

# **Briefing Paper: A Safer Way: Consultation on Making Britain's Roads the Safest in the World April 2009**

## **Background**

The proposed government strategy on road safety has been developed in light of the Department for Transport's (DfT) policy document 'Towards a Sustainable Transport System' in 2007 and the related 2008 consultation 'Delivering a Sustainable Transport System'. Within the policy document, five key goals were established including goals on health, safety and security, which the strategy aims to outline.

## **Summary**

The consultation document aims to seek views on government strategy, targets and measures for improving road safety in Great Britain from 2010. Government proposes the current ten year period strategy is increased to 20 years to encourage longer-term objectives, particularly in light of the development of vehicle technology, which the government predicts will see significant casualty reductions from 2020 to 2030. Government identifies that a more coordinated approach by those making decisions regarding investments that affect road safety, including vehicle manufacturers, can reduce casualties further.

The proposed strategy lists the following areas of government action:

- Supporting the choice of the safer vehicle
- Strengthening the weak links in the road network
- Responsible and irresponsible road use
- Measuring and ensuring success

Through supporting the choice of the safer vehicle:

- Government recognises the significant progress vehicle manufacturers have made in producing safer vehicles, including major developments in design of vehicle structures in crash protection, restraint systems and airbags.
- Government looks at steps that can be taken to implement existing new technologies more quickly due to estimates of car fleet renewal taking around 12 to 15 years.

In context of the shift to low carbon, government says that:

- Smaller lighter vehicles produced to improve fuel consumption may present new challenges around crash safety. Government further highlights early talks surrounding car to car compatibility legislation.
- Through increased investment and focus on reducing carbon emissions, government raises concerns that budgets for investing in R&D in terms of safety could be reduced.
- A move towards car-sharing could lead to an increase in rear seat passengers, raising concerns about the comparability of safety protection of front seat passengers.
- It will work to identify synergies between improved environmental and safety performance.

Regarding changes in social demographics:

- Government says there is a need to optimise design and protection systems for older drivers and female drivers through adaptive restraint systems, and improved side impact protection.

In changes in the driving task, government:

- Observes an increased risk of driver distraction from screens and warning mechanisms, with further concern raised regarding over-reliance on technology leading to serious consequences if technology fails.
- Recognises the integration of the European Statement of Principles Code of Practice by individual vehicle manufacturers in working practices and product design sign-off procedures.

Through maximising the potential of technology, government:

- States that over the short to medium term, secondary safety improvements such as better vehicle structures and airbags will continue to deliver increased casualty reductions but over the longer term, primary safety systems such as improvements in braking, suspension and tyres through computers and sensors will become more important. Government aims to put renewed emphasis in this area.
- Recognises the safety potential of advanced braking and lane keeping systems, collision avoidance systems and Intelligent Speed Adaptation, and vehicle to vehicle or vehicle to infrastructure communication.

On delivering change in the market-place, government:

- Highlights early considerations around legislation on smart restraint systems which could be in place around 2020.
- States that market-based measures concerning consumer information on safety technology will play an important complementary role to regulation in improving market penetration.

Setting out casualty reduction targets, the government:

- Aims to reduce road deaths by at least 33% by 2020 compared to 2004-08 averages, while also aiming to reduce serious road injuries by at least 33% by 2020.

### **Next steps**

The consultation will run for 12 weeks and close on 14 July 2009. Government will announce its conclusions later in the year following the end of the consultation period. Government's proposed strategy will run from 2010 to 2030, with five and ten year evaluation points.

***The consultation paper can be viewed at:***  
***<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/roadsafety/roadsafetyconsultation/>***

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