

## Evidence to Transport Committee inquiry into Road Safety

From : Rod King  
Representing: 20's Plenty For Us – The campaign for 20 mph to become the default speed limit for residential roads.  
Tel: 07973 639781  
Email: [rodk@20splentyforus.org.uk](mailto:rodk@20splentyforus.org.uk)  
Web: [www.20splentyforus.org.uk](http://www.20splentyforus.org.uk)

### Executive Summary

In the UK parents consistently cite the high speeds of vehicles and the volume of traffic as the reasons why they do not allow their children to walk or cycle to school. At the same time public opinion is recognising that we are creating roads designed and operated for motorists first, rather than equitably for all users. It is our vulnerable road users who are “hardest hit” by urban and residential vehicle speeds which are 60% higher than those in Northern Europe. Whilst our pedestrians account for 21% of all road fatalities in the UK, in the Netherlands it is just 9.4%. A road fatality in the UK is more likely to be a pedestrian than in any of our West European neighbours.

For an equitable use of our roads and streets as shared public spaces it is imperative that we create a safe environment that recognises the vulnerability of pedestrians and cyclists.

There is clear evidence that the public is very much in favour of a 20 mph speed limit on residential roads. Portsmouth is the first city to implement such a scheme on an authority wide basis. In doing so it initiated a “community-wide” debate linking road safety to restraint and equitable use of its roads.

If we are to move to a society that is less dependent upon the motor car (and its inevitable use of oil for energy) then it is imperative that we maximise the opportunity for people to walk or cycle instead. In reality this will not happen unless a major shift road safety is made in support of vulnerable road users. 20's Plenty For Us believe that the following should be key factors in that initiative :-

- 20 mph as the default speed limit for all residential roads.
- Implementation of “strict liability” in road traffic injury cases.
- Traffic authorities to embrace the use of cycling and walking in day to day operations.
- Traffic Authorities to design-in direct and safe cycle and walking facilities on all new road schemes.
- Random and covert use of speed checks for enforcement of 20 mph speed limits
- Driving bans should not be reduced by consideration of offenders use of car for employment

Together with public debate, these reforms will bring the UK into line with best practice in Europe and provide the foundation for a society whereby road safety will be increased for all rather than only those who drive cars. Everyone should have the freedom to choose a method of transport without fear that the road laws or use of roads put them at greater risk because of their vulnerability.

Such a change will considerably enhance the country's ability to face the transport challenges which are expected in the next decade. Regardless of the predictions for “peak oil” or “global warming” we need a more flexible transport policy that enables modal choice and shift without increased danger to those making that shift.

There is evidence of an increasing awareness by the public to such issues. Strong leadership, an honest recognition of these issues and firm action to change the way we use our roads and streets is now required.

## Introduction

In 2004, Rod King of Warrington learnt that its twin town, Hilden in Germany, enjoyed high levels of cycling with 24% of in-town trips being made by bicycle. He cycled to Hilden to gain a better understanding of how this had been achieved. He found that the town was noticing that cycling levels were reducing in the early 1990's and as a result they implement a reduced speed of 18.5 mph (30 kph) throughout the whole town. This had therefore become the foundation to their promotion of cycling. Whilst they had some segregated facilities, these were generally low quality and designed around a prevailing traffic speed of just 30 kph.

Since then Rod has campaigned for lower speeds on UK roads, especially in residential and urban roads. This effects not only cyclists, but also pedestrians who comprise a great percentage of road deaths in the UK than any other Western European country. In 2007 he founded 20's Plenty For Us to campaign on this issue and the charity now has groups throughout the country campaigning for 20 mph as the default for residential roads.

Over those 4 years he has noticed considerable shift in public opinion on 20 mph for residential roads. Now most residents favour it and there is increasing establishment recognition that this is a sensible step forward.

Rod is a regular contributor to the debate on road safety with particular reference to vulnerable road users. He has presented at conferences and meetings organised by Velo-City, CTC , Living Streets, Campaign for Better Transport, Cycle Campaign Network and Dublin City Council. Rod has a degree in Automobile Engineering and works as an IT consultant.

