

Road Safety Strategy 2010 – 2020 – Driving Forward Road Safety Pre-consultation Stakeholder Engagement

Purpose

In July 2007, the Minister of the Environment tasked officials with preparing a review of the current Road Safety Strategy. Following the report of the review it was announced that a new road safety strategy would be brought forward for launch during 2010, two years ahead of the planned end of the existing strategy. A small team was set up within the Department of the Environment to take forward the work on this project which was formally initiated in August 2008. Following research to identify and assess the nature of the road safety issues and problems to be addressed, a programme of engagement began in May 2009.

The DOE recognised that early engagement in constructive dialogue with stakeholders would help inform the way forward from the earliest stage and help the Department respond to issues that concern not only those with responsibility for delivering road safety, but those who are affected by road safety policies.

In order to maximise the benefits from road users experiences the Department engaged in consultation with key stakeholders prior to preparing the consultation paper.

The paragraphs that follow are a brief summary of that engagement with stakeholders in the period preceding the formal statutory consultation which began on 16 March and runs until 15 June 2010.

How we consulted

The Department began by seeking initial views of statutory road safety partners and others within government and its agencies. Through a number of workshops focusing on safer roads, safer vehicles and safer road users, the Department reflected on achievements and the position on our roads as reported by these road safety professionals. This began the process of developing new and complementary measures to improve road safety.

The Department then wrote to all those on its stakeholder lists inviting initial views on what could be done to improve road user safety and offering meetings if desired. In particular, the Department sought proposals for new measures that might be considered for possible inclusion as part of the planned formal consultation.

Recognising that young people are over-represented in road traffic collisions, the Department inserted an article into the Approved Driving Instructor's Update Newsletter asking for views from this important stakeholder group, particularly in improving safety for young and other newly qualified drivers.

Recognising the potential for the timing of formal consultation to conflict with curricular and examination timetables, the Department sought the views of children and young people, posting proposals to engage on the Participation Network website. This led to a number of events across Northern Ireland involving young people aged between 5 and 21 years of age.

Responses

All forms of engagement generated responses. As well as 30 substantive written responses, a number of respondents expressed an interest in road safety generally and indicated that they would welcome the opportunity to participate more fully during the formal consultation stage of preparing a new road safety strategy. A number of meetings were also held with political parties and other road user interest groups.

Through Participation Network, eighteen groups expressed an interest in facilitating discussions with young people on road safety. This led to fifteen events being held across Northern Ireland involving over 300 children and young people. The age of participants ranged from 5 to 21 but most were in the key road safety range of 14-18. These events provided a particularly useful insight into the concerns of young people from rural and urban backgrounds. As well as expressing views on proposals presented by the Department, children and young people also put forward their own ideas to improve safety.

Outcomes

The thinking on many road safety issues was consistent across the various stakeholders and several ideas were therefore replicated. Perhaps not unexpectedly, many ideas being proposed sought to address bad driving behaviour, improve the learning to drive experience, raise compliance with road traffic laws and encouraged use of engineering options. Opportunities presented by technological advances were also recognised and their consideration generally encouraged. These included advances in in-car safety technologies, enforcement activities and how road safety messages were and could be promoted.

Rural issues have been identified throughout as a particular concern. Collisions along the border and in border areas were raised consistently, particularly the involvement of drivers from outside Northern Ireland. While there is no specific research that would support the view that this is a particular problem, anecdotal evidence would certainly seem to suggest that there are issues to be addressed.

The reported attitudes and behaviours of children and young people in rural areas would appear to differ from urban counterparts. While again, largely anecdotal in nature, it would appear that a higher proportion of young people in rural areas admitted in meetings that they are open to what could be

considered as risk-taking or risky behaviours. This would appear to be encouraged, in part, by perceived lower levels of effective policing in rural areas compared with urban and a belief that rural people know their local roads and that it is, in fact, drivers from urban areas, unaccustomed to the nature of such roads, who cause most collisions. Again, this view would be unsupported by any research.

‘Sharing road space’ was a theme that arose continuously in recognition of the ongoing need to balance the requirements of all of our road users, whether as pedestrians, cyclists or drivers. As might be expected, this was particularly driver focused. A driver’s appreciation of the road conditions and the willingness and ability to adapt their driving style and behaviours accordingly was seen as key to the success of a new strategy. The way that this could be achieved, centred on driver preparedness and greater enforcement of, or compliance with, road traffic laws.

