



UNITED KINGDOM

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In 2019, 1 808 persons lost their lives in road crashes in the United Kingdom. Overall, the number of road deaths has considerably declined in the past two decades. However, since 2010 the rate of decline has slowed. In July 2019, the government published the Road Safety Statement 2019, A Lifetime of Road Safety. It sets out a two-year action plan containing 74 action measures. The statement emphasises the mentality shift towards a safe system approach.

Trends

The United Kingdom registered a **decrease in the number of road deaths in 2019**. According to the latest available data, 1 808 persons lost their lives in traffic crashes in the United Kingdom in 2019. This represents a 1.7% decline on 2018. In 2018, 1 839 road deaths were reported, a 0.9% decrease on 2017.

The **longer-term trend for road deaths** in the United Kingdom has been encouraging. Between 2000 and 2019, the number of annual road fatalities fell by 49%. The greatest reductions were achieved in the 2000-2010 period when annual fatalities totals dropped 47%. Since then the reduction in the number of road deaths has slowed: 2019 counted only 7.8% fewer fatalities than 2011.

The number of **traffic deaths per 100 000 inhabitants** in the United Kingdom fell by 56% between 2000 and 2019. In 2019, 2.7 traffic deaths per 100 000 inhabitants were recorded, compared to 6.1 in 2000. By way of comparison, the average in the European Union is 5.1 deaths per 100 000 inhabitants in 2019.

The United Kingdom recorded 0.5 **road fatalities per 10 000 registered vehicles** in 2019. This represents a decrease of 63% compared to the year 2000, when the rate of deaths to registered vehicles stood at 1.2.

Country Profile

Population in 2019: 66.8 million

GDP per capita in 2019: USD 42 300

Cost of road crashes: 1.5% of GDP (2019)

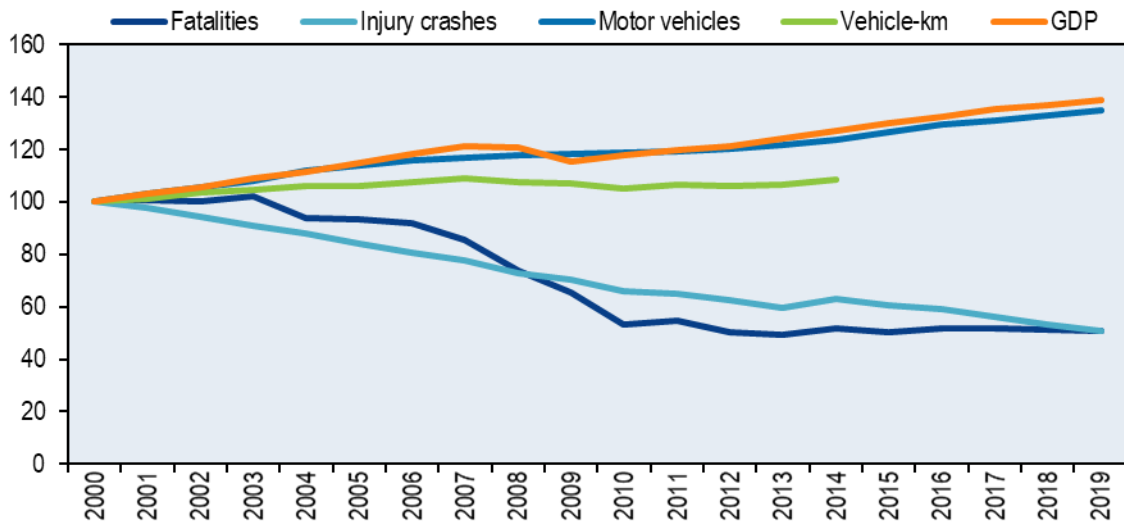
Road network: 423 019 kilometres (urban roads 37%; rural roads 63%; motorways 1%)

Registered motor vehicles in 2019: 39.9 million (cars 82.4%; goods vehicles 12%; motorcycles 3.2%)

Speed limits: 30 mph on urban roads; 60-70 mph on rural roads; 70 mph on motorways

Limits on Blood Alcohol Content (BAC): 0.8 g/l (England, N. Ireland, Wales); 0.5 g/l (Scotland)

