



Protecting Vulnerable Road Users

Consultation Paper

March 2021

Introduction

Aside from motorists, our roads are used by a variety of vulnerable users including pedestrians, cyclists, motor cyclists and horse riders. These individuals have a right to use the road and to be safe and protected whilst doing so. As outlined by the previous Cycling and Walking Minister Jesse Norman, 'Greater road safety - and especially the protection of vulnerable road users such as cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders – is essential'¹.

Northern Ireland is making moves in the right direction to protect our most vulnerable road users. According to Police Service of Northern Ireland statistics, pedestrian casualties are down 57% since 1986². While this is positive, more needs to be done. Between 2008-2012, vulnerable road users made up one third of the total fatalities on Northern Irish roads³. In 2018 twenty-four vulnerable road users lost their lives: sixteen pedestrians, seven motorcyclists and one pedal cyclist. Even one death on our roads is one too many. Ensuring that our vulnerable road users are protected is a core component of encouraging greater public health and exercise and the reduction of vehicles on the road.

The Democratic Unionist Party is committed to ensuring that our roads are open for all road users to enjoy safely and we welcome the opportunity to consult with all interested parties on this topic.

The consultation process

To ensure that this paper accurately reflects the needs and concerns of our vulnerable road users, a two-stage process will be undertaken:

1. Policy consultation: this paper will be published for public consultation and welcomes responses and comments from all.
2. A policy document: after feedback from this paper has been received and adapted, a final policy paper will be created outlining the Democratic Unionist Party's position on enhancing protections for vulnerable road users.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/bold-new-measures-to-keep-people-safe-on-the-roads>

² <https://www.psnipolice.uk/globalassets/inside-the-psni/our-statistics/road-traffic-collision-statistics/2018/2018-detailed-trends-report.pdf>

³ <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2015/regdev/1315.pdf>

As this is a consultation paper, nothing within this constitutes present party policy.

The Covid-19 pandemic

In 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic resulted in an almost global lockdown from March to July. During this time, individuals were encouraged to work from home, not socialise with anyone outside of their household, and businesses and shops were closed. However, one positive did emerge from this and that was the increased numbers of individuals who took to exercising outside, as per government guidelines. This year has seen an increase in the number of pedestrians and cyclists on our roads and more active lifestyles should be encouraged to continue.

A survey by Outdoor Recreation NI found that during lockdown the number of people getting outdoors has increased from 28% to 63%⁴. Of the people surveyed, 89% felt more calm, relaxed, refreshed and revitalised; 84% felt physically healthier and 79% felt closer to nature. These are all positives which must be encouraged and promoted as walking and outdoor exercise are beneficial for both mental and physical health⁵ ⁶. Aside from these benefits, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has stated that walking and cycling are great ways to socially distance as we return to our places of work and begin to socialise more. Whilst we continue to tackle Covid-19, encouraging the recent growth in walking and cycling could be a means of reducing numbers on public transport to continue to check the spread of the virus, although this will be more difficult during the winter months when the safety of vulnerable road users must be the main priority⁷ ⁸.

The increase in vulnerable road users has once again highlighted the risks faced by non-motorists on our roads. There have been issues with increased speeding on our roads during lockdown and this behaviour is both dangerous to vulnerable road users and creates a barrier to their participation on

⁴ <http://www.outdoorrecreationni.com/blog/engaging-with-the-outdoors-during-covid-19-lockdown-in-northern-ireland/>

⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-the-public-on-mental-health-and-wellbeing/guidance-for-the-public-on-the-mental-health-and-wellbeing-aspects-of-coronavirus-covid-19>

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/758519/cycling-walking-investment-strategy-safety-review.pdf

⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/28/calls-for-more-space-walking-cycling-uk-during-lockdown-coronavirus>

⁸ <https://etsc.eu/letter-prioritising-transport-safety-during-and-after-the-covid-19-crisis/>

our roads⁹. The Northern Yorkshire Police recently released an article which succinctly discusses some of the issues which are being faced by our vulnerable road users as we relax lockdown restrictions. These include increases in speeding, a lack of awareness from motorists of the 1.5 metre gap needed to pass vulnerable road users, varying levels of road volume with traffic decreasing at the beginning of lockdown then rising again once restrictions eased, and the risks from ‘rusty’ drivers who have not driven much during the lockdown period and may have slower reflexes and reaction times.