### 1. To what extent have targets for casualty reduction been a useful tool for focusing professional activity?

- 1.1. The primary target for casualty reduction is the KSI figures. Whilst this is quite laudable as a measure of the human and financial cost of incidents on our roads it fails to take account of the specific conditions which exists in the UK which effect the make up of these statistics, especially with regard to vulnerable road users.
- 1.2. No account is taken of a differentiation between "driver" deaths such as a motor driver accident involving no other parties and the deaths of pedestrians or cyclists as a result of actions by motor vehicles. Whilst the former are most often the cause of their own demise, the vulnerable victims are usually innocent road users who die because the motor driver has not taken into account their vulnerability. In a recent conversation with a Road Safety council officer, I was told that he agreed that lower speeds would be of enormous benefit to the quality of life for residents and particularly the safety of vulnerable road users. However, his targets for KSI reduction required him to focus on young drivers where it would give him the best potential KSI reduction for a given budget. The KSI targets were therefore causing a policy shift away from funding the safety of vulnerable road users.
- 1.3. KSIs are a very blunt measure of the safety improvement on our roads. In a recent PACTS conference Fred Wegmann of Netherlands Institute for Road Safety spoke of the need for a "paradigm shift" in our approach to road safety. The focus on KSI leads to emphasising ways to prevent KSI rather than create a safer environment. This may seem counter intuitive, but the creation of safety barriers, complicated segregated routes for cyclists and pedestrians often inhibits these transport modes in convenience and directness to the extent that they are discouraged. We are currently creating an environment whereby safety is achieved only at the expense of discouraging the very forms of transport which we aim to promote.

## 2. What further measures need to be adopted to reduce deaths and injuries arising from drinking and driving?

- 2.1. It has been reliably established that any consumption of alcohol degrades the ability of a driver to control his or her vehicle. We need to widen the whole debate on responsibility for the use of motor vehicles to recognise that any pre-meditated impairment of judgement whilst driving is socially unacceptable and will result in penalties.
- 2.2. Alcohol limits should be set at a “zero tolerance” level of .2g/l. This will establish categorically that if driving then no alcohol should be consumed at all. Thus providing a clear message to all drivers.
- 2.3. Penalties for drink driving should not be attenuated according to the reliance of an offender on his car as a necessary means of employment. There should be a clear scale of penalties that start with the mandatory withdrawal of a license for a minimum of 12 months.

## 3. How does Great Britain compare with other EU countries in its approach to reducing deaths and injuries?

- 3.1. For vulnerable road users such as pedestrians and cyclists there is a very clear skewing of fatalities towards this category of road user in the UK.

In 2004 the percentage of accident fatalities to pedestrians was higher in Britain than any other EU country. 20.6% of road fatalities were pedestrians compared to 13.9% as an EU average. In the Netherlands the figure was just 9.4%.<sup>1</sup> See appendix

In 2005 this figure increased to 21.0% however, the introduction additional EU countries such as Malta, Poland, Hungary and Estonia with even poorer statistics moved UK from being worst in EU to being 5<sup>th</sup> from bottom<sup>2</sup>. Hardly an indication that things were getting better in the UK. See appendix.

- 3.2. 20's Plenty For Us believes that the following account for the very different statistics for percentage pedestrian fatalities between the best practice in Europe (Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, Sweden) and the UK.

3.2.1. Lower tolerance of accidents in these countries

3.2.2. Strict Liability. In Netherlands cyclists and pedestrians cannot be more than 50% responsible since 1990's. Sweden has had a no fault liability since 1975. Note that these do not impose any automatic criminal guilt to the motor vehicle driver, but simply the liability in the event of an accident with a vulnerable road user.

3.2.3. A 30 kph (18.5 mph) speed limit as the default for all residential roads. This dramatically reduces both the incidence of accidents and their consequence. Most of this is achieved through a combination of public debate and consultation, low cost infrastructure (no need for physical calming) and random, covert enforcement.

3.2.4. Higher levels of walking and cycling as a result of the above create a culture with less polarisation between walkers/cyclists and motorists. This in turn creates a larger percentage of motorists who also walk and cycle.