Figure 1. Road safety, vehicle stock, traffic and GDP trends
Index 2000 = 100



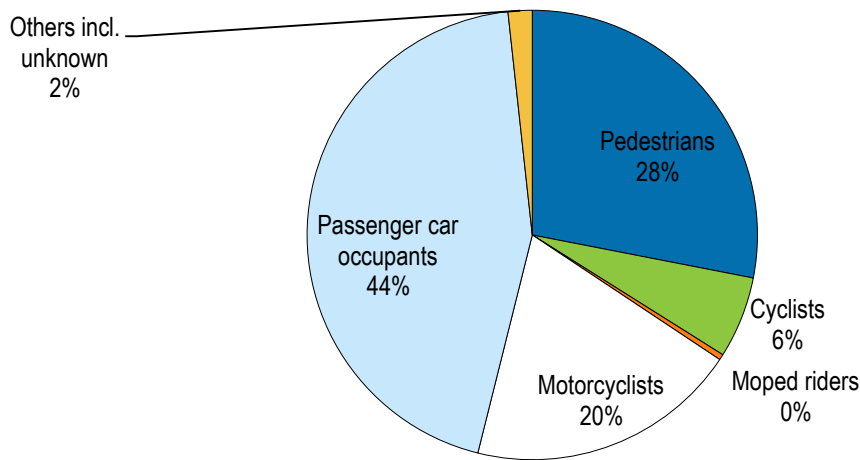
Data for **fatalities by road user groups** shows that passenger car occupants continue to be the group most affected by road crashes. In 2019, passenger car occupants accounted for the largest share of road deaths, with 44% of the total. They were followed by pedestrians (28%), motorcyclists (20%) and cyclists (6%).

The largest increase in fatalities was registered among pedestrians, with 487 deaths in 2019 compared to 472 in 2018. Road fatalities for passenger car occupants dropped by 4.6%, and motorcyclists had a decrease of 4.0%.

The long-term trend shows traffic in the United Kingdom has become safer for all road user groups since 2000. The strongest fatality reduction was observed among passenger car occupants, who registered 57% fewer deaths over this period. Pedestrians (-45%), moped riders (-53%) and motorcyclists (-43%) also saw strong road safety improvements during this time.

The user group that has benefitted least are cyclists, who saw the number of crash deaths fall by 22% since 2000.

More recently, since 2010 (see Figure 6 the number of road deaths has decreased for all road users but pedestrians. While on average the number of fatalities declined by 5%, it increased by 17% for pedestrians.

Figure 2. Road fatalities by road user group in percentage of total, 2019

Road deaths by age group in 2019 showed some changes compared to 2018. Notably, young people saw a reduction in fatalities, while the elderly population saw an increase in road deaths. Deaths fell 19.5% for road users aged between 0-14 and 9.1% between 15-17, compared to 2018. The elderly between 65 and 74, however, experienced 2.5% more road fatalities than in 2018.

Looking at the longer-term trend, since 2000 the number of road deaths has decreased for all groups. The strongest reduction in fatalities over this period occurred among young people with each age category up to 20 years of age recording fatality reductions of nearly 70% or more during this time period. The 21-64 age group saw fatalities halved in this time. The elderly benefitted the least from road safety improvements, seeing road fatalities drop roughly 26% since 2000.

More recently, since 2010 (see Figure 6) the number of fatalities decreased again for young people aged 15-17 and 18-20, while the situation deteriorated for the elderly (a 54% increase in fatalities for the 65-74 age group and a 13% rise for people over 75).

Despite recent improvements, young people continue to be at high risk in traffic, with a mortality rate much above the average. Traffic fatality rates are 4.2 per 100 000 inhabitants for the 18-20 age group and 4.1 for 21-24-year-olds. However, elderly people over 75 now have a mortality rate higher than young people, with 6.2 road deaths per 100 000 inhabitants.

