

# *Transport safety - into the 2020s*

Dear PACTS members, supporters and readers

A very happy New Year to you all. The twelve days of Christmas are now over and business has restarted in earnest.

As we go from one decade to another, I hope you will allow me a quick look back at the world of transport safety in the 2010s and a glimpse ahead to the 2020s.

**The 2010s saw road safety elevated to a global policy priority** in the UN Decade of Action and the Global Goals for Sustainable Development. This was recognition that road danger presents one of the biggest threats to human life worldwide, and one that is “man-made” and growing. Progress against casualty targets was less impressive but international wheels grind slowly.

In UK the number of road deaths changed little, with over 1,800 people killed each year; but the rate per head and per mile travelled fell. Taking the last ten years for which data are available (2008-2018), there was a decline of 30% in deaths and 20% in serious injuries. However, almost all of that occurred in 2008-2010.

The decade saw three road safety plans by Westminster governments, in 2012, 2017 and 2019. These contained useful actions, such as the new laws on drug driving, but lacked targets and did not amount to national strategies that would bring the agencies together to deliver the scale of action needed. That said, Highway England was established, with substantial resources and a 40% casualty reduction target which it is working to deliver. Local authorities were given powers to set local speed limits based on wider criteria, leading to 20mph limits in many urban areas and more 50mph limits on rural roads. London showed the most ambitious approach, adopting Vision Zero and backing it with resources and comprehensive action.

The Scottish Government reduced the legal drink-drive limit. Northern Ireland has sought to go further, and to introduce graduated driver licensing. The Welsh Government passed the Active Travel (Wales) Act and is reconsidering road and transport priorities, including default 20mph limits, in light of declaring a national climate emergency.

At EU level, a major achievement was the adoption of demanding safety regulations for vehicles produced in Europe after 2022. Various UK bodies contributed significantly to this. TRL estimates the regulations will prevent 25,000 deaths by 2035.

On UK railways, it was a better decade for safety, for both passengers and workers, with the technical lessons and organisational changes that followed the Cullen Inquiry taking effect, including independent accident investigation. Britain's performance compares well with that of other European railways. The main exception was the Croydon tram derailment in which seven people died and 58 were injured, the first passenger fatalities in a UK tram accident since 1959. It should not be forgotten that over 300 people still die each year in incidents on the main line network resulting from suicide or trespass.

The safety record of commercial airlines has continued to improve. In 2019, there were only 20 transport-category fatal accidents (283 deaths from 4.5 billion passengers) world-wide, and the 5-year moving average has reduced 3-fold since the turn of the century. The twin tragedies of the Boeing 737 Max disasters raised major questions about safety certification and regulatory processes which are likely to be a theme over the coming years.

**Looking at the decade to come**, the global fight against road casualties will continue at the 3<sup>rd</sup> Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety in Stockholm in February where minister-led delegations from over 80 countries, along with agencies, businesses and NGOs, will meet. You can view [the programme](#) and comment on the draft [Stockholm Declaration](#) until 21 January. PACTS Chair Barry Sheerman MP, who is also Chair of the Global Network of Road Safety Legislators, will be taking part.

Crystal-ball gazing is always dangerous but it seems highly likely that road safety will increasingly be integrated into wider policy agendas of climate change, environmental quality, resource use, personal health and sustainable cities. The example of zero road deaths in [Oslo 2019](#), as a result of sound road safety measures, along with substantial restrictions on car traffic and promotion of public transport, walking and cycling, indicates the way for cities. PACTS supports this approach.

It is likely to be the defining decade for autonomous vehicles as the technology matures and systems to regulate them are established. These hold out the prospect of substantial safety benefits. Whether they deliver on these, and whether they support or hinder the sustainability agenda, will depend on steering policy and regulation, if not the vehicles! The Law Commission is consulting.

At home, a government with a substantial majority will be better placed to introduce bolder policies. We must persuade them to adopt the right ones for transport safety. PACTS will work with the new parliament to re-establish the All-Party Parliamentary Group, and with DfT ministers – reshuffled or not in February. Brexit will inevitably occupy the government and create risks and opportunities in relation to safety standards, international agreements, institutional capacity and international trade deals.

Conventional risks will continue to exercise the road safety community – speed, careless/dangerous driving, drink and drugs, fatigue, distraction and seat belts. A new emphasis by DfT on in-depth collision investigation to deliver learning should enable better targeted interventions. The joint Roads Policing Review should end the reductions in enforcement action which has been detrimental to road safety. A call for evidence is likely to be issued shortly and PACTS will contribute with a new report. We will also soon publish a supplementary report on seat belts; followed by a report at Easter on drink driving.

The Road Safety Plan 2019 has a two-year time horizon, after which a broader, more substantive strategy is planned. This is an opportunity that we must all seize together.

The imminent report of the Williams Review of the rail industry is likely to recommend further structural change and HS2 will demand substantial resources and expertise. It is vital that rail safety is not inadvertently compromised by either of these. Emerging rail safety issues include the consequences for earthworks and structures from climate change and extreme weather events; the impacts of increased task automation on the train staff; and crowding and consequent passenger reactions.

In aviation, technology is running ahead of regulation in areas such as drone operations, and considerable work will be required to ensure safe integration of drones into airspace across the globe; the UK will be no exception. Pilot and crew fatigue will be an issue as operators seek to reduce their manpower costs, though there are regulatory caps on flying hours and rostered duties. Brexit remains a source of uncertainty. If the UK moves from the umbrella of EASA, the European regulator, to become a stand-alone authority, it will place major strains on the CAA and industry. This could bring difficulties with pilot licensing and associated crew medicals, and with certification of aircraft parts being manufactured in the UK for incorporation in aircraft that will operate in the EU. Bilateral agreements are being negotiated but have yet to be ratified.

**With the support of, and in partnership with, many of you,** PACTS has contributed to these agendas. You can see the content of our events and reports on our [website](#). We plan to do more in the months and years ahead. We see safety and sustainability becoming increasingly interwoven. We will continue to encourage working across the transport modes to tackle common problems such as fatigue, distraction, human factors in automation and employer responsibilities. We will maintain our focus on evidence-led solutions while recognising the importance and rights of victims and their families in bringing about change. Working with the government, stakeholders and our members we will seek to strengthen the transport safety community. You and PACTS know we can achieve so much more. We look forward to working with you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'David G Davies', written in a cursive style.

David G Davies, Executive Director

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