



Briefing 11/17 April 2011

# **‘Tackling the deficit – where next for road safety’ - A report by the RAC Foundation and PACTS.**

To: All contacts in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland

## **Key issues**

Report calls for more attention to maintain reduced casualty numbers on roads  
Possibility of increase in the number of road deaths because of cuts to road safety budgets and traffic growth caused by economic recovery  
Recommendations made include sharing of good practice and performance monitoring

## **1. Introduction**

The RAC Foundation published a joint report entitled ‘Tackling The Deficit: Where Next For Road Safety’ with the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety (PACTS). The research involved discussions with representatives from local authorities, police forces, the UK Fire and Rescue Service, professional bodies, academia and consultancies.

## **2. Main themes**

The report notes that road safety sits in a complex financial context, with increased competition for reduced funds. In the questionnaire issued, 89% of 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?’ Local authorities were the stakeholders who felt the most strongly about this question (with 92% answering ‘negative’ or ‘potentially negative’); they reported already having been affected by major budget cuts, job losses and a reduction in activities. These effects could be partly attributable to the perception that road safety is not a priority for central government, and that funding is being directed towards other services.

Research for this report found widespread support for a nationwide vision and target, to reassure local decision makers that road safety is a priority. Strong leadership on the importance of road safety will send out a clear message, and will give road safety greater backing at a local level when

it comes to competing for funding. Providing this direction could also help slow the current rapid loss of skilled and experienced professionals from the sector.

A first stage report was published by the same authors in October 2010 which found that the lack of a new strategy to replace *'Tomorrow's Roads, Safer For Everyone'* – the previous government's road safety strategy which ran until the end of 2010 – was a major concern for all stakeholders. With budget cuts, no strategy, and localism giving them more freedom but also fewer guidelines, it was feared at local authority level that road safety would be pushed down to the bottom of the priority list.

The report makes the central argument that reduced funds for road safety will have a direct impact on the number of casualties.

### **3. Finance**

Local road safety was affected significantly by this financial year's emergency Budget made in June 2010 which saw the abolition of the Road Safety Capital Grant (which had been set at £17.2 million) and a 27% cut to the Road Safety Revenue Grant (cutting it from £77.3 million to £56.7 million). From April 2011, the entire Road Safety Grant will be subsumed into the formula-based grant from the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG), which funds revenue spending of all local authority services. At the local level, authorities will as a result of these changes see their capital funding cut by 22% (LocalGov.co.uk, 2010). The integrated transport block will be halved in 2011/12, and highways maintenance will be cut by 15% over the course of the Spending Review period.

The overall picture of local government revenue funding remains complex. The ending of ring-fenced funding is intended to give local councils greater flexibility in meeting local need. For transport in general, and for road safety in particular, this will result in competition for revenue funding between these services and others such as adult social care, child protection and libraries.

When asked whether there were sufficient financial resources available to achieve further improvements in road safety, 61% of questionnaire respondents said no, 35% said it was too early to tell, and just 4% said yes.

The report gives numerous examples of councils cutting their road safety engineering budgets by between 60% and 80%, switching off speed cameras and abolishing lollipop men and women.

The report states that the view that there is insufficient funding is widespread, and unless steps are taken to address this, participants thought that this would result in a long-term loss of expertise. It was also feared that there is a real risk of an increase in casualty numbers, particularly as the unexpected beneficial side-effects of the recession pertaining to safety (resulting from less travel and lower speeds) wear off. Although the latest casualty figures from the DfT show continued reductions in the third quarter of 2010, this is as a result of long-term improvements to road safety. Negative impacts are unlikely to show up in the data straight away.

### **4. Strategy**

*Tomorrow's Roads, Safer for Everyone* was published in March 2000 and set casualty reduction targets and a road safety strategy for the following ten years. This strategy technically ended at the

end of 2010, and the previous PACTS report *Tackling the Deficit* identified a high level of concern amongst professionals about there being no replacement strategy.

The questionnaire revealed much support for a long-term vision, to provide an indication of how much progress the government and society want road safety to make. This would also acknowledge that although we currently have some of the safest roads in the world, we have not become complacent, and are still dedicated to reducing road casualties. This should be an integrated, wide reaching vision, one of better, safer communities where the road environment invites active travel, and responsibility for that environment is shared.

During its research for this report, PACTS has found widespread support throughout the sector for future quantitative targets. They give local authorities a clear framework within which to implement local plans and by which to measure success, and provide a 'policy hook' which helps to engage local politicians. Additionally, and of particular importance at this time, it provides leverage for directing funding towards road safety.

## **5. Performance Indicators**

The report endorses the 20 indicators, the data for which is already available, although not in one single published source. It is information that is collected nationally rather than at local authority level. These are included in Appendix A at the end of this briefing.

## **6. Government Actions**

The report recommends the following actions be taken.

### **One-off actions**

- The government should target action on high-risk user groups: drink and drug drivers; young drivers; and illegal drivers and drivers of illegal vehicles.
- The police should be equipped with type-approved enforcement technology.
- The Health and Safety Executive should be required to address traffic casualties in the course of work on equal terms with other accidents at work.
- The DfT should publish revised guidance on how to implement 20 mph speed limits.

