

SMMT WRITTEN EVIDENCE TO THE HOUSE OF COMMONS TRANSPORT COMMITTEE INQUIRY INTO THE STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK FOR ROAD SAFETY

NOVEMBER 2011

Introduction and summary

1. The Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders (SMMT) is the leading trade association for the UK motor industry, providing expert advice and information to its members as well as to external organisations. It represents companies throughout the automotive sector ranging from vehicle manufacturers, component and material suppliers to power train providers and design engineers. The motor industry is a crucial sector of the UK economy, generating a manufacturing turnover of £51 billion, and contributing well over 10% of the UK's total exports.

2. SMMT welcomes the opportunity to provide written evidence to the House of Commons Transport Select Committee inquiry on the Strategic Framework for Road Safety. SMMT and industry is committed to keeping the UK in the vanguard of road safety in Europe, a position it has occupied for many years, and welcomes any opportunity to contribute to a debate which helps raise both awareness and standards of road safety.

3. A summary of the response:

- The automotive industry supports government's drive to further improve road safety in the UK.
- The automotive industry has invested heavily in developing new safety technologies, supported driver education, and works closely with key stakeholders, including the insurance industry, the Department of Transport, and the EU and UN at an international level.
- Investing in safety technologies is an integral part of R&D programmes across the industry, in addition to the sector's focus on low carbon investment, which is often complimentary to road safety aims.
- The automotive industry strongly believes that an integrated approach is vital to any road safety initiative, as well as ensuring an effective infrastructure is in place to link central and local government ambitions. Industry also believes that in order for this to work, specific targets and goals need to be set.
- The automotive industry believes that government's deficit reduction programme should not impact on important road safety initiatives.

Vehicle technology

4. SMMT and its members within UK automotive manufacturing are committed to ensuring the highest standards of safety in its vehicles. SMMT is continually communicating with governments and policy makers at all levels to endeavour to improve road safety, and ensure workable regulations and policies are implemented.

5. Industry is continually investing in safety R&D, and developing new technologies. New advances in IT have allowed vehicle designers to move forward from passive safety systems to active safety systems that act to provide advanced warning and assistance to the driver of a vehicle in the event of a possible accident. These advanced systems include; collision avoidance, lane departure warning and electronic stability control. Further advances will allow the vehicles to become even smarter, enabling them to interact with their surroundings in real time to further enhance their safety, but these systems will need to be able to rely on information provided for the road network by others. Industry welcomes government incentives and initiatives that encourage and accelerate the implementation of such safety technologies into the vehicle fleet, thus ever improving the safety of UK roads.

6. SMMT continues to work with key stakeholders such as the insurance industry and consumers to promote awareness and adoption of new technologies such as crash avoidance/mitigation, and intelligent transport systems which are designed to reduce the risk of having an accident as well as mitigating the severity of accidents when they do occur.

7. Investing in safety technologies is an integral part of R&D programmes across the industry. The UK has recently seen a number of encouraging investment decisions by global automotive companies, which illustrates the competitiveness of the UK automotive sector and its position at the forefront of low carbon manufacturing. Many low carbon initiatives work hand-in-hand with road safety ambitions, complimenting the move to reduce emissions with the drive to improve vehicle safety. For example efforts to influence driver behaviour in order to promote more fuel-efficient driving has a positive effect on safer driving practices, in addition to the environmental benefits gained.

Integrated approach and the need for an overarching infrastructure

8. SMMT believes that any framework for road safety requires a fully integrated approach between the automotive industry, government, key stakeholders and road users. Developments in vehicle technology, the technology infrastructure, road user education, driver awareness, and government road safety initiatives need to work hand-in-hand to ensure the best outcomes for all stakeholders. SMMT encourages the implementation of clearly defined road safety targets, as the automotive industry is continually improving the safety of its products above and beyond legislative requirements, and would welcome a framework that encourages other stakeholders to commit to the same ambition.