We now have the unique opportunity to encourage those vulnerable road users to continue to use the road, whilst also promoting road safety for all road users. Launching a new media campaign to encourage vulnerable road users to continue with their exercise post lockdown, whilst encouraging the correct way to do so to protect everyone, may be of particular value.

Government strategies

In recent years, both the United Kingdom government and the Northern Ireland Assembly have been working to promote walking and cycling as alternatives to the use of vehicles, both for health and environmental benefits. The 2009 *Pedestrians and Cyclists: Improving Road Safety* report published by the UK Government highlighted that amongst all road users there is confusion over the correct rules of the road, particularly for cyclists, noting that:

‘There appears to be some misunderstanding among the public and some police as to the laws which apply to cyclists, for example, on cycling on the pavement.’¹⁰

Subsequent publications and road safety initiatives in recent years have sought to address this knowledge gap. In 2018 the UK Government published a two-year action plan on how to improve road safety for vulnerable users which contained recommendations as to how this can be achieved. The 2018 *Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy* is a comprehensive outline of what needs to be done to ensure the safety of all our road users. Perhaps the most important aspect of this Strategy is the holistic approach which it takes in addressing the needs of all road users:

‘One of this strategy’s core elements is its emphasis on the hierarchy of road users. Pedestrians, and especially elderly and disabled people, must feel safe in their interactions with cyclists and motor vehicles; cyclists and horse riders must feel safe in their interactions with pedestrians and motor

⁹ <https://northyorkshire.police.uk/news/five-ways-our-roads-changed/>

¹⁰ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2009/10/pedestrians-and-cyclists-improving-road-safety-report/>

*vehicles, drivers must feel safe in their interactions with pedestrians, cyclists and other vulnerable road users.*¹¹

Funding is a component part of this document, with £50 million having been spent on Bikeability training for school children with an estimate of 2.4 million children having received this training over the last ten years; £10 million for Cycle Ambition Cities for the development of better cycling infrastructure; and £80 million for the Local Authority Access Fund to support behaviour change and mode shift to Active Travel options (for example, for Big Bike Revival and Walk to School Initiatives). This document also lists a series of key themes which should be considered by all policy makers when looking to develop road safety legislation. These are:

- *Greater consideration and mutual understanding between all road users, especially towards cyclists and pedestrians.*
- *Prioritising the needs of cyclists and pedestrians when decisions are made.*
- *Protection of vulnerable road users from motor vehicles.*
- *Safer passing of cyclists and horse riders, from behind and in front.*
- *Improving awareness of vulnerable road users.*
- *Higher levels of compliance with the law and rules of the road.*
- *Promoting a more positive image of cycling and walking.*

There is also a call for an in-depth review of the Highway Code to assess what may need to be added or updated in order to clarify the rules of the road for vulnerable road users. However, it was noted within the Strategy that this review may take years to be completed. Planning policy and investment around the safety of all road users is vital and should be at the forefront of all road safety policies, and future infrastructure projects.

International examples

In recent years the United Kingdom has been behind in terms of international road safety statistics:

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/758519/cycling-walking-investment-strategy-safety-review.pdf

'The death rate of child pedestrians in Great Britain is worse than that in many other countries. In recent years we have been behind such countries as France, the Netherlands, Japan, Austria, Australia and Belgium in terms of the number of child pedestrians killed as a proportion of the population'¹².

