

## Roads policing review: call for evidence

### RAC Foundation response, October 2020



The RAC Foundation is a transport policy and research organisation which explores the economic, mobility, safety and environmental issues relating to roads and their users. The Foundation publishes independent and authoritative research with which it promotes informed debate and advocates policy in the interest of the responsible motorist. We would draw the Department's attention to the opinion piece we are publishing by former Chief Constable Steve Green giving his views on the options for the future of roads policing.

The questions posed in this call for evidence could be interpreted very broadly and stretch into all aspects of road safety, however we have aimed to keep a fairly tight focus on the issue of roads policing. We have not sought to answer every question.

Much of the reduction in casualties in recent decades can be attributed to improvements in vehicle design which better-protect vehicle occupants and lessen the risk for other road users, including pedestrians. We also have a good, long track record: of requiring drivers to be trained; of setting standards and testing for vehicle roadworthiness; of good highway engineering; and of having an extensive body of regulation for ensuring our roads can be used safely e.g. through the setting of speed limits. All this is against a backdrop of an ever-rising number of vehicles on the road.

However, it is possible that we have reached the limits of what can be achieved by existing policies and practices.

#### **Question 1 - Why do you think road casualties have remained fairly constant?**

Applying a systems thinking approach it may be that we've managed to secure the (relatively) easy wins by fixing individual parts of the system (e.g. vehicle design) but now to move further, we need to take a much more integrated approach, aggregating data to see what patterns emerge, for example, looking beyond the behaviour of a driver in the moment to consider their social environment and the social norms they recognise, the business practices and pressures to which they might be subject, and the physical environment around them. The majority of drivers at least aim to drive safely the majority of the time, and can be influenced by education and exhortation. But to tackle the temptation some clearly experience to drive less safely or even recklessly the design of interventions needs to start with an understanding of their circumstances: a disregard for obtaining a licence, obtaining insurance or driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol could be part of a much wider pattern of illegal behaviour.

This raises two important implications for the policing of the roads.

First, we know that for some drivers, particularly though not exclusively young males, the biggest influence on compliance is the credible risk of being caught (the Department's own research to inform the THINK! campaign has long recognised this). For any law to have effect citizens must know what the law requires, they must regard the punishment for breaking the law to be severe enough that they wish to avoid it, and they have to believe there is a credible risk of their being caught should they break the law. It is likely that much unsafe driving behaviour follows from a sense that drivers feel they are unlikely to be caught, or that the penalties for non-compliance are insufficient. Enforcement, by the police and other agencies, needs to be targeted, make best use of available technology, and be sufficient – and sufficiently visible – to be effective. Targeting a disregard for motoring laws is also likely to reveal

wider criminal behaviours – we should be aiming to deny criminals the use of the road not just because of the road safety risk they pose but because we need to interrupt their criminal activities.

Second, the police have a key role to play in joining with other agencies and sharing information in order both to identify the highest risk offenders and to develop effective intervention strategies. This is not a one-way street – information collected in silos has a tendency to stay in silos (e.g. in health, social services and policing) not least because of the need to give adequate protection to the personal data these agencies hold. Hence some clever joined-up thinking will be needed to find the right approaches. This is likely to be one of the conclusions we draw from our current Road Collision Investigation Project.

**Question 2 - What does the evidence suggest has the most impact on reducing deaths on the road?**

**Question 3 - What evidence led initiatives demonstrate what could be done to help reduce road traffic casualties?**

Taking these two questions together we first consider what has had the most effect up to now.

This is a question that can be answered with some evidence, though the relative contributions of different practices aren't crystal clear we can point, for example, to: the development of the seat belt and the requirement to wear it as having a major impact; to the architecture of the vehicle with crumple zones, a strengthened cab to protect the occupants and the deployment of air bags; and to the setting and enforcement of appropriate speed limits. Tackling driver impairment has also played an important role, pushing down on drink and drug driving. But for the impacts to be sustained adequate enforcement, by the police and other agencies, is key. Failure to wear a seat belt is one of the well-recognised 'fatal five' causes of road death. As are speeding, drink/drug driving, distraction and otherwise careless/inconsiderate/reckless driving. The enforcement of all five rightly falls to the police since they can be distinguished from other decriminalised actions suitable for civil enforcement by the seriousness of their consequences.

