

ROAD SAFETY STRATEGY 2013-2020

Briefing Note

Introduction

The Road Safety Authority published its new Road Safety Strategy on 28 March 2013 and it can be accessed on the RSA website at <http://www.rsa.ie/en/Utility/About-Us/Our-strategy>. This is the fourth national strategy, the first of which was published in 1997. It also covers a longer period than previous strategies – eight rather than five years. The Institute made a detailed submission to the public consultation. A copy of the Institute's submission can also be found on the Institute's website. Many of the issues raised by the Institute are reflected in the published Strategy.

Targets

The new Strategy sets two very challenging targets to be achieved by 2020:

- Reduce the number of road deaths to 124 per annum (from 162 in 2012).
- Reduce the number of serious injuries to 330 per annum (from 485 in 2012).

To put these targets in context, road deaths peaked at 640 in the early 1970s and have declined from 462 in 1997, at the start of the first Strategy, to 162 last year. Serious injuries have declined from nearly 2200 in 1997 to 485 last year.

These targets are intended to maintain the progress that has been achieved over the last 15 years and to close the gap with the best performing countries (UK, Netherlands, Sweden and Australia). The setting of a target for serious injuries is particularly welcome. Most commentary and public interest tends to focus on the headline fatality figures, but serious injury accidents have devastating consequences for individuals and their families and long term economic and societal costs. Both targets are challenging for a number of reasons. There is the risk of complacency given our recent success in reducing

road deaths. Much of the so-called low hanging fruit has been picked and it will be difficult to implement new measures which will have the same impact as the high-impact measures such as stricter drink driving laws and enforcement, penalty points, speed cameras and so on. Indeed it will be difficult to maintain the impact of these headline measures in the longer term as their deterrent effect reduces.

The achievement of the targeted reduction in serious injuries is complicated by the fact that there is believed to be significant under-reporting of such incidents and that there is no universally accepted definition of what constitutes a serious injury.

The Strategy also sets subsidiary targets of 100% compliance with speed limits and seat belt wearing requirements, while acknowledging that in practice full compliance will not be achieved.

Trends

Very substantial long term progress has been made in reducing deaths among vulnerable road users. There has been almost a two thirds reduction in deaths of pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists since 1993, compared with an overall reduction of 50% in road deaths. However this group remains at high risk - 2 in 5 of those who died on the roads in the period 2007-12 were vulnerable road users. (One in five were pedestrians and one in ten were motorcyclists.) There are also some other interesting trends from this period:

- Single vehicle collisions accounted for 38% of all fatal collisions and a quarter of all injury collisions. The equivalent figures for head on collisions were 19% and 12% and for collisions involving pedestrians 22% and 17% respectively.
- Four out of five fatal collisions were either single vehicle, head on or pedestrian collisions.
- Driver error accounted for 87% of all contributory factors identified in fatal collisions.
- The highest number of casualties was in the early evening rush hour (6-7pm). The period from 9pm to 3am accounted for 27% of fatalities.

Compliance with speed limits is a continuing problem, particularly in urban areas and for articulated vehicles travelling on national roads. A 2012 survey showed very low compliance rates on urban national roads within the 50km/h zone – 15% for private cars, 22% for articulated vehicles and 24% for rigid vehicles. By contrast seat belt wearing is much improved. In a 2011 survey, compliance rates were at or above 90% for most categories, the only exception being 85% for primary schools pupils as front seat passengers.

The Challenges

The following are some of the principal challenges identified by the Strategy:

- Work related vehicle safety, with a third of collisions occurring during hours of work or travel to work.
- Medical fitness to drive – understanding and mitigating the risks associated with illness or disability.
- Drug driving which is much more complex to detect than alcohol and involves both prescription and illicit drugs.
- Fatigue, with sleep-related crashes accounting for possibly 15-20% of all collisions.
- Distraction, particularly mobile phone use. Driver distraction is thought to play a role in 20-30% of all road collisions. Nearly half of all drivers admit to sometimes using a mobile phone while driving.
- Vulnerable road users – old people and children, pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists.
- Emergency response and care – the quicker the response and the better the quality of care received, the better the chance of survival and the better the subsequent quality of life.

The New Strategy

The new Strategy is based on what is called a safe systems approach which tries to take a more holistic approach to road safety. It is built on the following principles:

- Human behaviour – people make mistakes and the road transport system needs to accommodate this.