In Northern Ireland we have the opportunity to not only lower the number of accidents on our roads, but to become a world leader in road safety and this is what the Democratic Unionist Party is striving to achieve. In working to improving road safety for all road users, and in particular vulnerable road users, we have the opportunity to examine international examples of best practice and to adapt these policies for our own use. For example, Sweden and the Netherlands have developed successful initiatives to promote road safety for all road users. Both the Vision Zero policies from Sweden and the Sustainable Safety initiative from the Netherlands have been 'adopted in the Northern Ireland Road Safety Strategy to 2020'¹³. These initiatives will be discussed in greater depth as part of the consultation process following this paper. We welcome comments on the success of the Road Safety Strategy to date.

In terms of how we modify our infrastructure to encourage more people to walk and cycle, and to do so safely, examining how similar policies have been implemented in major European cities could provide the blueprints of how this can be achieved within Northern Ireland, and the United Kingdom as a whole. The European Transport Safety Council notes that:

'Paris, Berlin, Milan and Brussels have boldly introduced new or expanded pedestrian and cycling infrastructure with unprecedented speed.'¹⁴

In our 2019 Northern Ireland Plan the Democratic Unionist Party has raised the need to invest in the visibility and safety of cycle routes and to continue to promote cycling for all age groups. It will be interesting to note as time progresses how successful the measures introduced in major European cities have been and whether this can shape the future of walking and cycling infrastructure in Northern Ireland.

¹² <https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2009/10/pedestrians-and-cyclists-improving-road-safety-report/>

¹³ <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2016-2021/2016/infrastructure/6416.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://etsc.eu/tag/vulnerable-road-users/>

Pedestrians

For pedestrians in Northern Ireland and Great Britain, the Highway Code outlines the correct rules and procedures which must be followed to ensure their safety and the safety of other road users¹⁵. Visibility is a key factor for safety on our roads, particularly on rural roads or when walking in poor visibility or adverse weather conditions. Pedestrians must wear light coloured clothing to enable them to be seen by other road users. They should also wear hi-vis or reflective clothing to further ensure that other road users can see them. All pedestrians must walk to the right-hand side of the road against the flow of traffic to ensure that they can see vehicles approaching and that drivers in return can see them. The only variation of the right-hand rule is if the pedestrian is walking on a sharp right-hand bend as in this scenario it is safer for the pedestrian to cross over to the left-hand side of the road as the visibility of drivers on the bend may be limited, then return to the correct side after the bend. Whilst there is no rule against pedestrians walking two abreast, the Highway Code does stress that pedestrians must 'be prepared' to walk in single file where it is deemed necessary.

As reinforced by NI Direct advice:

'Although you can't be responsible for the way people drive, you can take a number of steps to make yourself safer as a pedestrian:

- *stop, look and listen*
- *don't try to cross the road between parked cars*
- *if possible, cross at a pedestrian crossing or traffic lights*
- *never cross at a bend*
- *if there is a footpath, use it*
- *if there is no footpath, walk/run/jog on the right hand side of the road, facing oncoming traffic and keep as close as possible to the side of the road*
- *wear fluorescent clothing during the day and reflective clothing at night*¹⁶

Pedestrians are among our most vulnerable road users. In 2019 a total of 17 pedestrians tragically lost their lives in Northern Ireland¹⁷. The Road Safety Education advice leaflet on pedestrians notes that:

¹⁵ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-highway-code/rules-for-pedestrians-1-to-35>

¹⁶ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/be-safe-pedestrian>

¹⁷ <https://www.psni.police.uk/inside-psni/Statistics/road-traffic-collision-statistics/>

*'One in five road deaths is a pedestrian. 74% of pedestrian deaths are caused by the pedestrian most commonly being heedless to traffic or careless'*¹⁸.

There are increasing concerns surrounding vulnerable road users listening to music and being on their mobile phones whilst on the road. There is a distraction component to the listening of music and being on a mobile phone which may result in accidents and injuries. Another concern with listening to music is the inability to hear oncoming traffic. This is particularly a danger for children and young people walking to and from school and places of higher and further education. The *Road Safety Statement 2019: A Lifetime of Road Safety*, raises the need to better educate young people and children about the potential hazards of using mobile phones and listening to music while they walk and/or cycle¹⁹.