While the safety of road user groups and their behaviours were recurring themes throughout the responses, many identified the need for continuing and more innovative means of engagement, particularly when this involved high at risk groups, particularly young people aged 16 to 24 years of age.

There was a recognition that we need to better understand the road safety problems that we are seeking to address. Research, better information and on-going monitoring were seen as an important element of a new strategy.

Next Steps

Many of the ideas presented over the pre-consultation are incorporated in the measures proposed in the consultation on preparing a road safety strategy for Northern Ireland 2010-2020. Engagement with stakeholders will continue throughout the formal consultation stages and the process of developing proposals into final action measures will remain ongoing.

The Department plans to build on this engagement in future and indeed, positive partnerships with all stakeholders will be necessary for the delivery of a strategy that will see a journey on Northern Ireland’s roads as safe for all road users as anywhere in the world.

A sample of proposals and comments received over the pre-consultation period is attached at Annex A. Some of the inclusions are specific suggestions for actions while others are more general themes or comments. Most have been included or are reflected in the consultation document while some have not been developed further. They are included to inform debate and discussion and to encourage further inclusion in the process.

Annex A

Responses to Pre-consultation: Sample of comments and suggestions received

The following statements are typical of proposals and comments received during the pre-consultation stages of the project. They are not presented in any particular order.

Safer Roads

- There should be a shift to user-centred principles for road design (functionality of the roads; relative speed of the road users; making roads self-explanatory)
- Increase in traffic calming measures, particularly around schools
- Greater speed management, particularly outside schools including prohibiting parking around school gates
- Urban design should adopt a user hierarchy wherein needs of pedestrians, cyclists and public transport users are considered, in that order, before those of the private car
- Increase the use of road safety audits
- Those responsible should ensure that pedestrians can move around safely, free of hazards such as unnecessary, or badly positioned and unmarked poles; vehicles parked on footways, shop displays; overgrowing hedges, fouled paths
- Cycle lanes should not be provided unless fit for purpose
- At junctions from main roads to side roads provide turning lanes of appropriate lengths
- Altering the modal mix can improve safety - reallocate more road space to sustainable modes
- More SPECs systems and greater use of speed cameras in rural areas
- Change timings on urban pedestrian crossings to favour pedestrians

Safer Road User Groups

- Enforcement should be specifically targeted at young male drivers
- Information and education to raise awareness of the effects a medical condition can have on a person's ability to drive safely
- Cycling proficiency training should be extended to secondary schools
- Encourage and promote advanced driving skills/test for novices leading to lower insurance premiums for successful candidates
- Conduct research to establish an accurate picture of cross-border driving issues to better understand the risk that this represents and take proportionate action

Safer Road User Behaviours

- DE to take responsibility for monitoring that road safety is in the curriculum for all primary and post-primary schools
- More engagement by DOE/police/road safety organisations with young adults starting to drive
- Consideration to driving lessons including a wider range of driving experience – e.g. different road, weather and traffic conditions
- Introduce programme of continuous learning for drivers
- All drivers to re-sit test after a certain period - e.g. 15 years
- Bus, LGV and HGV drivers should have a greater emphasis on vulnerable road users in their training
- Increase police targeting of mobile phone usage
- Greater police priority to enforcing road traffic laws, with more cases brought to court rather than issuing Fixed Penalties
- More effective police presence on the roads to caution bad drivers
- The definitions and sentences for core bad driving offences (dangerous and careless driving) should be reviewed

Safer Vehicles

- Improve DOE enforcement powers to increase compliance by freight operators
- All technological options should be considered but with caution - some advances, such as crash avoidance systems, can be seen as removing driver responsibility and result in unsafe driving or complacency
- Use intelligent speed adaptation including feedback to driver on road conditions and speed limits
- Rear seat sensors fitted to cars to remind passengers to wear seat belts

Other Measures

- Make mandatory the wearing of cycle helmets for all cyclists / children
- Consider further work and/or trials on intelligent speed adaptation used on a non-mandatory basis to help with speed limit compliance
- Greater role for post RPA local authorities in delivery of road safety
- Each county/council to develop local road safety plans
- Ensure that during planning process, the design of urban space, road and footpath network ensures best safety principles
- Introduce minimum driver trainer standards and regulate driver training providers, including those training professional drivers
- Developing more 'driver improvement courses' as sentencing options; include innovative educational packages specifically designed for the young adults and ethnic minorities