- Human frailty – the human body has only a limited capacity to withstand death or serious injury.
- Forgiving systems – the roads and vehicles we use, the speeds we travel at and the attitudes of road users towards each other need to be more forgiving of human error.
- Shared responsibility – everybody has a responsibility in relation to safe use from the road user to the vehicle or road designer.

The Strategy identifies three key areas of action – education, engineering and enforcement. There are a total of 144 actions proposed for implementation over the period of the Strategy, many of which are continuations or developments of existing measures. The following paragraphs give a flavour of some of the most significant, interesting or novel ones (with implementation dates).

Education (Actions 1-51)

- Use interactive and age-appropriate new media to promote road safety awareness, including the development of a social media strategy (annually)
- Conduct a safety education and awareness campaign on the use of seatbelts on school buses (Q3 2013)
- Develop and implement education and awareness interventions targeted at 17-27 year olds (annually)
- Implement specific education measures targeted at vulnerable road users, including safe crossing by pedestrians, intoxicated pedestrians, use of personal protection equipment by cyclists and motorcyclists, awareness of HCV blind spots and care for young and old people (annually)
- Develop and implement education and awareness actions aimed at minority and disadvantaged groups in the community (Q1 2015)
- Develop and implement a standardised guide to address school gate safety (Q4 2014)
- Develop and make available to schools a standardised cycle training proficiency programme for children (Q3 2014)

- Undertake an education and awareness campaign on distracted driving, in particular the use of hands-free phones (annually)
- Ensure that learner drivers sit a test before obtaining a subsequent learner permit (Q1 2014)
- Educate drivers on the importance of vehicle maintenance (generally and for adverse weather conditions) and tyre safety (annually)
- Develop a national education and enforcement programme to improve standards of load safety in the workplace and on the road, ensuring that loads are properly secured (Q1 2014)
- Conduct annual education and awareness campaigns on the safe use of railway level crossings (Q4 2013 and annually thereafter)

Engineering (Actions 52-68)

- Carry out 150 minor realignment schemes on national roads by Q4 2020 and annually implement safety schemes at high risk locations on regional and local roads
- Provide at least five new motorway service areas (2020)
- Improve the condition of road pavement on national roads, with 90% categorised as fair or better by Q1 2020

Enforcement (Actions 69-144)

- Carry out targeted enforcement operations particularly aimed at speeding, alcohol and drugs, seatbelt and helmet use and mobile phone use (annually)
- Legislate for a zero tolerance approach to driving under the influence of illicit drugs and to tackle impaired driving with other drugs (Q2 2015)
- Enforce EU driver hours and operator licensing requirements, rising from 260,000 working days checked in 2013 to 350,000 by 2016
- Implement and enforce new maintenance requirements for commercial vehicle operators (Q3 2014)
- Develop and implement an effective roadside enforcement strategy for large commercial vehicles and drivers, targeting roadworthiness, drivers' hours and operator licensing (Q3 2013)

- Target enforcement at less compliant HCV drivers and operators in respect of drivers' hours and vehicle road worthiness (Q1 2014)
- Review and update penalty points system, particularly relating to drivers and vulnerable road users and emerging road safety concerns (Q4 2014)
- Assess if own account operators should be included in the road transport operator licensing system (Q3 2014)
- Publish the review of speed limits and implement its recommendations (Q4 2014)
- Legislate to extend on the spot fines to offences related to cyclists and drivers' hours (Q2 2014)
- Review the feasibility of providing courts with alternative sanctions such as corrective training courses for commercial vehicle operators and drivers (Q3 2013)
- Make it compulsory for a breakdown emergency pack to be carried in all vehicles, including first aid kit, high visibility vest, triangle and torch (Q3 2016)
- Legislate to prevent persons over the legal alcohol limit from acting as accompanying drivers for learner drivers (Q3 2016)
- Legislate to provide for rehabilitation and driving awareness courses as sentencing options for certain offenders (Q1 2015)
- Consider legislation to ban high risk activities on roads, including marketing vending and charity collections (Q4 2014)

Consideration will be given to the feasibility of introducing alcolocks to immobilise vehicles where a driver has been drinking and to the use of the safety camera network to detect offences other than speeding. In-vehicle devices which detect tiredness will be encouraged as will handbrake locks for phone use by professional drivers.