



**Challenging drink-driving culture:  
alcohol interlocks**

Democratic Unionist Party

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## **Introduction**

The Democratic Unionist Party is striving to ensure the utmost levels of road safety are being met and implemented across Northern Ireland. Driving under the influence of drugs or alcohol is a serious criminal offence which can have severe and life changing consequences for all who are involved.

As a society we have been proactively seeking to reduce and eliminate the levels of drink driving on our roads. Most notably this has been done through numerous high profile and hard-hitting media and public awareness campaigns which highlight the horrors which can, and do, result from drink driving. The Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) conduct high profile operations to prevent drink driving throughout the year, with a particular focus during the Christmas period, as well as early intervention projects in schools aimed at educating young people commencing their driving experience about the dangers to both themselves and others of drink driving.

## **Interlocks – an additional tool**

The use of alcohol interlocks provides another method of deterring and preventing individuals from drink driving. Alcohol interlocks are a type of breathalyser device which are built into vehicles to test if drivers have consumed alcohol before the start of each journey. When the driver first enters the vehicle, they are required to provide a breath sample before the vehicle can even be started. If the level of alcohol present in the breath sample is over the designated amount, the interlock device stops the vehicle from starting, therefore preventing the driver from committing a drink-driving offence and possibly harming themselves or others. The interlock device then stores the information received from this sample for a set amount of time, meaning that the driver will not be allowed to try to start the vehicle again until this set time period has passed. Interlock devices also test the driver again at certain points throughout their journey, such as when there has been a break in driving, to ensure that no alcohol has been consumed since the vehicle was first started.

Alcohol interlock devices can be programmed to detect to legal limit of alcohol levels, and they can also be programmed to detect lower levels. Currently in England, Wales and Northern Ireland the maximum legal alcohol breath content limit is 35 microgrammes per 100ml of breath, whilst for Scotland this figure is much lower at 22 microgrammes per 100ml of breath. Under the 2010 Road Traffic Act, the maximum legal alcohol breath content limit in the Republic of Ireland is dependent

upon what type of driver you are. For those holding a full licence the limit maximum limit is 22 microgrammes per 100ml of breath, whilst for learner drivers, professional drivers and novice drivers this limit reduces to 9 microgrammes per 100ml of breath<sup>1</sup>.

By proactively preventing drink driving on each journey, these devices can actively save lives.

The Democratic Unionist Party has investigated the use of alcohol interlocks as part of our 2019 Policy Plan commitment themes of *Improving Public Transport* and *Let's Lead the Way on Fighting Crime*. One death on our roads from drink driving is one too many. We are committed to continuously enhancing our road safety for all road users and will investigate all possible options available to do so.

### **Preventing drink-driving and repeat offending**

Across the United Kingdom drink driving is a serious issue. Within Northern Ireland alone the PSNI dealt with 27,104 drink driving related offences between 2011 and 2019<sup>2</sup>. All 3,005 people caught drink or drug driving in 2019 were referred for prosecution. Alcohol interlock devices can be used as both a primary or secondary crime prevention method and provide a key tool for police services across the world in the fight against drink driving related offences. For individuals who are caught and prosecuted for drink driving offences, car alcohol interlocks may be a way of reducing the amount of repeat offending as it physically prevents them from being able to start and drive a vehicle under the influence. This alone is a valuable reason why alcohol interlocks deserve more research and attention.

The European Transport Safety Council has called for the mandatory use of alcohol interlocks in the cars of all repeat drink driver offenders. This is in response to the findings of a report commissioned by the ETSC which found that over 5,000 deaths across the European Union are either a result of, or directly related to drink driving<sup>3</sup>. Written evidence from the Continental Automotive Trading UK Ltd on the UK Parliament Road Safety Framework states that:

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/2010/act/25/enacted/en/print>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.psni.police.uk/globalassets/inside-the-psni/our-statistics/motoring-offences-statistics/2019/motoring-offences-2019-annual-report.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.autoexpress.co.uk/car-news/102705/drink-drive-alcohol-interlocks-get-first-uk-trial>

*'As Alcolocks have shown that they can provide a way of preventing drink driving, and thus reduce the number of road casualties, legislation should be considered for the mandatory use of Alcolocks in the UK especially where drivers have been convicted of drink driving. Furthermore this type of preventative measure for drink driving helps to relieve the pressure on police and other enforcement resources, and enable these to be targeted better'*<sup>4</sup>

Road safety charities and organisations have been calling on the UK government to do more regarding alcohol interlocks. The Road safety charity Brake has called on the UK Government to introduce alcohol interlocks as part of their rehabilitation programmes for drink-drivers with their Director of Campaigns for Brake, Joshua Harris, stating:

