

Transport Safety Commission Inquiry into UK Transport Safety: Brake's response

Brake

Brake is a national road safety charity that exists to stop the needless deaths and serious injuries that happen on roads every day, make streets and communities safer for everyone, and care for families bereaved and injured in road crashes. Brake promotes road safety awareness, safe and sustainable road use, and effective road safety policies. We do this through national campaigns, community education, a Fleet Safety Forum, practitioner services, and by coordinating the UK's flagship road safety event every November, Road Safety Week. Brake is a national, government-funded provider of support to families and individuals devastated by road death and serious injury, including through a helpline and support packs.

Key points

- Responsibility for road safety must lie with national government, who should set clear and challenging targets, working towards a 'vision zero' approach whereby every road death and injury can and must be prevented.
- An academic consensus exists as to what measures are effective in improving road safety, and these measures are applicable nationally, without significant regional variation. Road safety decision-making should not be devolved to local level.
- Brake believes people will always make mistakes when using roads; we therefore support the safe systems approach, with a focus on creating safe environments for vulnerable road users on foot and bike, including by the creation of safe routes and implementation of 20mph limits as the urban default.
- Central government must take responsibility for creating a safe road use culture, including by providing more funding for national awareness campaigns. Key misconceptions that must be tackled to achieve this include the harmful mislabelling of preventable road crashes as 'accidents'.
- The national prioritisation of traffic enforcement is critical to reducing the social acceptability of road traffic offences. There is widespread complacency amongst drivers about the importance of obeying road traffic laws, with offences not perceived as 'real crimes'.
- Cuts to road safety funding; particularly the abolition of the road safety grants to local authorities, have sent a signal that road safety is not a priority. Road safety funding must be protected in order to maintain improvements.

Leadership, responsibility and coordination: *Are there clear lines of responsibility for transport safety? How is responsibility structured currently across the different modes and for different system providers? Is national leadership in transport safety evident in all the modes?*

Brake believes it is critical that clear leadership is provided from central government for road safety policy and delivery, and that ultimate responsibility lies with central government for making our roads as safe as possible. Although there are some regional and local differences in methods needed to reduce casualties due to geographical variations, in the UK these are relatively marginal, and broadly speaking there is an international academic consensus on what is effective in improving road safety, which can be applied across the country. Responsibility for road safety decision-making should not be devolved to local level as has been proposed through the localism agenda. Making roads safer, and eliminating tragic road casualties, is a challenge that we believe is most effectively tackled primarily at national level, while ensuring the continuing important contribution of local practitioners through clear and determined leadership.

It should be the responsibility of central government to ensure that work to improve road safety through road and vehicle engineering, through enforcement of traffic law, and through education and awareness, is delivered consistently, developed in line with evolving understanding of best practice, and effectively joined up to be complementary and cohesive, and to maximise impact. Central government should also be working at a European level to support international efforts to improve road safety, such as through cross-border enforcement.

Brake considers it important to retain some flexibility at local level to enable road safety practitioners to be responsive to particular risks specific to that area. However, Brake believes that control over most aspects of road safety policy should lie at national level, ensuring resources are focused on measures evidenced to be effective in reducing risk and casualties. Enabling local authorities to choose to implement effective road

safety policies, but not requiring that all should do so, can mean implementation is piecemeal; while some communities start to benefit, others do not, and the spread of evidenced policies across the country may be more costly and less impactful.

Given that there is much academic consensus on which road safety policies and measures are effective in improving road safety, the most efficient and cost effective way to implement such measures is at a national level. While some factors that contribute to road casualties are concentrated in certain areas (such as bikers riding dangerously on rural roads), most are generic issues that are relevant in most localities.