Figure 3. Road fatality rates by age group, 2010-19
Deaths per 100 000 inhabitants in a given age group

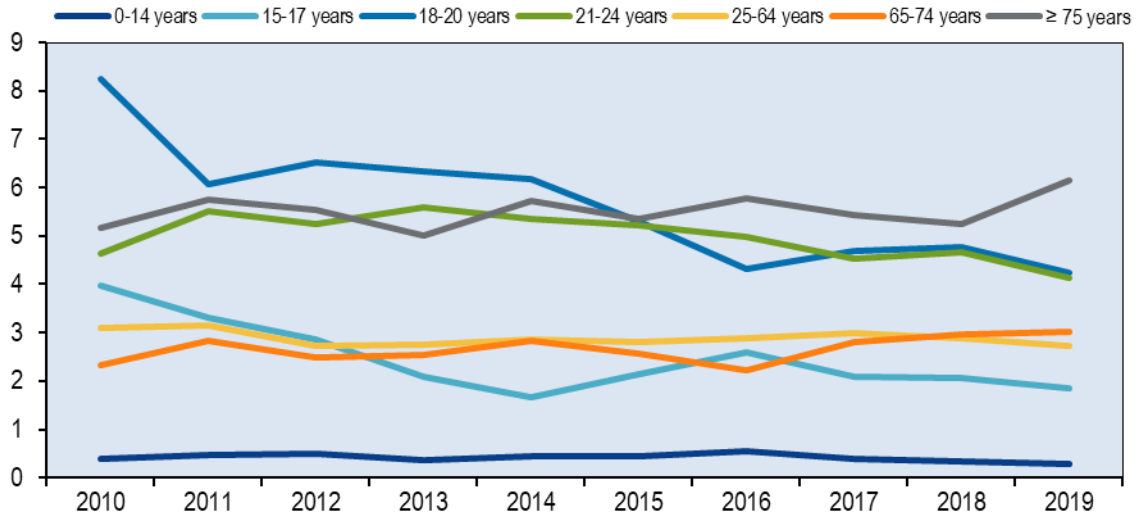
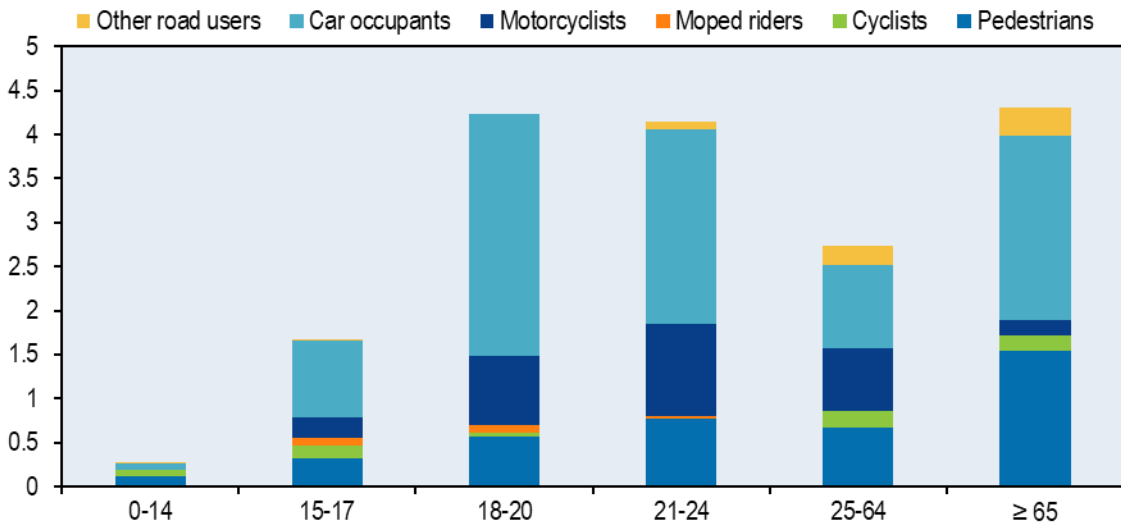


Figure 4. Road fatality rate by age and road user group, 2019
Fatalities per 100 000 inhabitants



Analysis of **fatalities by road type** shows the rural network has a higher proportion of deaths than other road networks in the United Kingdom. In 2019, 58% of deaths occurred on rural roads, 37% on urban roads and 5% on motorways. This repartition has remained largely stable in recent years.

In comparison to 2018, the number of road deaths in 2019 decreased 2.4% on rural roads and 10.1% on motorways, while urban roads saw road deaths increase by 1.1%.

Since 2000, fatalities have decreased significantly and evenly across all areas, with each road type seeing between 40% and 50% fewer fatalities in 2019.