*'Driving over the alcohol limit can have devastating consequences, so it is shocking to see thousands of drivers have been caught drink driving at least twice in the past four years. What is worse is that many of these drivers shouldn't have been on the roads to offend again, if the full extent of the law had been used. It needs to be made clear to drivers that not a drop of alcohol before getting behind the wheel is safe – something which our current drink drive limit fails to do. The Government must act now to tackle drink driving by implementing a zero-tolerance limit, investing in roads policing to provide a true deterrent to this dangerous driving and encouraging the courts to use the law to its fullest extent.'*<sup>5</sup>

As part of the 2005 Road Safety Bill, the UK government has been investigating the possible introduction of alcohol interlock devices in the cars of drink driving offenders, particularly those who are at risk of reoffending. In 2019, a study by the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety (Pacts) recommended a review into the use of alcohol interlock devices in the United Kingdom based on their usage and success in Europe<sup>6</sup>. The report is to be published in 2020<sup>7</sup>. Alcohol interlocks are used across Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Poland and Sweden in commercial and transport vehicles, and in programmes to prevent the reoffending of drink drivers<sup>8</sup>. The experience from the Dutch alcohol interlock programme highlights the effectiveness of these devices. As research from the Dutch Ministry of Justice found, interlocks were twice as effective in preventing drink driving reoffending than other sanctions, with only 4% of programme participants reoffending in two years

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<sup>4</sup> <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201012/cmselect/cmtran/writev/roadsafety/m37.htm>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.brake.org.uk/media-centre/1946-more-than-5-000-repeat-drink-drive-offenders-in-past-four-years>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/jul/18/convicted-drink-drivers-could-have-alcolocks-fitted-to-cars>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.pacts.org.uk/2020/05/new-pacts-research-project-alcohol-interlocks/>

<sup>8</sup> [https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/report\\_reducing\\_drink\\_driving\\_final.pdf](https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/report_reducing_drink_driving_final.pdf)

compared to 7% of those undertaking educational programmes<sup>9</sup>. In 2019, France legislated that drink driving offenders could avoid a driving ban in return for having an alcohol interlock device fitted to their vehicles. In all 50 American states, alcohol interlock devices are a requirement for drink driving offenders<sup>10</sup>. The Irish road strategy developed in 2013 'included the option of a compulsory installation of alcohol interlocks in cars of repeat drink-driving offenders as part of their sentence.' Other countries, such as Germany and Austria have been trailing the use of these devices, mainly for the rehabilitation of drink drivers.<sup>11</sup>

In 2018, the first trial of alcohol interlock devices as a drink-driving deterrent in the United Kingdom began in Durham, England. During this trial, Durham police service offered individuals found guilty of drink driving offences the option of having alcohol interlocks devices fitted in their vehicles free of charge in a bid to assess whether the installation of the interlock devices could reduce reoffending rates<sup>12</sup>. The breathalyser data received and stored by these alcohol interlocks was then collected and monitored by the police. The Police, Crime and Victims' Commissioner for Durham, Ron Hogg, notes that:

*'The misuse of alcohol puts a massive strain on our emergency services and the financial burden alone is estimated to be in the region of £11bn, not to mention the potentially devastating consequences for the families of those killed or injured in road traffic accidents caused by alcohol. The UK Government has assessed the evidence from other countries and concluded that alcohol interlocks are effective and cost-effective in reducing reoffending. Yet there is no legislation which would allow police forces in the UK to pilot these devices through the courts. Until there is a change in national policy, Durham Constabulary will use these on a voluntary basis for repeat offenders, those who have a history of problems with alcohol or anyone who thinks could benefit from the system to sign up through the Checkpoint programme'<sup>13</sup>.*

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<sup>9</sup> <https://etsc.eu/tag/alcohol-interlocks/>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.driving.co.uk/news/government-considering-alcolocks-curb-drink-driving-offences/>

<sup>11</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/transport/road\\_safety/sites/roadsafety/files/newspdf/study\\_alcohol\\_interlock.pdf](https://ec.europa.eu/transport/road_safety/sites/roadsafety/files/newspdf/study_alcohol_interlock.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.durham.police.uk/news-and-events/Pages/News%20Articles/Durham-Police-Introduce-UK's-First-In-Car-Breath-Test.aspx>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.durham.police.uk/news-and-events/Pages/News%20Articles/Durham-Police-Introduce-UK's-First-In-Car-Breath-Test.aspx>

During this trial, Durham police also offered the devices confidentially and free of charge to anyone within the policing area who believed that they would benefit from the use of these devices, a measure which may actively have prevented some individuals from committing drink driving offences<sup>14</sup>.