### **Looking to the Future**

- The government should improve data collection by implementing universal use of hand-held electronic devices for data collection by police; and combining resources, for example from the Ministry of Justice and the Department of Health.
- The DfT should implement the Transport Committee recommendation to reduce the drink-drive limit to 20 mg alcohol per 100 ml blood, and commit to a timetable for doing so by 2015, with the possibility of using 50 mg as a stepping stone.

### **Ongoing actions**

- The national statistics concerning use of the roads, and concerning casualties in the course of their use, should be enhanced.
- The DfT should continuously monitor and support local authorities and partnerships, and help to develop a manageable set of performance indicators that would assist local authorities in assessing their relative performance.

- The Government should support continued UK input to bodies that supply information for consumers on European vehicle safety regulation, notably Euro NCAP.
- In addition to maintaining the present focus on reducing the numbers of those killed or seriously injured, which should continue to be the priority, the Government and road safety professionals should aim to reduce slight injuries. Much can be learned from examining accidents which result in slight injuries – such injuries could have been serious injuries or even fatalities, had there been a slightly different set of factors; it is therefore useful to monitor these accidents carefully.
- Within the DfT, the road safety and sustainable transport divisions should work together and focus on removing the safety-related barriers to active travel (both perceived and real).
- The DfT should also work with the Department of Health to raise awareness of road safety as a means of reducing preventable deaths.
- The DfT should work with the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice to improve enforcement of licensing, insurance and roadworthiness offences, in recognition of the link between road crime and other criminal offences.
- The DfT should maintain progress on updating driver and rider training and testing.
- The Government should monitor prosecution and sentencing for driving offences.
- The DfT should encourage a programme of research into changing contributory factors in casualty occurrence, notably in respect of vehicle technology and nomadic devices (portable electronic devices such as satellite navigation systems brought into the car and used by a driver for information, assistance, communication or entertainment).

## **7. Local Authority actions**

It is also recommended that local authorities: take a proactive approach in promoting the importance of road safety and the effectiveness of their work in this area; co-ordinate and support fire and rescue as they take on a more important role in road safety; look for opportunities for engaging with and involving the private sector; and engage with civil society through the dissemination of useful and accessible information.

## **8. Conclusion**

The report concludes by stating that stakeholders want to see a challenging strategy with strong leadership and rate-based targets, to give a clear direction for improvements in road safety. The balance will need to be found between localism and a national plan for improvement. The alternative to 'one size fits all' should not be its opposite, 'every man for himself'.

## **9. APSE comment**

APSE welcomes the thrust of this report which aims to ensure that road safety must lie at the heart of government transport policy. Local authorities play a major role in designing and implementing road safety work at the local level but this must be backed up with support from central government. The need for clarity around a vision and strategy to move forward is clear as it highlights the context within which the service is being delivered and the priority designated to it by the local authority.

Unfortunately road safety is falling into the same category as many services which appear to be being sidelined as all services battle for reducing financial resources. As with many services there are significant costs for local authorities and other public service providers associated with increasing casualty figures. If the reductions in casualties achieved over recent years are lost and

the figures begin to increase, any short term savings will be lost and a far greater level of resources and time will be spent on dealing with the immediate repercussions of individual incidents and on re-establishing road safety as a priority for all interested parties.

APSE agrees with the argument made in the report about the benefits of sharing good practice and of using a set of agreed performance indicators as part of a approach to keeping road casualty figures as low as possible.

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**Principal Advisor**

## **Appendix A**

National Key Performance Indicators endorsed by this report the data for which is already available.

- 1.** Rate of road deaths per 100 million vehicle kilometres.
- 2.** Rate of road deaths per 100 million vehicle kilometres in the ten most deprived local authority areas.
- 3.** Rate of killed or seriously injured pedestrians per 100 million kilometres walked.
- 4.** Rate of killed or seriously injured cyclists per 100 million kilometres cycled.
- 5.** Rate of killed or seriously injured motorcyclists per 100 million vehicle kilometres.
- 6.** Rate of killed or seriously injured car users per 100 million vehicle kilometres.
- 7.** Rate of people over 70 killed or seriously injured per 100 million kilometres travelled by all modes.
- 8.** Number of killed or seriously injured casualties resulting from collisions involving drivers under the age of 19.
- 9.** Number of killed or seriously injured casualties resulting from collisions involving drivers aged 20–25.
- 10.** Number of people killed in road collisions on rural roads.
- 11.** Number of people killed where at least one of the drivers or riders involved was over the legal blood alcohol limit or under the influence of drugs.
- 12.** Proportion of vehicles exceeding speed limits.
- 13.** Cost of road traffic casualties, and this cost as a percentage of GDP.
- 14.** Percentage increases in the numbers of people walking and cycling and in distance travelled by pedestrians and cyclists.
- 15.** Number of people prosecuted for driving offences.
- 16.** Number of people convicted of repeat traffic offences.
- 17.** Number of cars driven by unlicensed/uninsured drivers.
- 18.** Number of car occupants killed who were not wearing a seat belt.
- 19.** Number of people offered speed awareness courses.
- 20.** Number of people killed or injured in road collisions whilst driving for work.