the strategy (See summary p.1-3 of this document), but it is explicitly stated that these are illustrative of what can be achieved rather than hard projections or targets.

Without any formal framework for road safety to operate within there is a danger, especially given how well the UK is doing with casualty reduction targets, that resources will not be prioritised to deliver road safety improvements. The 1988 Road Traffic Act, Section 39, puts a Statutory Duty on local authorities to undertake studies into road accidents, and to take steps both to reduce and prevent accidents, so it will not be possible for local authorities to cease all activity in the road safety field, but more direct requirements might help local authorities make the case for funds against other areas of spending. English roads are included as an indicator in the public health outcomes framework (Public health grant) and in the Local Transport White Paper. For the Local Sustainable Transport Fund safety is a key consideration for bids, but despite these levers it is likely that without a national target or imperative for road safety in particular, the level of improvements achieved over the past ten years may not be realised going forward.

Funding

The decision taken in the emergency budget to decentralise road safety funding has had a devastating impact on road safety practice (See: RAC Foundation and PACTS 2010 and 2011 reports on 'Tackling the Deficit') and there have been difficulties at the local level at identifying other sources of funding with which to carry out road safety activities. Going forwards it is still likely to be difficult for road safety initiatives to compete against other local authority resource needs, which emphasises the need for support resources, which can help road safety officers make the business case for funding.

The missing pieces

Despite there being much to agree with in the framework document there are a number of issues which are currently missing from the document, or are only mentioned in brief. Safer vehicles and road infrastructure are two such issues which require Central Government focus, but have only received a small mention in the strategy itself.

Vehicle technology and the forthcoming challenges such as weight differentials, in-car distractions and older female drivers are discussed briefly, but the overall

message coming out of the framework document is that the Government is keen to reduce the regulatory burden on business and hope to address these and other future concerns through working collaborative on research with vehicle manufacturers.

The importance of consumer information on vehicle safety (e.g. EuroNCAP) and technology (e.g. winter tyres) issues is stressed, but despite the fact that these initiatives will be delivered outside Government, there may well need to be some more direct Government involvement, which is not fully recognised.

The report gives some space to the importance of road engineering improvements as it notes the relevance of combining a systems approach (recognising that people make mistakes and build systems to this understanding) with the more traditional three E's (Education, Enforcement and Engineering) methodology. The paper also stresses the importance of taking a public health perspective (prevention, based on science and collaborative in nature) to road safety. With strategic roads the report notes that high value for money road safety interventions will be reflected in resource allocation decisions and given the difficulty of budget cuts road safety improvements are most likely to be made alongside other road improvements. This sole focus on the strategic road network does not provide an indication of how safer roads can and should be developed at a local level and it is not clear whether the intention is for the Highways Agency to act as a 'beacon' of good practice, or whether the toolkits due to be provided to local authorities will help appropriate local road improvements be developed. Given the Foundation has recently published work on this subject (See: RAC Foundation and Road Safety Foundation report 'Saving Lives, Saving Money') there is a need to watch how activity in this area develops to decide whether intervention will be necessary to ensure safe road infrastructure features more prominently on the agenda.

There were also a number of problems recognised by the framework where specific plans of action are not forthcoming. For instance younger drivers are described as an at risk group, but beyond formal driving education improvements there was no specific plans mentioned to address this concern. The higher rates of collision amongst different modes of transport are also mentioned, but again there is nothing contained in the document about how to address this issue, beyond a commitment to working on improving the situation. There is a commitment to carry on the THINK! campaigns targeted specifically at young drivers, motorcyclists and child pedestrians, which is a positive development, but unlikely to be enough on its own do address the road safety issues experienced by these groups. Older drivers are yet another example of where the growing need to address driving skills and aging is recognised, but the suggested action of working with voluntary groups to develop further education courses is unlikely to address the known problems associated with older drivers (See: RAC Foundation reports on older drivers for more information).

Summary

The Strategic Framework for Road Safety is by no means perfect. It does not include all the plans, recommendations and initiatives that the RAC Foundation would hope to see. But there is a great deal contained which sends out a positive message on

Road Safety which the Foundation is able to support. By way of summary Table 2 highlights the key pros and cons of the framework.

Table 2: Pros and cons of the Strategy Framework for Road Safety

| Area | Pros | Cons |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Vision | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The vision is right for the UK • It is positive that central Government is reasserting the importance of road safety | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is unclear whether Government (national or local) will be able to deliver on the vision given the plan details • There is a lack of targets / formal framework for LAs to work within |
| Responsibilities | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National Government has pitched its own responsibilities for road safety about right • The toolkit approach will be important for supporting LAs in their role and needs to be developed quickly | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The document leaves local authorities without any real guiding framework for action at the local level • Vehicle developments may need more Gov. intervention than suggested |
| Strategy | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The recognition of the role of the 'systems' and public health approach to road safety is welcome | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The balance of focus is not quite right. There is too much focus on education and enforcement and not enough on safer vehicles and roads • Problems are raised which do not have associated action plans (Younger drivers, alternative modes, lower income groups) |
| Enforcement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The focus on enforcement in general, high end offenders and anti-social behaviour is welcome • A commitment to running a speed review, raising the level of fixed penalty notices and tightening up regulations on drink/drug drivers is also welcome | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Police resource capabilities might not be able to deliver the enforcement needed, which risks undermining the whole strategy • There is a need to ensure speeding is still address despite the new focus on anti-social behaviour • Definition, appeals system and resources for new 'careless |

| | | |
|------------------|---|--|
| | | <p>driving' penalty need to be decided</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There could be a downside associated with only focusing on high end offenders • Not lowering the BAC to 50mg/100ml from 80mg/100ml is a missed opportunity |
| Area | Pros | Cons |
| Education | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The approach to education esp. new pass plus and remedial education is welcome as is the commitment to targeted think campaigns | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no coherent approach to lifelong learning beyond remedial education • Older driver education actions do not address the main issues around driving in older age. |

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