9. SMMT believes that the Strategic Framework for Road Safety's focus on localism and the devolution of powers to local government can only work if a centralised regulatory framework and infrastructure is in place. Local authorities do not currently possess the infrastructure, budget, expertise, or capability to ensure that the aims set out in the framework will be fully realised. It is therefore a necessity for central government to set specific targets and outcomes that will guarantee effective communication of goals and progress, standardisation across regions, and the ability for stakeholders to be evaluated on their performance through clearly defined metrics. The localism agenda and devolution of responsibility outlined in the Strategic Framework for Road Safety needs to recognise this reality.

Government funding, proposals, and risks

10. As government has focused on reducing public expenditure, there have been several significant policy decisions which have a direct impact on the UK's intelligence, information and leadership on the road safety agenda. Two specific examples are the abolition of Road Accident In-Depth Investigation Study (RAIDS) funding, and support for the Driving for Better Business Campaign.

11. RAIDS provided invaluable data for industry and government, to support the development of safety systems and safety strategies for the UK and Europe. It also placed the UK at the forefront of actual accident data, which was utilised to improve safety across the board and inform all stakeholders. The loss of one of the only sources of this data and expertise (specifically staff involved in this initiative), could lead to a potentially significant impact on research and improvements in road safety.

12. Additionally, the end of government funding for the Driving for Better Business campaign has had a direct impact on one of the biggest groups of drivers, and on business efficiency in the UK. The initiative had tangible benefits for companies who experienced better driving by their staff, with reduced accidents while encouraging more fuel efficient driving. This in turn had a positive impact in reducing business costs

13. The automotive industry is concerned by a number of recent proposals, which contradict government's stated intention to improve road safety. The anticipated Department for Transport consultation on raising the national speed limit on motorways from 70 to 80 miles per hour, and recent ministerial statements suggesting a reduction in the frequency of the MOT test regime, pose potential concerns

14. SMMT believes that the MOT is an essential check on the safety and roadworthiness of vehicles, and that any review of the scheme or test frequency needs to maintain this primary objective. A reduction in frequency cannot be justified in light of government's stated objectives in the Strategic Framework for Road Safety, in addition to the move at a European level to reduce road deaths by 50% by 2020. A recent report from TRL on the "Effect of vehicle defects in road accidents", illustrates this, by showing that a decrease in frequency would result in an increase in fatalities¹. The automotive industry firmly believes that safety should always be the key factor when considering any changes to transport legislation, and urges the government to review the aforementioned proposals.

¹ Available from

http://www.trl.co.uk/online_store/reports_publications/trl_reports/cat_road_user_safety/report_effect_of_vehicle_defects_in_road_accidents.htm

European regulation

15. The UK automotive industry and government should be proud of its record on road safety, with 38 road deaths per million inhabitants in the UK in 2009, the second lowest in Europe behind only Liechtenstein (28), and compared to an EU average of 70. This position at the forefront of European road safety should be an ongoing ambition.

16. SMMT supports a continued proactive UK approach in EU road safety discussions, and share the UK government's concerns on eCall. Industry has highlighted a number of issues that need to be addressed prior to the introduction of eCall legislation, key amongst these are:

- Providing the automotive industry with sufficient lead-time for development and testing the eCall in-vehicle feature (minimum 3 years).
- Ensuring that the infrastructure (PSAPs and networks provided by member states, public authorities and telecommunication companies) are in place across Europe. There is a risk to OEMs that eCall fitment will be mandated in Type Approval requirements without the availability of full mobile network coverage in the EU.
- Industry therefore believes that any move to mandate the installation of eCall systems should be rejected, until these concerns are addressed.

17. Industry is keen to ensure that any potential new road safety regulatory requirements adhere to both UK and European 'better regulation' principles, are considered in a timely manner, and that the implementation process provides sufficient lead-time for industry compliance.

Contact:

Josh Harris

Policy Officer

jharris@smmmt.co.uk

020 7344 1614