Second, what might be the most impactful measures looking ahead?

We would advocate a twin-track approach – sustained activity on the measures that have got us this far, including adequate on-road enforcement and further improving the safety performance of new vehicle designs, alongside a fresh look through the systems thinking lens to see what more can be done to encourage safer driving. For example, Neale Kinnear and Teresa Senserrick's report (2017) for us took a systems thinking approach to young driver safety arguing that thinking about 'problem' young drivers should give way to a broader, more comprehensive approach, going beyond simply blaming individuals, and instead looking at the social and environmental factors that lead to young drivers being at risk.. We have long advocated some form of graduated driver licensing which, if linked to a telematic insurance product, could work for the vast majority of young drivers with relatively little police enforcement beyond that needed today to deter the proportion who drive unsafely.

We could have added a third point: accelerate the path to more highly automated driving. The arrival of intelligent speed assistance in new vehicles is likely to be a help in some circumstances, though the fact that it will arrive at a time when we have over 30 million cars on the road without this technology means it will take some time to ripple through, and will not, of itself, tackle the problems of inappropriate speed on rural roads – a particular problem in this country - that aren't beyond the legal limit. While much is being made of the safety benefits of largely or fully autonomous vehicles, but we doubt whether these are achievable until the technology both reaches the showrooms and penetrates sufficiently into the parc, which puts it many years into the future.

**Question 4 - Can you provide examples or empirical evidence demonstrating a relationship between road traffic law enforcement and compliance with road traffic law?**

**Question 5 - Can you provide any examples or empirical evidence identifying a causal relationship between enforcement and road collision casualty numbers?**

Two reports in particular come to mind on the generality of roads policing:

TRL 2015: The Effectiveness of Roads Policing, Technical Research for Thames Valley Police and Hampshire Constabulary [https://trl.co.uk/sites/default/files/TVP\\_Summary\\_All\\_Pagesv2.pdf](https://trl.co.uk/sites/default/files/TVP_Summary_All_Pagesv2.pdf)  
And

PACTS 2020: Roads policing and its contribution to road safety

<https://www.pacts.org.uk/2020/06/roads-policing-and-its-contribution-to-road-safety-report-from-pacts/>

This report is also interesting, providing evidence of the effectiveness of a specific, targeted deployment of camera technology to a location where speeding was a recognised safety issue – use of average speed cameras on the A9 in Scotland:

<https://www.pressandjournal.co.uk/fp/news/highlands/1457907/deaths-and-crashes-down-since-average-speed-cameras-introduced/>

[The RAC Foundation has previously commissioned research into the effectiveness of average speed cameras:](https://www.racfoundation.org/research/safety/effectiveness-average-speed-cameras-great-britain)

<https://www.racfoundation.org/research/safety/effectiveness-average-speed-cameras-great-britain>

**Question 7 - What else alongside enforcement (such as education or examples of use of technology and signage) has been evidenced to increase compliance?**

It is extremely hard to pinpoint what action has resulted in what outcome, indeed, we would counsel against it - take the history of seat belt wearing, which included a series of steps moving from discretionary to mandatory fitment of seat belts, front and rear, making the public aware of the risks from not wearing a belt, making the wearing of the seat belt mandatory and backing that with a fine for non-compliance. Instead we would point to the way policing needs to work in combination with actors across the whole system – see the report Professor Neville Stanton write for the Foundation in 2019 <https://www.racfoundation.org/research/safety/models-and-methods-for-collision-analysis>

**Question 8 - How have improvements in design and technology of vehicles (such as collision avoidance systems) impacted upon road safety?**

The International Vehicle Standards team in the Department is probably better placed to answer this than anyone else, having been closely involved in the design of improved vehicle standards over time, and will have copies of multiple reports from Thatcham, euroNCAP, ETSC, TRL and others.