Children and older people are particularly vulnerable and at-risk groups on our roads. In 2012, 30% of pedestrians killed or seriously injured were under 16 and 17% were over 65²⁰. Education is key to ensuring that our children and young people understand and correctly follow the rules of the road. The road safety organisation Think! provides lesson plans for children at both primary and secondary school on road safety. However, concerns have been raised in Northern Ireland that not enough is being done. In a 2000 report by the Northern Ireland Assembly, it was stated that there has been a 'gross failure to recognise the importance of road safety education for children and other vulnerable road users' in response to the reduction of Road Safety Education Officers from 16 to 11²¹. Aside from age, the 2009 UK Parliament *Pedestrians and Cyclists: Improving Road Safety* report highlighted that additional road safety measures are needed for children from less affluent areas, noting that initiatives to enhance road safety must:

*'...give priority to promoting child pedestrian road safety schemes in deprived areas, which suffer disproportionately from such casualties.'*²²

¹⁸ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Road%20safety%20education%20leafelt%20-%20Pedestrians%202016.pdf>

¹⁹

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/817695/road-safety-statement-2019.pdf

²⁰ <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/raise/publications/2015/regdev/1315.pdf>

²¹ <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/assembly-business/committees/1998-2003/pac/reports/report-on-road-safety-in-northern-ireland/>

²² <https://www.parliament.uk/business/news/2009/10/pedestrians-and-cyclists-improving-road-safety-report/>

There are numerous ways in which we as a society can work towards preventing road deaths. Infrastructure plays a vital role and one which may have been overlooked in terms of pedestrian safety. Well maintained roads are essential for the safety of all our road users as good road surfaces, correct and up to date road markings, road lighting and well-maintained hedgerows and trees for clear visibility help to reduce incidents faced by all, and in particular vulnerable road users²³. Public awareness campaigns, like that run by Police Scotland every March, help to raise awareness of vulnerable road users. This has real life impacts as Police Scotland saw a drop in responses to pedestrian casualties from 1,253 in 2018 to 637 in 2019²⁴.

One slightly more outside the box approach to protecting vulnerable road users could be the campaign by the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) for the adoption of Single Double British Summertime (SDBS) in the United Kingdom²⁵. This would move clocks one hour ahead of Greenwich Mean Time in summer and move them two hours ahead in winter to ensure lighter evenings all year round. In a paper promoting this measure, RoSPA notes that whilst the trial of Single Double British Summertime from 1968 to 1971 was not successful, now may be the time to conduct a second trial over a timeframe of two to three years. The introduction of Single Double British Summertime would cost what RoSPA believes to be an estimate of £5 million as part of a public awareness campaign, but it is believed that this would be a one-off cost. A 2009 Department of Transport paper, *A Safer Way: Making Britain's Roads the Safest in the World*, has previously discussed the adoption of Single Double British Summertime and even speculated that this could prevent around 80 road deaths per year²⁶. However, a move to Single Double British Summertime would have other implications which would need to be addressed in detail.

Initiatives to enhance the safety of pedestrians may include:

- A public awareness campaign to highlight the risks faced by pedestrians on our roads
- Better education of the correct rules that pedestrians must follow on the road

²³ <https://www.local.gov.uk/parliament/briefings-and-responses/general-debate-road-safety-house-commons-5-november-2018>

²⁴ <https://www.scotland.police.uk/what-s-happening/news/2020/march/week-of-action-to-focus-on-vulnerable-road-users/>

²⁵ <https://www.rospace.com/rospaweb/docs/advice-services/road-safety/british-summertime-factsheet.pdf>

²⁶

<https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/closed/roadsafetyconsultation/roadsafetyconsultation.pdf>

- The creation of more off-road walking and green space areas to provide pedestrians with feasible alternative to walking on roads
- The creation of more footpaths (where appropriate) and green pathways on rural roads

