



# Transport Activists' Roundtable

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## North West

[www.nwtar.org.uk](http://www.nwtar.org.uk)

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Dear Sir or Madam,

The North West Transport Roundtable is one of eight regional roundtables run under the auspices of the Campaign for Better Transport (formerly Transport 2000). We are an umbrella organisation whose purpose is to promote sustainable transport, sustainable land use and healthy lives. We serve on several bodies established by regional agencies and, in the main, engage with planning and consultations at the regional and sub-regional level. However, we also respond sometimes to national consultations. We would like to offer the following comments on the Department for Transport's paper: *'A Safer Way: Consultation on Making Britain's Roads the Safest in the World'*.

#### Over-arching comments

We welcome much about this document, most particularly its vision of 'Making Britain's roads the safest in the world'. The idea of having an independent expert panel to advise on road safety and policy has some merit but we have a concern that the panel, like this document, might be overly focused on engineering solutions and might not be open to sufficient lateral thinking – unless its membership were to include a variety of disciplines and a fair representation of environmental NGO input.

We would argue that having too many road signs and too many varying speed limits is a contributory factor to the number of collisions that take place. There is a need for greater standardisation of road speeds. This will not be achieved by continuing to allow highway authorities the power to make independent decisions about these matters. Lower speed limits and a reduction in signage 'clutter' are proven ways of reducing danger on the roads. This could be achieved by the introduction of national standards but, as matters stand, it is confusing to drivers as they move around to encounter one set of rules in one highway authority and another set in another.

**Question 1: This consultation document sets out current evidence on the key road safety challenges. Do you agree with our analysis? Would you highlight others?**

**Question 2: Do you agree that our vision for road safety should be to have the safest roads in the world? Do you agree that we should define a strategy running over 20 years to 2030, but with review points after five and ten years? We have identified a number of factors that may affect our ability to deliver road safety improvements in the future world we are planning for. Do you think we have taken account of the key risks and opportunities? Are there others you would add?**

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We would like to take questions one and two together.

As already stated, we are very supportive of the vision. The really key challenge is not mentioned. This is the need to reduce road traffic. Less traffic overall would mean less people killed and injured on the roads. This is achievable by a concerted effort at every level to introduce 'smart choices'. Also by providing more good quality and flexible public transport, reducing the cost of public transport, making more roads more attractive to cyclists and by providing more safe and pleasant provision off roads for cyclists and walkers. However, the provision of good public transport – especially rail improvements - is now very complex due to the present structures. Until structures change, therefore, strategies which include rail are going to have to have to be long term ones.

The biggest failing of this consultation document is that, in trying to achieve greater road safety, it focuses only on the roads and does not look sideways for solutions. There is little evidence of across-mode and across (governmental) department thinking. But this is going to be essential to achieve the vision. For instance, a network of cycleways, 'Quiet Lanes' and 'Greenways' between and through urban areas, along with other pedestrian-friendly initiatives in urban and rural areas, would go a long way to encouraging people not to use private motor vehicles for short journeys. But, of these initiatives, only the 'Quiet Lanes, ones and some of the cycleways actually involve roads themselves. In that respect, this document is retrenching into the type of roads-only thinking which the DfT has invested much effort in recent years trying to get local authorities in particular to move away from. There also needs to be cross-working with DEFRA on carbon reduction and DCLG on planning.

There needs to be carrots and sticks for local authorities to discourage them from persisting in coming forward with major scheme bids for road schemes and encourages them to favour rail and bus schemes and interventions that assist pedestrians and cyclists. There is no longer any argument about the fact that providing more highway capacity generates more traffic movements and therefore new and expanded roads should not continue to be seen as the answer to traffic problems. In any event, they do nothing to meet the government's carbon targets.