3.2.5. Traffic engineers in UK local authorities have long been motivated by increasing throughput in motor vehicles on local roads without any recognising any economic or society benefit for encouraging modal shift from personal car usage. Road Safety has often become a “retrospective” exercise resulting in compromised facilities for pedestrians and cyclists at junctions. In other countries a “holistic” approach is taken whereby cyclists and pedestrian accessibility is recognised on all roads through a combination of either direct, convenient

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<sup>1</sup> European Road Safety Observatory, Traffic Safety Basic Facts 2006 - Pedestrians

<sup>2</sup> European Road Safety Observatory, Traffic Safety Basic Facts 2007 - Pedestrians

segregated facilities or through lowering the speed limit to 20 mph. Funding for such segregated facilities comes from the general road transport budget and is not limited by a cycling or pedestrian budget.

3.2.6. In Northern European countries the endemic use of the cycle as the primary mode of transport for teens creates a subsequent generation of learner drivers who are already skilled in road positioning and spatial awareness. Their experience of using roads as a cyclist therefore enables them to become better drivers more quickly and with more empathy towards cyclists and pedestrians with whom they share the roads. This experience of “teen cycling” therefore continues to benefit the safety of the country’s vulnerable road users long after those teens have matured. Increasing “teen cycling” could well be the answer to addressing the UK’s poor record on young driver deaths.

#### **4. How do approaches in reductions in risk on the roads compare to those adopted in other modes of transport?**

4.1. I suspect that this is a rhetorical question. Clearly the manner in which we react to deaths on the railways or airways is completely different to that for road transport. As an example we have “rules and regulations” in such industries which do carry approbation and swingeing fines if broken. We have a central government that sets the rules for using the roads, but the policing of this is delegated to local police authorities. The police establishment had been reducing police resources for enforcement of driving laws for some time. Police forces seem to be content to delegate speed enforcement to Road Safety Partnerships and some refuse to enforce 20 mph limits in any way.

4.2. Whilst many improvements have been made by addressing “accident black spots” the remaining deaths, especially for vulnerable road users, are spread out across the whole road network with little clustering. Therefore these can only be improved by changing the way people interact with vulnerable road users rather than specific localised highway engineering.

#### **5. Are there specific blockages caused by shortages of appropriately trained and skilled staff?**

5.1. Yes, throughout most traffic authorities there is little perception of the needs of vulnerable road users. Responsibility for the “championing” of cyclists and pedestrian rights is often delegated to a junior member of staff. Most traffic engineers, and particularly senior management, have no experience of travelling to work other than by car. Hence their whole perception of transport is seen from behind a “windscreen” looking out, rather than an objective view of the needs of all road users. A number of changes would correct this.

5.1.1. Establish the mandatory use of cycles by all traffic authorities for engineer trips of less than 5 miles. If necessary this should be preceded by cycle training and the provision of “pool” bikes. The only exemption would be on health grounds and a doctor’s certificate.

5.1.2. Avoid the marginalisation of cycling and walking by recognising the need to include these modes in all professional training and highway design. If cycling and walking is to become a “mainstream” mode of transport then this must be reflected in the concerns, attitudes and design skills of traffic engineers and highway designers.

5.1.3. Rather than having junior “champions” of cycling and walkers, make this a prime responsibility of all traffic officers and highway engineers.

#### **6. What further policies, not already widely used, might be considered for adoption and what evidence there is for their success?**

6.1. 20 mph as a default speed limit for residential roads

- 6.1.1. This is a clear policy which has wide public support yet little widespread implementation. Portsmouth has taken the initiative to implement this across the whole authority without the expense of physical calming. Early evidence shows that the community wide debate that preceded this decision sensitised the whole population to the benefits of a collective community decision to reduce speeds and coupled this with a personal commitment to adherence. As a result average speeds have reduced by 3 mph and the whole community is tuned to the correlation between speed and safety reduction.
- 6.1.2. Unfortunately, those on the edges of social responsibility still break those limits. A more robust enforcement of these by the police with covert and random speed checks would be effective in bringing these into line. Experience from Northern Europe shows that police enforcement is a critical factor in gaining near 100% adherence to such limits. The government is not giving enough priority in resources to the police for the enforcement of 20 mph speed limits. It should also enable the use of covert and random enforcement.
- 6.1.3. Wider education and training is required for traffic authorities and engineers who have often not taken notice of the revised guidelines for setting local speed limits as in DfT Circular 01/2006. Many link 20 mph to physical calming and still refer to 85<sup>th</sup> percentile as the determining factor in assessing prevailing traffic speeds and the need for any form of calming. In fact this was revised to "mean" speed in 01/2006. Most do not recognise the in-built contradictions in 01/2006 which can be expected in guidelines.