Figure 5. Road fatalities by road type

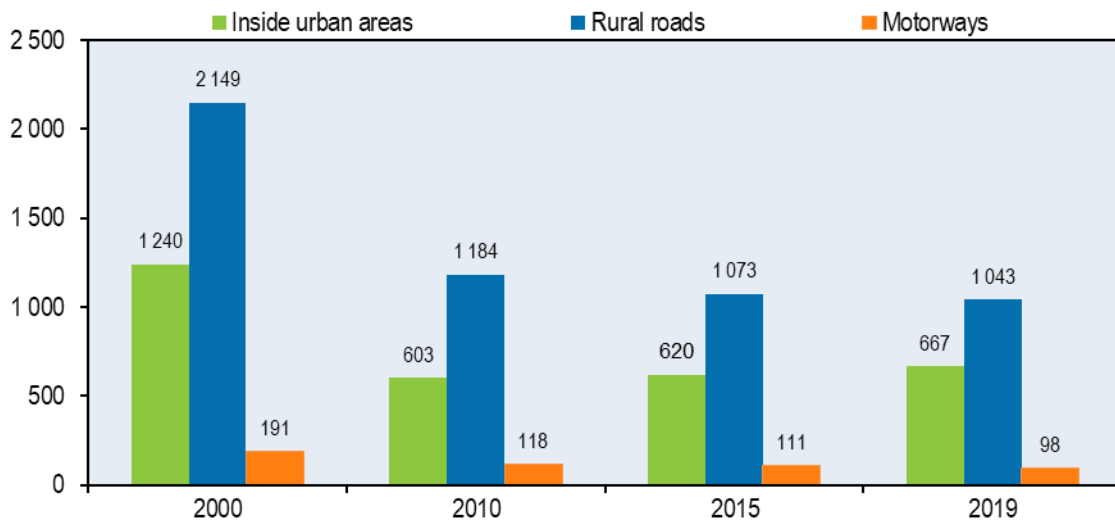
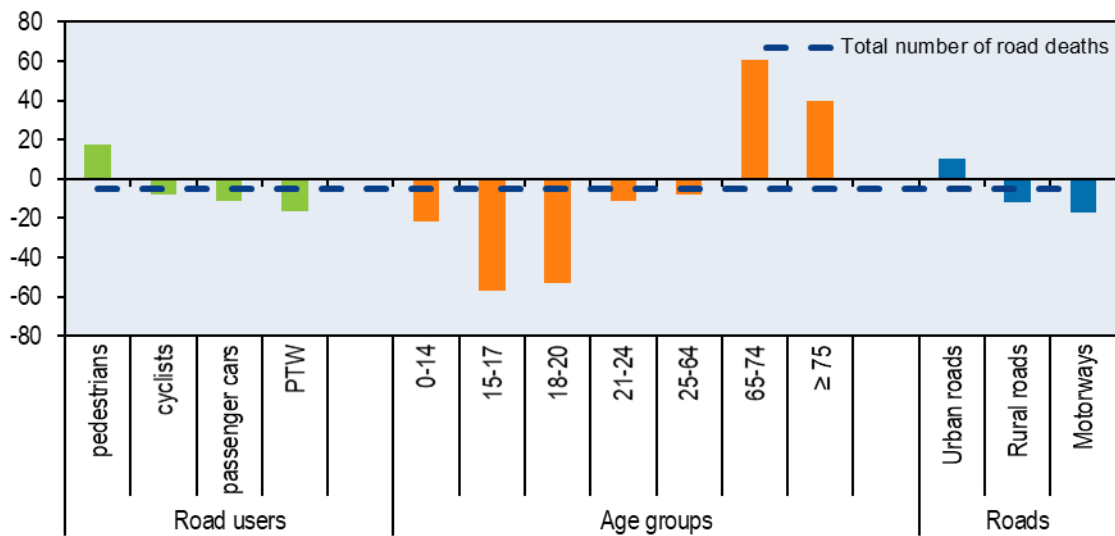


Figure 6. Evolution of road deaths by user category, age group and road type, 2010-19



Fatality data are essential to understanding road safety issues but hardly sufficient. Information on **serious injuries from crashes** is also critically important. Yet injury data are much more difficult to obtain, validate and – where available – compare. In the United Kingdom, 26 719 serious injuries were recorded in 2019 – an increase of 1.8% on 2018.

