



UK Government Road Safety Strategy Briefing Paper

January 2026

The UK Government has published a new Road Safety Strategy, the first of such in over ten years. Given the importance of road safety to highway planning, design, operation and management, the Institute of Highway Engineers has prepared this briefing to help members understand:

- Why a new strategy has been introduced
- What the Government is seeking to achieve
- The main policy themes and measures set out in the strategy
- How road safety policy is expected to evolve over the next decade

1. Why a new Road Safety Strategy was needed

The Government states that progress on road safety in Great Britain has slowed in recent years, with casualty reduction no longer following the long-term downward trend seen in earlier decades.

Key points set out in the strategy include:

- In the most recent reporting year, 1,602 people were killed and almost 28,000 people were seriously injured on Great Britain's roads.
- Road collisions are estimated to have resulted in £6.9 billion in lost economic output and over £3 billion in NHS medical and ambulance costs.
- The DfT acknowledges that 22 European countries have made greater progress than the UK in reducing road fatalities over the past decade, contributing to a fall in the UK's relative ranking.

These factors reinforce the Government's view that a new long-term framework is required.

2. National targets

Using a 2022–2024 baseline, the strategy sets two headline national targets:

- A 65% reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured on Great Britain's roads by 2035
- A 70% reduction in the number of children under 16 being killed or seriously injured on Great Britain Roads by 2035

The Government labels these as long-term, outcome focused targets intended to re-establish momentum and provide clarity for delivery partners.

3. The Safe System approach

A significant feature of the strategy is the formal adoption of the Safe System approach, which is used widely internationally.

Safe System approach:

- Accepts that people make mistakes, but that these mistakes should not result in injuries that are life changing or death.
- Seeks to manage impact forces through safe speeds, safer road design and safer vehicles.
- Treats road safety as a shared responsibility, involving local authorities, vehicle manufacturers, enforcement bodies, employers and road users.

This represents a shift away from approaches that mainly focus on individual behaviour and towards system wide risk management.

4. Governance

The strategy commits to new and strengthened governance arrangements, including:

- A Road Safety Board, chaired by the Minister for Local Transport, to oversee delivery
- An Expert Advisory Panel, drawing membership from local authorities, emergency services, active travel groups and road safety organisations

- A commitment to establish a Road Safety Investigation Branch which will build on a previous pathfinder project, to analyse collision patterns using linked police and health data and to identify underlying causes

The intention of this is to improve learning from serious incidents and to support evidence led prevention.

5. Structure of the strategy

The strategy is organised around four core themes, each with a package of commitments and consultations.

Theme 1: Supporting road users

Measures set out in the strategy include:

- Consultation on introducing a minimum learning period for learner drivers (three or six months), alongside minimum learning hours and a mandated syllabus
- Consultation on lower blood alcohol limits, including for beginner drivers
- Proposals for mandatory eyesight tests for drivers aged 70 and over, with options for cognitive testing
- Consultation on reforms to motorcycle training, testing and licensing, reflecting the disproportionate risk faced by motorcyclists
- Development of a National Work-Related Road Safety Charter, to be piloted over two years, recognising that around one third of road fatalities involve someone driving or riding for work
- Publication of new national guidance on road safety education, training and publicity, supporting a lifelong learning approach

The government will use these steps to reinforce the need for safer road user behaviours.



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Theme 2: Technology, data and innovation

Key commitments include:

- Consultation on mandating 18 vehicle safety technologies, such as autonomous emergency braking and lane-keeping assistance, through closer alignment with European vehicle standards
- Consideration of joining 'Data for Road Safety', which is a European initiative enabling the sharing of safety-related traffic data between vehicle manufacturers, road operators and emergency services
- Establishment of a Road Safety Investigation Branch with a strong data and analytical focus
- Work to improve understanding of advanced driver assistance systems and their real-world safety benefits

Theme 3: Ensuring infrastructure is safe

The strategy includes commitments to:

- Publish an updated edition of Setting Local Speed Limits guidance
- Update the Manual for Streets, reinforcing safety outcomes in street design
- Explore the use of rural road categories and support pilot trials, including PRIME pilots
- Continue to embed safety considerations into the design, planning and operation of the UK road network

These measures reflect the Safe System principle that well planned and designed infrastructure should help reduce the consequences of human error.

Theme 4: Robust enforcement

Proposals under this theme include:

- Consultation on tougher action on drink driving, including lower limits and the potential use of alcohol interlock devices (alcolocks)
- Consideration of new penalties for seatbelt non-compliance, including for child passengers
- Measures to tackle illegal and 'ghost' number plates designed to evade enforcement
- Action against uninsured, unlicensed and unroadworthy vehicles
- A Roads Policing Innovation Programme to support more effective enforcement

The Government noted that in 2023 one in six road fatalities involved drink driving, reinforcing the focus on high-risk behaviours.

6. Monitoring and delivery

The Government has committed to:

- Monitoring progress through the Road Safety Board
- Using performance indicators to track delivery against the 2035 targets
- Evaluating pilots and voluntary schemes, with the option of regulatory measures if outcomes are not achieved

Recommendations for policy engagement

- The engineering and technology sector can contribute to consultations on road safety measures, guidance on infrastructure and vehicle and technology regulations.
- The sector can share technical expertise with policy makers on the implementation of Safe System implementation, management of speed on the roads and road design standards.
- Promote knowledge exchange between government, industry and other professional bodies to ensure informed, safe and practical safety measures.
- Provide evidence and data from previous studies



The new Road Safety Strategy represents a significant reset of national road safety policy and combines long-term targets with a broad range of measures across users, vehicles, infrastructure and enforcement. The emphasis on the Safe System approach aligns with international best practice and signals an expectation of sustained collaboration across all parts of the transport system.

The Institute of Highway Engineers will continue to keep members informed as consultations are launched and guidance is updated.

Documents of Reference

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/road-safety-strategy>

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/thousands-of-lives-to-be-saved-under-bold-new-road-safety-strategy>

If you have any questions on this briefing document, please contact the Institute of Highway Engineers Policy and Engagement Manager Cyrena Lafronte at

Cyrena.Lafronte@theihe.org