Hence a **priority** such as paragraph 33 which states that

*"The needs of vulnerable road users must be **fully** taken into account in order to further encourage these modes of travel"*

is ignored because a **suggestion** in paragraph 82 that

*"20 mph speed limits are, therefore, only suitable in areas where vehicle speeds are already low (the Department would **suggest** where mean vehicle speeds are 24 mph or below), or where additional traffic calming measures are planned as part of the strategy."*

We also have some LA's not recognising that traffic calming is not limited to physical calming and can include roundels, gateways, etc. Some authorities, such as Cambridge Traffic Authority have even decided to go further than the 01/2006 recommendations and not implement a 20 mph speed limit unless the average speed is already 20 mph or less!!!

Such ignorance of the needs of vulnerable road users should be addressed so that the implementation of 20 mph for residential roads can be universally implemented.

- 6.1.4. There is also a mistaken view that 20 mph speed limits in the immediate vicinity of schools is a good thing. This takes the debate away from all residential roads being 20 mph. In fact the presence of large numbers of children around schools make this one of the safest places for children. Evidence shows that they are far more at risk on parts of their cycling or walking journey closer to their home where drivers are less likely to be aware of their presence. Children need protection for their complete journey home and this will only come from the widespread lowering of vehicle speeds throughout communities.

- 6.2. Strict Liability should be adopted in the UK. This emphasises the protection that vulnerable road users should be afforded on our roads. We need to redress the balance in the inherent safety of vehicle passengers compared to the vulnerability of cyclists and pedestrians. Unfortunately all the recent progress in vehicle passenger safety has increased danger to pedestrians and cyclists. The concept of "risk compensation"<sup>3</sup> means that where drivers feel safer then they compensate by increasing speed. This inevitably increases risks to vulnerable road users.

In 1982 Lord Denning proposed that there should be liability without fault where motor vehicles are in accidents with vulnerable road users. Since then there have been several attempts at bringing the UK

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<sup>3</sup> Risk by John Adams – ISBN 1-85728-068-7

law into line with that in other European countries. Strict Liability is another foundation of the success of cycling and walking policies in the Netherlands, Denmark, Germany and Sweden.

## 7. What should be the priorities for government in considering further targets for casualty reduction beyond 2010?

The government should recognise that the equitable sharing of the roads for all users is a priority if it is to gain any modal shift to cycling or walking. Whilst Northern European towns have cycle usage in excess of 24% for in-town trips UK levels of 4% outside a few rare examples typify the view that our roads are too dangerous for people, particularly children, to cycle and walk.

Road safety must be viewed holistically within the context of encouraging modal shift and it must be realised that this cannot be done with low quality segregated pedestrian and cycle facilities that lack convenience and directness, often increase conflicts with motorists and only serve to maintain high motor vehicle speeds through isolation.

This equitable sharing must be the foundation of our road safety policies. Within all towns, villages or residential areas vehicle speeds must be lowered to 20 mph to provide such equitable sharing without fear for those too young to drive, those not able to drive or those who simply wish not to drive. Higher speed limits should only be allowed where continuous, high quality segregated facilities are available. These should have priority over side roads and entrances.

In the future, our society will become far more reliant upon those citizens who do shift their mode of transport and will receive considerable benefits from such active travel. **Those citizens will not make that shift unless society gives them the respect on the roads that they deserve.**

This foundation will become the basis to encourage active travel with all the benefits that result from this, specifically :-

- Lower pollution
- Lower oil use
- Better health
- Better accessibility
- Fewer casualties
- Lower noise
- Better quality of life

Most importantly this should be done as part of a wider initiative and public debate to address the country's needs for the transport of people for the next decade. Increased safety for cyclists and pedestrians must be put into the wider context of benefiting the whole community rather than simply making better conditions for the current minority who walk or cycle.