Economic costs of road crashes

In 2019 the estimated total value unreported accidents was around GBP 17 billion a year, higher than the value of reported injury accidents. This raises the total estimate for all reported and unreported accidents to around GBP 33 billion a year, corresponding to 1.5% of GDP.

Table 1. Costs of road crashes, 2019

	Unit cost [GBP]	Total [GBP]
Fatalities	2.13 million	3.7 billion
Severe injuries	0.24 million	6.1 billion
Slight injuries	0.25 million	2.5 billion
Property damage costs	0.02 million	4.4 billion
Non-fatal crashes not reported to police		16.7 billion
Total		33.4 billion
Total as % of GDP		1.5%

Behaviour

The behaviour of road users is an important determinant of a country's road safety performance. **Exceeding the speed limit**, in particular, is one of the main contributory factors of road crashes. In Great Britain, 14% of all reported road fatalities in 2019 involved excessive speed as a contributory factor. Exceeding the speed limit was reported as a contributory factor in 6% of all crashes in Great Britain in 2019.

The table below summarises the main speed limits in the United Kingdom.

Table 2. Passenger car speed limits by road type, 2020

	General speed limit
Urban roads	30 mph
Rural roads	Single carriageway: 60 mph Dual carriageway: 70 mph
Motorways	70 mph

A report on the evaluation of the three-year project on 20 mph limits was published in 2018. The purpose was to address a gap in the evidence available on the effectiveness of 20 mph speed limit (signed only) schemes (see the Measures section).

Driving under the influence of alcohol is another cause of road crashes in the United Kingdom, as in most IRTAD countries. In 2018 between 220 and 260 people were killed in road crashes in Great Britain where at least one driver was over the drink-drive BAC limit, with a central estimate of 240 deaths. Although the central estimate for 2018 is lower than the final figure for 2017, the difference is not statistically significant and continues a period of stability recorded since 2010.

In a survey on drink driving in England and Wales undertaken in 2019-20, around 5% of drivers said that they had driven at least once or twice within the previous 12 months when they thought they were over the legal alcohol limit (Department for Transport [DfT], 2019). This proportion is similar to 2018-19 but lower than the years 2009/10 to 2017/18.

In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, the maximum authorised BAC is 0.8 g/l. In Scotland, the maximum limit was reduced to 0.5 g/l in December 2014.

For statistical purposes, a drink-drive accident is defined as an incident on a public road in which someone is killed or injured and where at least one of the motor vehicle drivers or riders involved meets one of the following criteria: the individual refuses to give a breath test specimen when requested by police (other than when incapable of doing so for medical reasons); they fail a roadside breath test by registering over 35 micrograms of alcohol per 100 millilitres of breath in England and Wales, or 22 micrograms of alcohol per 100 millilitres of breath in Scotland; they die and are subsequently found to have more than the authorised BAC.

Drugs and driving is an occurrence in the United Kingdom, but there is no data on the role of drug use by road users for reported road crashes. In 2019-20 in England and Wales, 0.4% of drivers said they had driven under the influence of illegal drugs at least once in the previous year. This is not significantly different from the years 2015/16 to 2018/19, although it is lower than earlier years. Both drink and drug driving are more prevalent among males and younger drivers. More detailed results on self-reported drink and drug driving are published at <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/ras51-reported-drinking-and-driving>.

The United Kingdom introduced new legislation on 2 March 2015 on driving with a specified controlled drug in the body above a specified limit. The previous legislation required the police to demonstrate driving was impaired by drugs in order to prosecute. An evaluation of this new drug driving legislation was conducted in 2017, and the conclusions are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/drug-driving-law-evaluation>.

A problem for traffic safety in the United Kingdom is **distraction**, for instance, through the use of mobile phones while driving or crossing a street. An observational survey held in 2017 in Great Britain showed the proportion of drivers using hand-held mobile phones while driving was 1.1% overall: 1.0% for car drivers, 2.1% for van drivers and 0.6% for truck drivers (<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/seatbelt-and-mobile-phone-use-surveys-2017>).