Cyclists

Cycling is a great mode of transport and a fantastic way to exercise and to enjoy the outdoors. It is an activity that is loved by people of all ages and can be enjoyed as a means of travel, a hobby, a way of keeping fit, or as a competitive sport. As such, this means that our roads are often used by cyclists of a variety of ages and varying levels of experience. A 2016 comparative study of road traffic collisions in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland for the Northern Ireland Assembly found that male cyclists are five times more likely to be seriously injured than their female counterparts²⁷. Reasons behind this may be that men are more likely to cycle, or may be more prone to more risk taking when they cycle, than their female counterparts. Either way, this is an interesting statistic which may require further investigation.

The Highways Code lists the correct and necessary safety features which are needed to protect cyclists on the road²⁸. Cyclists must always wear a correct fitting helmet which meets safety regulations; wear appropriate reflective and colourful clothing when on the road, and should make sure that their bike or bikes have a white front and red rear light, a red rear reflector and amber pedal reflectors under the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2000, regulations 13,15,21 and 27²⁹. These measures not only help to keep the cyclist safe, but allow other road users to easily see them.

As mentioned above (see section **Government strategies**) there is often confusion as to what the correct rules are for cycling. For example, cyclists must not ride their bike on a footpath or footway, unless there is a specific cycle lane on said footpath or footway under the Road Traffic Regulation (Northern Ireland) Order 1997 Article 3³⁰. However, many cyclists, particularly children and young people, do tend to ride on footpaths as it is sometimes seen as safer than cycling on the road,

²⁷ <http://www.niassembly.gov.uk/globalassets/documents/infrastructure/research-papers/228.-20160923raise-comaprative-analysis-of-road-traffic-accidents-in-northern-ireland-and-the-republic-of-ireland.pdf>

²⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-highway-code/rules-for-cyclists-59-to-82>

²⁹ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/2000/169/contents/made>

³⁰ Road Traffic Regulation (NI) Order 1997

especially if traffic is heavy. Cyclists can ride a maximum of two abreast, but must ride single file around bends and on narrow and busy roads. This raises questions regarding what is defined as a busy road as different road users may have contrasting opinions on this. Think! also notes that cyclists should:

'Avoid riding up the inside of vehicles, as you might not be seen. If a vehicle is indicating to the left hang back at the junction to reduce the risk of a collision'³¹.

This confusion shared by all road users on what cyclists can and cannot do is why teaching all road users, particularly children, the correct rules for riding on the road is so important. The United Kingdom government has been funding initiatives in Great Britain such as Bikeability, a programme which teaches school children about cycling and road safety.

In Northern Ireland, the majority of school children learn about cycling safety through the Cycling Proficiency Scheme which has trained more than 450,000 pupils in the 45 years the programme has been running³². Sustrans, a charity which promotes walking and cycling in the United Kingdom, offers a variety of cycling courses for children and adults, as well as awareness courses for bus and lorry driver³³. These are great initiatives and deserve further promotion to encourage greater uptake. As a society we are familiar with the old saying, *'you never forget how to ride a bike'*. This may be the case, but as road safety regulations change over time it is vital that road users of all ages keep their knowledge of this up to date.

Aside from providing cyclists themselves with the necessary training, drivers also have to be aware of how to safely share the road with vulnerable road users. The correct way for a vehicle to pass a cyclist on the road is to wait until a clear and straight part of the road, slow down and keep at least 1.5 metres distance between the vehicle and the cyclist. However, many cyclists report that this is often not the case and campaigns such as the *Too Close for Comfort* campaign promoted by Cycling UK hope to promote awareness of this³⁴. Reckless overtaking of cyclists put both the cyclist and the vehicle driver into dangerous and potential life threatening situations. Drivers are already taught a certain amount about the safe passing of vulnerable road users as part of the hazard perception component of the driving test. Under the Cycling and Walking Investment Strategy, further cycling training will be

³¹ <https://www.think.gov.uk/advice-for-road-users/#cyclists>

³² <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/cycling-proficiency-scheme>

³³ <https://www.sustrans.org.uk/our-blog/projects/2019/northern-ireland/cycle-training-in-northern-ireland/>

³⁴ <https://www.cyclinguk.org/campaign/toocloseforcomfort>

provided to driving instructors to ensure that learner drivers are fully aware from the start of their driving careers about how to share the road correctly.