Objectives and targets: *What transport safety results are currently being sought for the different modes and which agencies are accountable on behalf of government for achieving them? What is the role and nature of aims and targets? Should the long-term Safe System goal and strategy be adopted for all transport modes? How can road safety goals be aligned with other transport objectives such as sustainability, public health and active travel measures to achieve co-benefits?*

As a charity that provides support to families whose lives have been devastated by road death and serious injury, we witness the appalling suffering that results. We are acutely aware that these deaths and injuries are preventable. We believe that they should be viewed by society as an unacceptable occurrence: in other words, the only acceptable number of deaths and serious injuries is zero. We therefore advocate a long-term vision of eradicating road deaths and serious injuries. We also believe that targets can be valuable in helping us to drive progress and move towards that long-term goal.

There is international evidence that the setting of casualty reduction targets in itself accelerates and aids casualty reduction [1]. There is also a widespread consensus among road safety practitioners that targets are valued and welcomed within the sector.

We believe that central government should set challenging national targets (broken down into road user groups, age groups, and casualty severity) for casualty reductions, have a 'vision zero' style vision of working towards no deaths and serious injuries, and should implement evidenced road safety policies nationally in support of these aims, along with a framework for how these policies will be supported and implemented as appropriate at a local level. Local authorities, police forces and other local partners should be required to draw up plans outlining how they will contribute to national goals, and be required to report back to central government and publicise their progress through these plans. Brake welcomes the Welsh Assembly's move to create a duty for local authorities to produce a prioritised list of projects required to deliver an active transport network [2].

We believe that a strong focus is needed by central and local government on improving the safety of people on foot and bicycle, given the vulnerability of these road users, their level of casualty involvement, and the wide-ranging social and economic benefits that can be delivered through improving their safety [3]. As part of this, we believe we should change the national default urban speed limit to 20mph and create a safer infrastructure for people on foot and on bicycles that, in particular, allows for the mistakes of vulnerable road users, not least children, who of course will always make mistakes using roads but who don't deserve to die for those mistakes.

Improving the safety of pedestrians and cyclists, including through 20mph limits and safe routes, provides a key example of how road safety goals can and should be aligned with other transport objectives such as reducing car use and fossil fuel dependency, tackling inactivity and obesity, and creating more sustainable, active and healthy communities. *Read more at www.brake.org.uk/go20.*

Perceptions and culture: *How do we gauge public perception of risk, public acceptability of effective measures; and public and corporate acceptance of liability? How can a greater culture of safety be achieved among employers, transport users and others?*

We know from research that there is a widespread perception among drivers that their driving skills are superior to those of others [4], and therefore there is widespread complacency about the importance of adhering exactly to the law on our roads [5].

This perception should be addressed from a young age with compulsory road safety education within schools, aimed at raising awareness of the risks and the steps that young people can take to help reduce those risks. Through our Too young to die campaign, Brake campaigns to minimise the risks young people

are exposed to at too early an age, through education and graduated driver licensing. By inviting young people to consider the risks and alternatives for themselves, we aim to deconstruct the perceived social necessity of driving amongst young people. *Read more at <http://www.brake.org.uk/too-young-to-die>.*

The private sector, professional bodies and the wider public should also be engaged, particularly via local authorities and organisations such as Brake, in road safety awareness work, contributing to the development of a safety culture. The government should develop its support of existing and established forums and events, such as Brake's professional services and Road Safety Week, to reach greater numbers via cost effective means in support of the government's road safety priorities. Brake produces extensive guidance on creating a greater culture of road safety among employers and fleets [6][7][8][9].

National publicity campaigns and local educational work are both vital, and it is extremely concerning that spending on awareness campaigns has been severely cut back in recent years. These campaigns must be developed in line with the latest thinking and research on what is most likely to influence behaviour, and are working towards a safer, more responsible culture of using roads. Campaigns should emphasise the benefits of safer and more sustainable road use, and the human and economic consequences and costs of road crashes, as well as promoting specific behavioural change and plugging identified knowledge gaps and misperceptions.