In the United Kingdom, driving while using a hand-held device is not allowed, although hands-free devices are tolerated. New penalties were introduced in March 2017. Motorists using a phone while driving now receive 6 points on their licence and a GBP 200 fine – up from 3 points and GBP 100. Motorists caught using their mobile phones twice or accruing 12 points on their licence will face a magistrates' court and risk being disqualified, with fines of up to GBP 1 000. Drivers who have not had their licence for more than two years risk having it revoked, and lorry or bus drivers can be suspended if caught.

The share of **sleepiness and fatigue** as a contributory factor in crashes is especially challenging to detect. In Great Britain, fatigue was assigned as a contributory factor in 2% of all reported accidents and 4% of fatal injury crashes in 2019.

Seat belt wearing has been compulsory in the United Kingdom since 1983 in front seats and since 1991 in rear seats. Seat belt wearing regulations for children in rear seats came into force in 1989. Children are required to be restrained by a suitable combination of car seats and belts, depending on age.

Table 3. Seat belt wearing rates
Percentages

	2017
Front seats	
Driver	99
Passenger	97
Rear seats	
General	93
Children (use of child restraint)	97

For motorcyclists, **helmet wearing** is the most effective passive safety habit. In the United Kingdom, helmets have been compulsory on motorcycles since 1973 and on mopeds (up to 50 cc, maximum speed 45 km/h) since 1977.

A helmet is not compulsory on bicycles.

Road safety management and strategies

There are **several factors of influence on the United Kingdom's road safety performance**, as captured by the above indicators. Road fatalities reached a peak in 1941 of just over 9 000 in Great Britain. Since then, fatalities have decreased by more than 80%. In addition to the longer-term trends in improved vehicle safety, road engineering, trauma care and education, various factors may have contributed to the recent large reductions in fatalities.

The recession and economic downturn led to falling traffic levels, and the continued reduction in average speeds will have also played a significant part in reduced deaths. In similar fashion, large fatality reductions were seen during the recession in the early 1990s. In more recent years, though, traffic levels have risen again, surpassing pre-recession levels. This may be one key reason why casualty levels have plateaued at best and may be beginning to increase again.

A statistical weather model for Great Britain has been used to assess the impact of weather on the number of road casualties reported in 2015. The model indicates that for most months of the year the weather had little net effect, so the weather adjusted figures for 2015 differ little from the actual reported figures. In 2016, it is estimated the warmer and drier weather may have led to 20 more deaths.

Responsibility for the organisation of road safety in the United Kingdom lies with the DfT. It sets the overall road safety strategy for Great Britain. This includes decisions about road safety targets and legislating on key safety issues. Transport Scotland has certain

powers in regards to road safety in Scotland. For example, it can vary the drink-driving limit. And the Welsh Assembly has set a Welsh road safety target. Local highway authorities are responsible for safety on their roads and can use engineering measures as well as local education campaigns to improve safety. Road safety in Northern Ireland is the responsibility of the Department for Infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

In July 2019, the DfT published the Road Safety Statement, entitled A Lifetime of Road Safety. The document sets out the Department's action plan for the coming two years and focuses on its priority road user groups: young road users, rural road users, motorcyclists and older vulnerable road users. The document outlines additional actions for safer vehicles, safer speed and safer infrastructure in line with the principles of the safe system approach. In total, the statement sets out 74 different actions the department will work towards.

The statement emphasises the mentality shift towards a safe system approach, which commits the department to the idea that road deaths and casualties are not merely the result of poor driving but of a transport system as a whole, from signage to road user education, from enforcement to infrastructure design and construction. The effect of this approach should be to raise standards and improve co-ordination so that avoidable road deaths and injuries are reduced to an absolute minimum. Accordingly, national and local agencies, road safety charities, stakeholder groups, emergency services and other actors are integral to achieve safer roads.

Measures

Several measures to improve road safety management have recently been put in place.

Road Safety Statement 2019: The Department recently published a number of road safety measures in accordance with its publicly stated road safety priorities in the Road Safety Statement. The latter is a two-year action plan to address four priority road user groups: young people, rural road users, motorcyclists and older vulnerable users. The publication outlines 74 actions the department aims to implement in this period, including further research into road safety management.