In Northern Ireland, drink driving legislation and penalties are covered within the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995 and the Road Traffic (Amendment) Act (Northern Ireland) 2016. Drink driving penalties in Northern Ireland currently range from fines of up to £2,500, driving bans and 3 months imprisonment if found to be under the influence in charge of a vehicle, to a fine of an unlimited amount, a ban of a minimum of two years and up to 14 years imprisonment for the serious crimes of causing death or grievous bodily injury through driving under the influence<sup>15</sup>. By offering alcohol interlock devices to first time offenders we may be able to prevent repeat and escalating offences. These devices can actively save lives.

Whilst these devices have been proven to help prevent reoffending, questions remain regarding who should fund them in Northern Ireland or the United Kingdom as a whole if they are introduced. The *Alcohol Interlock Implementation in the European Union; Feasibility* study notes that alcohol interlock devices in drink-driver rehabilitation programmes should be paid for by the participants themselves:

*'Interlock programme trials for DUI offenders should be user-paid, meaning that the participant pays the device (possibly in the form of a rental scheme), its installation and service, medical checks etc. as those costs can be justified if the driver benefits from participation. However, alternative models of financing should be discussed, e.g. public grants for needy participants, cost splitting between participant and public sources/suppliers.'*<sup>16</sup>

In Sweden, this roughly equates to a cost of €4,500 per participant for the two-year period of the programme.<sup>17</sup> This research also found that costs were not a major problem for participants in these programmes in Canada and the US. In some alcohol interlock programmes for reoffenders, the costs of the scheme may be covered by the participants in order to reduce or waive fines, such as in Florida. However, with this method of funding it has been noted that fines should only be reduced or waived

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.itv.com/news/2018-07-24/police-offer-drink-drivers-device-to-stop-vehicle-from-starting/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/drink-driving-penalties>

<sup>16</sup> <https://www.swov.nl/sites/default/files/publicaties/rapport/d-2001-20.pdf>

<sup>17</sup> [https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/03\\_-The-Swedish-Alcohol-Interlock-Program-for-offenders-2019.pdf](https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/03_-The-Swedish-Alcohol-Interlock-Program-for-offenders-2019.pdf)

once the programme has been successfully completed as an incentive for the participant to complete the programme.<sup>18</sup>

This study also highlighted that cost-effectiveness evaluations for alcohol interlock programmes could be made using the 'One Million Euro Test'. This method is supported by the European Commission and states that a road safety initiative is considered cost-effective so long as 'the cost saved per life does not exceed the amount of €1 million' (Commission of the European Communities, 2000). The European Transport Safety Council notes that in terms of cost benefits analysis, this varies greatly depending on what the interlock is being purchased for. For example, alcohol interlocks can be expensive to purchase for reoffender programmes, often costing between €1,200 and €1,500 due to the lower numbers of devices purchased. However, that cost may drop for larger orders such as the fitting of alcohol interlocks to all commercial vehicles within a country.<sup>19</sup> The European Commission noted in 2020 that the benefits to cost ratio of alcohol interlocks in different countries are as follows:

- *For the Netherlands, the reduction of 35 traffic fatalities annually is valued at 4.8 million per death, leading to a benefit of 168 million Euros resulting in a benefit/cost ratio of 4.1*
- *For the Czech Republic, the 8 fatalities prevented are counted at 1.1 million Euro/death, leading to estimated benefits of 9 million Euro/year resulting in a benefit/cost ratio of 1.6*
- *For Norway, the benefits are calculated as 5.5 deaths less per year a rate of 5.9 million Euro per death, or at 32.5 million Euro /year resulting in a benefit/cost ratio of 4.5*
- *For Spain, the reduction with 86.5 deaths/year at 800.000 Euro per death would imply benefits of 69 million Euro/year resulting in a benefit/cost ratio of 0.7<sup>20</sup>*

According to a review from Willis, Lybrand and Bellamy in 2004, alcohol interlock devices do actively reduce reoffending, but only while they are installed in the vehicle. Once they are removed, participants may find themselves falling back into old habits. This raises questions as to whether these devices should be a permanent feature in the vehicles of individuals who have taken part in these programmes or a sufficiently long time to affect behaviour. However, more research is needed to determine the correlation between the removal of alcohol interlock devices and reoffending. It is

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<sup>18</sup> [https://hekyll.services.adelaide.edu.au/dspace/bitstream/2440/82808/1/hdl\\_82808.pdf](https://hekyll.services.adelaide.edu.au/dspace/bitstream/2440/82808/1/hdl_82808.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> [https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/Drink\\_Driving\\_in\\_Commercial\\_Transport.pdf](https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/Drink_Driving_in_Commercial_Transport.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/transport/road\\_safety/specialist/knowledge/esave/esafety\\_measures\\_known\\_safety\\_effects/alclocks\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/transport/road_safety/specialist/knowledge/esave/esafety_measures_known_safety_effects/alclocks_en)



therefore vital that any reoffender programme using alcohol interlock devices combines this with an education programme to promote and encourage lasting lifestyle change among participants<sup>21 22</sup>.