One of the most pervasive and damaging misconceptions the government needs to take a lead on tackling is the mislabelling of road crashes as 'accidents'. Road crashes are not accidents; they are devastating and preventable events, not chance mishaps, and the use of terminology must be adjusted accordingly. Calling them accidents undermines work to make roads safer, and can cause insult to families whose lives have been torn apart by needless casualties.

Improvements to enforcement should play a significant role in reducing the social acceptability of road traffic offences. Traffic policing should be made a national policing priority, with a commitment to increasing the number of specialist traffic police, the amount of time spent on frontline traffic policing, and roadside checks. Confusion about drink driving should be addressed by tightening drink and drug driving law and introducing a zero-tolerance drink-drive limit. Additionally, fixed penalty fines must be significantly increased, alongside the number of penalty points awarded to more serious offenders. Brake believes that increasing penalties for road traffic offences is a crucial part of developing a safer road user culture, since it provides a stronger deterrent by making it clear that breaking laws on our roads are real and serious crimes that are not acceptable in our society. *Read more at www.brake.org.uk/crackdown.*

Funding: *What are the current levels of funding for transport safety? Are annual funding mechanisms and resource allocation procedures appropriate?*

Brake understands that the delivery of road safety programmes at both national and local level has been significantly cut back in recent years due to spending cuts. For example, Brake is aware that numerous local authorities have reduced the size of their road safety units (or dismissed them entirely), reduced the number of speed cameras they have in operation, and cut back on school crossing patrols, while central government has significantly reduced its spending on road safety publicity campaigns.

This has followed road safety grants provided to local authorities by central government being scaled back and then abolished. While funding is still available for road safety projects from other sources, Brake believes that abolishing the road safety grant sent a signal that road safety was not a priority, and meant that local authorities would have to hunt out funding for this important area of work from elsewhere, in competition with other priority issues. In practice, it appears that the knock-on effect of these changes in funding has been making it increasingly challenging for local authorities to continue to find sufficient funding to even maintain current levels of road safety work, let alone putting in place additional measures to prevent casualties and reduce risk. Brake believes that road safety funding should be protected along with other key areas of public health spending, given the fact that road crashes account for such a large proportion of hospital admissions, and the fact that improving road safety within communities can help to promote healthy lifestyles. Road casualties are a major economic burden, costing an estimated £34 billion annually to the British economy [10]; hence many proven road safety measures are shown to pay for themselves several times over.

While investing in effective road safety measures delivers a range of benefits to the local community and authorities these benefits are often felt indirectly, and over a longer time period. It's not always immediately

possible to correlate local benefits and outcomes with spending on particular road safety measures. Brake argues that the impetus for continuing to invest in road safety, particularly in these economically challenging times, must come from central government.

Promotion: *Is transport safety receiving adequate promotion and championing?*

It is clear that road safety and central government funding associated with it, has not been regarded as a priority, within the Department for Transport or within government more broadly. If we are to see a significant shift in attitude and policy by lawmakers and policy advisors, then government need to set out a clear vision, develop targets and milestones and broaden the issue across government, so road safety becomes less of a 'technical' issue and more one of social justice and well-being.

Brake is well regarded as an independent, evidence-based charity that works in coalition with other like-minded organisations to promote road safety messages and campaigns to stop the five deaths and 63 serious injuries that happen on UK roads every day. More than that, it seeks nothing less than a fundamental shift in attitudes as to how we plan, manage and use our roads, paths and cycle ways. Brake remains a small charity, to achieve such a seismic shift in attitude, it would benefit greatly from an increase in government funding.

Monitoring and evaluation: *How should trends in safety be monitored and by whom? What is the case for an independent road safety or collision investigator?*

Transparency about performance should and must start with transparency about the goals of road safety policy and delivery.

Data on casualties at national and local level, and among different types of road user, should continue to be published by government. However, alongside this, more evaluation data should be published on local and national initiatives that improve road safety, to enable some level of correlation between delivery of road safety work, and casualty trends. The government should require local authorities to publish plans stating how they will improve road safety locally, and publicise progress against these plans.