Road safety management: A GBP 350 000 innovation competition to provide police forces with the next generation of mobile breathalyser equipment – enabling swifter and timelier read-outs on drink-driving tests – is currently underway.

In January 2018, the secretary of state announced the department would be taking over responsibility for CRASH, a collision reporting and sharing/investigation IT system currently managed by the Home Office. DfT helped to redevelop and enhance the system, and it has now been rolled out to all police forces that use the previous CRASH system.

A report on the evaluation of the three-year project on 20 mph limits was published last year. The purpose was to address a gap in the evidence available on the effectiveness of 20 mph speed limit (signed only) schemes. Twelve case study schemes were studied, from a variety of area types, road types and scale. The research concludes the following:

- 20 mph limits are supported by the majority of residents and drivers.
- There has been a small reduction in average (median) speed – less than 1 mph.
- Vehicles travelling at higher speeds before the introduction of the 20 mph limit have reduced their speed more than those already travelling at lower speeds.
- There is not enough evidence to conclude that there has been a significant change in collisions and casualties following the introduction of 20 mph limits in residential areas.

Road users: The first statutory Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy was published in April 2017. In March 2018, the government published a public call for evidence on the topic. The government response to the call for evidence was published in November 2018 and includes a range of safety measures that will bring cycling and walking closer together as part of the government’s overall ambition to increase active travel. The response also sets out a vision and a two-year plan of action, with 21 packages of measures addressing the key themes and issues raised in the call for evidence.

The Department for Transport announced a GBP 480 000 partnership between police forces and the RAC Foundation to trial an innovative approach to road collision investigation, carrying out more in-depth, qualitative analysis of the underlying causes of road safety incidents.

Infrastructure: The Safer Roads Fund makes GBP 100 million available to enable local authorities to improve the 50 most dangerous stretches of A roads in England. This improvement project is currently underway, and the department is working closely with local authorities and the Road Safety Foundation.

Definitions, methodology, data collection

A road fatality is defined as a human casualty where injuries result in death within 30 days of a road accident. Confirmed suicides are excluded.

A serious injury is an injury for which a person is detained in hospital as an in-patient or any of the following injuries whether or not they are detained in hospital: fractures, concussions, internal injuries, being crushed, burns (excluding friction burns), severe cuts, severe general shock requiring medical treatment and injuries causing death 30 or more days after the accident. Casualties are recorded as seriously or slightly injured by police on the basis of information available within a short time of the accident. This generally will not reflect the results of a medical examination but may be influenced according to whether the casualty is hospitalised or not.

A slight injury is minor by definition, such as a sprain (including whiplash), bruise or cut not judged to be severe, or a slight shock requiring roadside attention. This definition includes injuries not requiring medical treatment.

There are three main sources of safety information in the United Kingdom:

- the national road accident reporting system, STATS19, which is based upon police reports
- information from coroners in England and Wales and fiscal procurators in Scotland on the levels of alcohol in the blood of people killed in road traffic accidents
- hospital episode statistics (HES).

Most of the data in this report, which is also included in the IRTAD database, come from STATS19. While all fatal crashes are reported by the police, data from hospitals, surveys and compensation claims indicate a considerable proportion of non-fatal casualties are not known to the police. According to the best current estimate – primarily from the 2017 National Travel Survey data – the total number of road casualties in Great Britain each year, including those not reported to the police, is within the range of 590 000 to 760 000, with a central estimate of 670 000.

Linking HES data from hospitals and police data for England gives a better understanding of injury severity and outcomes. Around 40% of the police-reported seriously-injured casualties for England alone match the hospital records. As part of this linkage, the DfT has been working with the Maximum Abbreviated Injury Scale (MAIS) to rate the severity of injury crashes.

In 2015/16, some police forces changed their reporting system for severe injuries, and it is likely the recording of serious injuries is more accurate for police forces using the new reporting systems. This had a large impact on the number of serious injuries reported in 2016 and 2017, which can therefore not be directly compared to previous years.

Resources

Recent research

An evaluation of the national speed awareness course was published in March 2018: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-speed-awareness-course-impact-evaluation>.

The report from phase one of an ongoing review of the Safer Roads Fund was published in June 2018: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/safer-road-fund-process-evaluation>.

An evaluation of 20 mph zones was published in November 2018: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/20-mph-speed-limits-on-roads>.