The DUP will support:

- The introduction of alcohol interlocks in Northern Ireland as a method of preventing reoffending of drink driving offences, particularly for repeat offenders.
- The availability of courts in Northern Ireland to deploy alcohol interlocks devices when prosecuting first-time and reoffenders.

### **Commercial vehicles**

For years, in-vehicle breathalysers have been used by a variety of transportation, commercial and haulage companies across the world to ensure the utmost levels of road safety compliance within their companies and as a deterrent against drink driving.

Scandinavian countries have been leading the way on the use of alcohol interlocks in commercial vehicles for over a decade. In Sweden, the installation and use of alcohol interlocks in commercial vehicles was introduced in 2008. This policy has been well received and many policy makers look towards Sweden as the best practice case study on interlocks<sup>23</sup>. Other countries are also following this example. In Norway it has been a requirement for all buses and mini buses to have alcohol interlock devices fitted since 2019 and there is currently an ongoing discussion regarding the extension of this initiative to include taxis<sup>24</sup>. This is similar to the situation in France, where all coaches are fitted with alcohol interlock devices<sup>25</sup>. However, to date France has not extended this policy to include buses or taxis. Mandatory use of alcohol interlocks varies across Europe. In Finland interlocks have been mandatory on all vehicles which transport primary age children since 2011. Since 2010 all vehicles in France that can hold eight or more people have to be fitted with an alcohol interlock and from 2015 all French buses must have these devices installed.

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<sup>21</sup><https://www.cochranelibrary.com/cdsr/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD004168.pub2/pdf/CDSR/CD004168/CD004168.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> [https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/report\\_reducing\\_drink\\_driving\\_final.pdf](https://etsc.eu/wp-content/uploads/report_reducing_drink_driving_final.pdf)

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0001457505001090>

<sup>24</sup> <https://norwaytoday.info/news/obligation-alcolocks-buses-minibuses-2019/>

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/07/19/breathalysers-could-fitted-inside-vehicles-convicted-drink/>

Alcolock devices are not currently mandatory in commercial vehicles in the United Kingdom, yet some transportation and haulage companies have taken the decision to fit them. National Express, one of the major coach companies operating in Great Britain, took the decision in 2010 to ensure that all their coaches were fitted with interlock devices. This decision followed an incident in 2008 where a drunk National Express driver crashed a coach on the M1 England<sup>26</sup>. The introduction of these devices across the National Express fleet has been successful and has been welcomed by the road safety organisation Brake:

*'This is a transport safety measure and National Express is a great example of embracing new technology to make transport safer. We are working with Alcolock to lobby the government for its introduction in private cars and haulage as is standard in other European countries.'*<sup>27</sup>

Whilst it is positive that National Express as an organisation have taken this proactive step towards increasing road safety, it is imperative that other coach and transportation companies within the United Kingdom follow this example. The fastest way to ensure this is to implement government policy requiring the use of alcohol interlock devices in all commercial vehicles. However, there is a cost aspect to this which would need to be carefully considered.

In Northern Ireland, the phased introduction of alcohol interlock devices in all commercial and transportation vehicles has the potential to become a leader in road safety and the prevention of drink driving related offences, both within the United Kingdom, and globally. To finance such a scheme, a grant could be offered to partially fund the purchase of the devices, with the onus placed on the companies themselves to pay for the annual upkeep for the devices. Offers could also be discussed and negotiated with alcohol interlock distributors directly to offer discounts straight from the manufacturer.

The DUP will support:

- A review of the success of alcohol interlocks devices in companies and countries who have already implemented them to assess the effectiveness of a widescale roll out of such devices to all commercial vehicles in Northern Ireland.

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<sup>26</sup> <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/8508701.stm>

<sup>27</sup> <https://www.nationalexpressgroup.com/newsmedia/news-across-the-group/2010/national-express-makes-coaches-even-safer/>

- A feasibility study into the legal and financial requirements to promote the use of alcohol interlock devices in commercial and transportation vehicles.
- Based upon a sound evidential basis emerging from a feasibility study, legislation for the introduction of alcohol interlock devices in all coaches, buses and taxis across Northern Ireland in order to promote safer public transport and encourage greater public confidence in these forms of transport.

## **Conclusion**

Alcohol interlock devices have an active role to play in how we promote and enforce road safety within our society. They can provide additional pathways to help us to address and prevent repeat offending of drink driving. These devices help us to ensure that our commercial and transport vehicles are driven to the utmost standards of safety possible. While the case for alcohol interlocks in private use cars remains to be proven, it is worth further examining the use of these devices as outlined within the paper above.