As well as ensuring national initiatives and policies are academically evaluated for effectiveness, Brake believes that the government should fund, and require local evaluation of road safety initiatives, which should then be disseminated to practitioners and the public. For example, many road safety partnerships invest in programmes to educate young people on the consequences of risk taking, through roadshows. However, while most collect feedback from participants, academic evaluation of the impact of these schemes on actual behaviour is lacking. Given that reducing risk among young drivers should be a major priority in improving road safety, Brake recommends that the government funds an academic study into the efficacy of such schemes, with a view to helping local partnerships focus resources on methods that are evidenced in improving safety and potentially saving public money.

The system of determining and recording causes of crashes by police needs to be improved to offer a clearer picture of the main factors involved. For example, some factors are unlikely to become apparent until later on if an investigation takes place, while others may not be determined at all due to a lack of testing, such as impairment by drugs.

Work is also needed to improve recording and evaluation of injury numbers taking into account accurate hospital data, to provide the true extent of casualties, particularly the most serious injuries – as data on serious injuries is at present inadequately collected.

In addition, we also lack a complete picture of road safety work delivered locally around the country. For example there are no national databases recording the extent of 20mph limits or school-based road safety education. Improving the reporting of local road safety delivery would enable the government to push through a more focused and streamlined national programme of work.

Research: *What provision is made for keeping abreast of effective global practice? What provision is made for transport safety in R&D budgets?*

We have access to a large base of academic and case-study based evidence showing us which measures are effective in reducing casualties and reducing risk. This comprises academic studies carried out both in

the UK and overseas, examining the contribution of different factors to risk and casualty levels, as well as the impact of specific policies and programmes on road user behaviour, risk and casualty levels. Using this evidence base is essential in directing our efforts to continue to reduce casualties. Brake urges the government to ensure that road safety work delivered at local and national level is rooted in evidence and is responsive to new evidence.

Brake regularly monitors and assesses driver attitudes and behaviour through driver surveys. The findings are used to inform and prioritise Brake's work. Other road safety practitioners are encouraged to make use of this resource. *Read more at* <http://www.brake.org.uk/info-resources/info-research/driver-survey-reports>.

End notes

[1] Road Safety Target in Sight: Making up for lost time, ETSC, 2010

[2] Welsh Government Active Travel Inquiry: Brake's response, Brake, 2013

<http://www.brake.org.uk/assets/WelshAssembly-Activetravelinquiry-Mar-13.docx>

[3] GO 20 campaign briefing, Brake, 2014 <http://www.brake.org.uk/assets/docs/pdf/GO20-campaignbriefforweb.pdf>

[4] Road Safety Research Report No. 111: Understanding Public Attitudes to Road User Safety, Department for Transport, 2010

[5] Charity appeals: pledge to drive safely and legally, as two thirds admit breaking traffic laws, Brake, 2013

<http://www.brake.org.uk/news/1133-091013>

[6] Developing a safety culture guidance, Brake, 2006 <http://www.brakepro.org/assets/docs/practitioner-tools/FSFguidance-06-safetyculture.pdf>

[7] Essential guide to fleet safety for SMEs and employers starting out in road risk management, Brake, 2014

<http://www.brakepro.org/assets/docs/practitioner-tools/fleet-guidance-14-SMEessentialguide-Mar.pdf>

[8] The business case for fleet safety, Brake, 2012 <http://www.brakepro.org/assets/docs/practitioner-tools/FSFguidance-12-business%20case%20for%20fleet%20safety.pdf>

[9] Duty of care, Brake, 2008 <http://www.brakepro.org/assets/docs/practitioner-tools/FSFguidance-08-Duty%20of%20Care%20Apr.pdf>

[10] Reported road casualties Great Britain 2012 annual report, Department for Transport, 2013