**Question 9 - In respect of commercial vehicles can you provide any evidence or examples that current levels of enforcement by police and/or DVSA and the sanctions that follow are an effective deterrent to encourage compliance?**

**Question 10 - If not, can you provide any evidence or examples of how enforcement or sanctions could be changed to achieve improved compliance?**

The scale of non-compliance that DVSA is continuing to pick up through current levels of activity suggests to us that the sanctions available to them are inadequate and that this is a bigger issue than the absolute level of enforcement activity. The Department's own published data reveals a shockingly high level of infringement found through DVSA checks:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/856001/dvsa-enf-01-vehicle-enforcement-checks-at-roadside-and-operators-premises.csv/preview](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/856001/dvsa-enf-01-vehicle-enforcement-checks-at-roadside-and-operators-premises.csv/preview)

We are concerned also about the expectations of employers on the driving that their staff will do, in the course of work but also travelling to and from work. We have long argued that road related injury incidents should be brought within the RIDDOR (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations) framework.

**Question 13 - Can you provide evidence or examples (in particular the use of technology) of what could be done to better enable and equip those charged with enforcing traffic laws?**

The police need to be equipped with genuinely portable, court admissible roadside testing equipment to detect drug and alcohol impairment, and to have the facility for arresting those found to be over the prescribed limits. We have heard instances – referenced in Steve Green's paper – of limited numbers of custody suites being available. Once samples are taken they need to be processed swiftly – we have also heard that constraints on laboratory testing capacity mean there is a growing backlog of blood alcohol samples to be tested. The coronavirus pandemic has shown that our capacity for processing medical samples may be a wider issue.

The more administrative activity can be lifted from officers and handled by civilian staff, the better, in which context we would argue for continued resourcing of victim support beyond the police service e.g. Brake's National Road Victim Service.

While Police and Crime Commissioners will set local priorities we see value in there being greater national consistency, for example in the targeting of activity, and in the linking of road traffic offences with wider criminality.

Where collisions occur that require a police investigation much could be done to use technology to speed the process and reduce the call on officers' time – we would point to the use of drone technology by the Air Accident Investigation Branch. We may find more on this topic in the course of our Road Collision Investigation Project.

**Question 14 - Can you provide evidence of existing approaches to enforcement or available technologies that could inform the future shape of road traffic enforcement by police and other agencies?**

Our concern, flagged by this question, is about the risk of an over-reliance on automated technology (see the work done for us on automated enforcement by Dr Adam Snow in 2019, and previously in 2017 - <https://www.racfoundation.org/research/safety/speed-offence-detection-and-disposal-in-england-and-wales>).

We have previously published research into the effectiveness of speed cameras (including this 2019 report by Professor Richard Allsop: [https://www.racfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/revised\\_guidance\\_on\\_use\\_of\\_speed\\_camera\\_transparency\\_data\\_with\\_March\\_2019\\_addendum\\_Allsop.pdf](https://www.racfoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/revised_guidance_on_use_of_speed_camera_transparency_data_with_March_2019_addendum_Allsop.pdf)), but concerns clearly remain in the public mind about the rationale for their deployment. It is important to guard against this unfounded concern by publishing data on the performance of each camera site, including the rationale for a camera being deployed.

It is also important to recognise that a large proportion of collisions occur on rural roads where, whilst inappropriate speed might be one contributory factor, it may well be inappropriate but within the legal maximum, on a road where fixed or average speed cameras would not detect or deter the other factors, such as position on the carriageway, loss of control or failure to anticipate other road users. Technology can deliver a great deal, but technology has its limits.

IAM Trust, 2016: Rural roads, the biggest killer [https://www.iamroadsmart.com/docs/default-source/research-reports/iam-rural-roads.pdf?sfvrsn=a9dffa50\\_2](https://www.iamroadsmart.com/docs/default-source/research-reports/iam-rural-roads.pdf?sfvrsn=a9dffa50_2)

Lastly, modern motor vehicles and devices carried within them generate a great deal of information about the vehicle and its use, be that from cameras fitted specifically to record each trip, through to mobile telephones and on to the in-vehicle telematics. That data should be made readily available to investigating officers who, by turn, need the relevant skills to access and interpret the data – this may be a reason why a dedicated collision investigation service may be appropriate in order to develop the right skillbase most efficiently.

**RAC Foundation**

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