A report on the problem of seat belt non-wearing in the UK was published in 2019: <http://www.pacts.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/PACTS-Seat-Belts-Report-Final3.pdf>.

A review into the existing evidence on the effectiveness of interventions designed to improve cyclist and pedestrian safety was published in March 2020:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/cycling-and-walking-safety-rapid-evidence-assessment>.

A report on the contribution of roads policing towards road safety was published in June 2020: <https://www.pacts.org.uk/2020/06/roads-policing-and-its-contribution-to-road-safety-report-from-pacts/>.

A report of analysis of data from the U-drive naturalistic driving study to understand mobile phone use while driving was published in October 2020:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mobile-phone-use-by-drivers>.

Websites

UK Department for Transport – Road Safety policy: <https://www.gov.uk/transport/road-safety-driving-rules-and-penalties>.

UK Department for Transport – Road Safety Statistics: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/road-accidents-and-safety-statistics>.

UK Road safety observatory: key facts and summaries of research on road safety topics: <http://www.roadsafetyobservatory.com/>.

References

DfT (2019), *Road Safety Statement: Progress Report. A Lifetime of Road Safety*, 2019 Road Safety Statement <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/road-safety-statement-2019-a-lifetime-of-road-safety>.

Road safety and traffic data

	1990	2000	2010	2017	2018	2019	2019 % change over			
							2018	2010	2000	1990
Reported safety data										
Fatalities	5 402	3 580	1 905	1 856	1 839	1 808	-1.7%	-5.1%	-49.5%	-66.5%
Injury crashes	265 600	242 117	160 080	136 063	128 384	123 212	-4.0%	-23.0%	-49.1%	-53.6%
Deaths per 100,000 population	9.4	6.1	3.0	2.8	2.8	2.7	-2.2%	-10.8%	-55.5%	-71.3%
Deaths per 10,000 registered vehicles	2.1	1.2	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.5	-3.0%	-16.4%	-62.5%	-78.9%
Deaths per billion vehicle kilometres	..	7.4	3.8	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Fatalities by road user										
Pedestrians	1 754	889	415	485	472	487	3.2%	17.3%	-45.2%	-72.2%
Cyclists	267	131	111	103	100	102	2.0%	-8.1%	-22.1%	-61.8%
Moped riders	37	15	10	3	8	7	-12.5%	-30.0%	-53.3%	-81.1%
Motorcyclists	634	597	403	355	353	339	-4.0%	-15.9%	-43.2%	-46.5%
Passenger car occupants	2 462	1 784	867	823	807	770	-4.6%	-11.2%	-56.8%	-68.7%
Other road users	248	164	99	87	99	30	-69.7%	-69.7%	-81.7%	-87.9%
Fatalities by age group										
0-14 years	394	171	42	45	41	33	-19.5%	-21.4%	-80.7%	-91.6%
15-17 years	335	169	57	45	44	40	-9.1%	-29.8%	-76.3%	-88.1%
18-20 years	558	342	197	111	111	97	-12.6%	-50.8%	-71.6%	-82.6%
21-24 years	616	304	178	154	158	139	-12.0%	-21.9%	-54.3%	-77.4%
25-64 years	2 223	1 908	1 046	1 024	998	947	-5.1%	-9.5%	-50.4%	-57.4%
65-74 years	..	272	128	184	197	202	2.5%	57.8%	-25.7%	..
≥ 75 years	..	407	257	293	290	350	20.7%	36.2%	-14.0%	..
Fatalities by road type										
Urban roads	2 462	1 240	603	643	660	667	1.1%	10.6%	-46.2%	-72.9%
Rural roads	2 706	2 149	1 184	1 114	1 069	1 043	-2.4%	-11.9%	-51.5%	-61.5%
Motorways	234	191	118	99	109	98	-10.1%	-16.9%	-48.7%	-58.1%
Traffic data										
Registered vehicles (thousands)	25 191	29 629	35 170	38 893	39 365	39 890	1.3%	13.4%	34.6%	58.4%
Vehicle kilometres (millions)	..	482 951	507 814	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Registered vehicles per 1,000 population	440.1	503.0	560.4	588.9	592.5	597.2	0.8%	6.6%	18.7%	35.7%