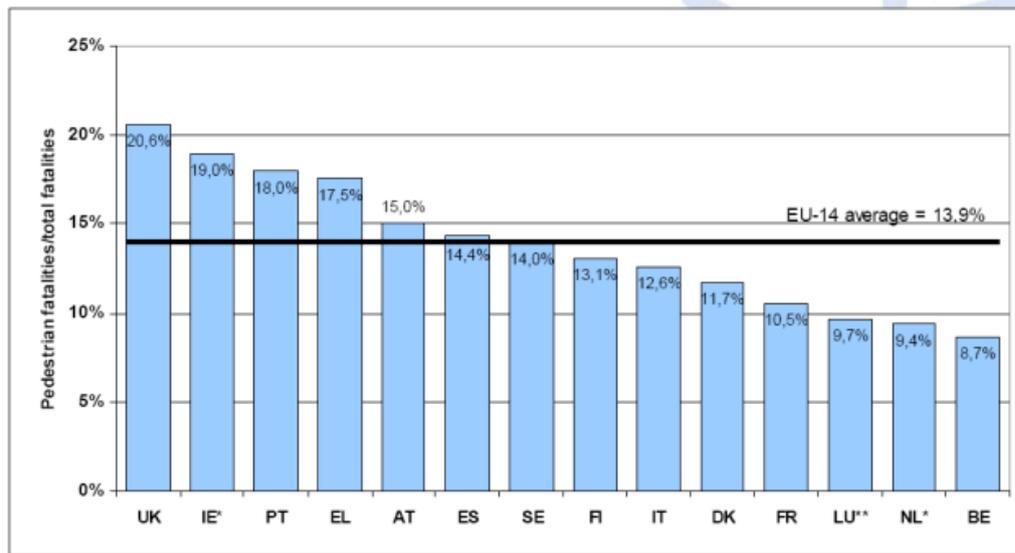
With that need should come the acceptance of "strict liability". The "innocent till proven guilty" argument should be robustly resisted as a "red herring" to the liability debate. The harmonisation of this with other Northern European countries should be sought.

### In conclusion :-

**The nation is changing its attitude to travel and fact that we will inevitably have to change our transport habits. But whilst a nation can change attitudes and become receptive to the need for change it does need visionary leaders to implement policies which will enable**

**those aspirations to be met. I trust that the Transport Committee can provide and encourage that leadership.**

**Figure 3: Pedestrian fatalities as a percentage of total fatalities, 2004**

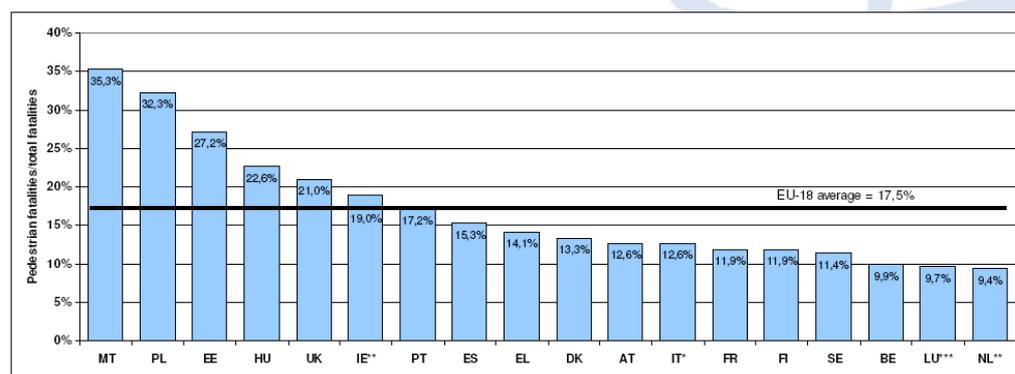


\* Data from 2003  
\*\* Data from 2002

Source: CARE Database / EC  
Date of query: October 2006

## Appendix

**Figure 3: Pedestrian fatalities as a percentage of total fatalities, 2005**



\* Data from 2004  
\*\* Data from 2003  
\*\*\* Data from 2002

Source: CARE Database / EC  
Date of query: October 2007