**Question: We think that the key challenge for road safety from 2010 is better and more systematic delivery, rather than policy changes. Do you agree? We are proposing a number of measures to support the effectiveness of the road safety profession. Do you think they will be effective? What else might be done? Do you agree that an independent annual report on road safety performance, created on an annual basis, would be a worthwhile innovation?**

Pre-consultation for the 'Safer Way' consultation document highlighted the importance of *"moving away from a 'silo-based' approach that looks at engineering, enforcement and education separately, to considering the needs of an integrated road safety system"* (para. 4.15). We could not agree more but, as stated in our over-arching comments, the need is to be even more lateral thinking than that. However, purely on the matter of roads, the consultation flags up how road safety is dealt with in the Netherlands (p. 41). Effectively, what this espouses is dividing roads up according to their function (eg. a distributor road or an access road). This potentially has some merit and is a similar concept to the 'road hierarchy' which was the subject of much discussion a few years ago. One advantage of this type of approach is that road signs could be in a particular colour dependent on the type of road and there could be a nationally recognised speed limit for that type of road. Set speed limits for certain types of roads negates the need for repeater signs and therefore reduce roadside 'clutter'. We would probably therefore not agree that there is no need for policy change.

As far as the measures proposed to help road safety professionals are concerned, if these have come from the profession – as the document states – then they should be enacted. Any measures which might help save more lives and that are not environmentally damaging (and therefore risk- causing damage to the wider environment and society) should be encouraged. If the professionals would find an independently assembled report helpful, then there ought to be one.

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**Question: Do you agree that highways authorities reviewing and, where appropriate, reducing speed limits on single carriageway roads will be an effective way of addressing casualties on rural roads? Are there other ways safety on rural roads can be improved? How can we most effectively promote the implementation of 20 mph schemes in residential areas? What other measures should we be encouraging to reduce pedestrian and cycle casualties in towns? How can we better support highway authorities to progress road safety schemes?**

As already stated, we do not agree that allowing the different highway authorities the leeway to treat similar roads and circumstances differently is a good idea (other than by exception for very special reasons). It is confusing to drivers and less safe because drivers have to spend more time with their eyes off the road reading signs. Safety of rural roads could be improved by the introduction of a rural road hierarchy with the more strategic routes at the top, to which HGVs are confined, except for access, and Quiet Lanes at the bottom. As far as the greater implementation of 20 mph zones is concerned, if the political will existed, packages of these zones could be rolled up into major scheme bids by highway authorities. However, politicians persistently see the delivery of more highway capacity as a priority. This comes back to the carrot and stick approach referred to at the top of page two in this submission. Perhaps there could be greater financial incentives for authorities and regions which come forward with packages of smaller scale schemes and ‘smart choices’ aimed at reducing traffic, reducing road casualties and reducing harmful greenhouse gas emissions?

**Question: What should Government do to secure greater road safety benefits from vehicles? Do you agree that, in future, crash avoidance systems will grow in importance and will have the potential to greatly reduce casualties? How can we best encourage consumers to include safety performance in purchasing decisions?**

The government should be looking to get more people out of their private vehicles more of the time and they will only do this by offering more alternatives – and by those alternatives being reliable, comfortable and good value for money. As far as crash avoidance systems are concerned, these will merely help to keep the number of crashes lower than would otherwise be the case – but these systems will not reduce them overall if the overall number of private motor vehicles keeps rising, along with the usage of them. In as far as the consumer market is concerned, could fiscal penalties be placed on less safe vehicles – both directly and via insurance companies?

**Question: We have highlighted what we believe to be the most dangerous driving behaviours. Do you agree with our assessment? What more can be done to persuade the motoring public that illegal and inappropriate speeds are not acceptable behaviours? What more can be done to encourage safe and responsible driving? Should more be done to reward good driving? If so, what?**

There is a major issue about driving behaviour around school gates at drop-off and collection times, ironically often by parents themselves. Solutions here involve the kind of lateral thinking alluded to at the beginning and include more high quality school buses and more ‘safe routes to schools’ initiatives. As far as persuading the motoring public to adhere to the speed limit is concerned, the initiative which some authorities have pursued of offering safety training sessions instead of points on driving licences for speeding offences appear to have been quite successful. Re. incentives. What about offering a free bicycle to people who complete so many years of claim-free driving – partly sponsored by the insurance industry and partly by the DfT?

**Question: Do you agree with our targets? Do you agree with our indicators? Do you agree the Road Safety Delivery Board should be tasked with holding government and stakeholders to account on a new safety plan?**

The targets in as far as they go appear to be sufficiently stretching but there should also be a target to reduce traffic. Re. the Road Safety Board, it is hard to see how it can be given adequate powers but the concept is fine.

Yours sincerely,

**LILLIAN BURNS**  
Convenor