Initiatives to enhance the safety of cyclists may include:

- The creation of more cycle lanes and off-road cycling facilities across Northern Ireland
- More education for children and young people on cycle safety
- Working with employers to promote cycling to work initiatives and relevant training on cycle safety
- Working with driving instructors to ensure that all learner drivers are taught the most up to date information on sharing the road safely with vulnerable road users and ensuring that sharing the road with all road users becomes a larger component of the driving test

E-bikes and E-vehicles

The ever-changing technology of the vehicles on our roads is creating new and ever-expanding areas which road safety policy needs to address. Electric, or e-bikes, are now becoming a popular alternative to the traditional bike, particularly for use in city commuting. These are motor assisted pedal bikes which are capable of reaching speeds of up to 15.5 miles per hour with the motor, although they can go faster than this when pedalled manually. According to research conducted by RoSPA, there are now over 50,000 electric bikes being sold in the United Kingdom each year³⁵.

However, there are risks associated with the use of electric bikes. In the United Kingdom these bikes do not require a license, can be rode by anyone over the age of 14 and do not have to be taxed or insured³⁶. As they can be faster than ordinary push bikes, this raises the possibility of speed related incidents and injuries. In most circumstances, accidents involving electronic bikes and speed involve only the one vehicle. As electric bikes move faster than traditional bikes, other road users may find their speed hard to judge. One of the biggest causes of injury to electric bikes users is the weight of the bike. On average, they are 10kg heavier than a traditional bike and accidents can be caused when cyclists are stationary, or mounting and dismounting due to the strength needed to hold the bike upright. There is also a risk to other vulnerable road users from electric bikes. In 2018 Sakine Cihan

³⁵ <https://www.rospa.com/rospaweb/docs/advice-services/road-safety/cyclists/e-bikes-factsheet.pdf>

³⁶ <https://www.gov.uk/electric-bike-rules>

died from injuries she received after being involved in a crash with an electric bike in London³⁷. Whilst this was a tragic accident, it has raised concerns which will need to be addressed to ensure that all road users are protected. Any new road safety legislation will have to incorporate electronic bikes into their policies.

E-scooters are devices which can carry one person in a standing position, have an electric motor and can go at speeds of up to 12.5 miles per hour. Currently they are illegal to use on roads, cycle lanes and pavements in the United Kingdom, but they can be used on private land with the landowner's permission. The Department for Transport (DoT) is currently reviewing regulations on the use of E-scooters and trials of rental E-scooters are being planned in locations across the United Kingdom³⁸.

Electric vehicles, or Ultra Low Emission Vehicles (ULEVs), are becoming ever more popular on our roads. At an estimate, there are over 150,000 electric vehicles on our roads. The increasing use of e-vehicles is also raising safety concerns for the future. These vehicles are more environmentally friendly, yet there are issues which need to be addressed. One of the 'side-effects' of e-vehicles is that they are considerably quieter when the engine is running than traditional petrol and diesel vehicles. As a result, they are harder to hear and this can lead to serious risks for vulnerable road users. As per a pledge within the *Future of Mobility: Urban Strategy* paper by the UK government, measures have been put in place to address these concerns:

The government has further cemented its position as a global leader in the transition to zero emission transport, by securing new regulations to make electric vehicles safer and provide greater confidence to vulnerable road users.

From 1 July 2019, all manufacturers must install a system in new types of quiet electric and hybrid electric vehicles. Sound generators will produce a specified level of noise when they are reversing or running below 20 km/h (about 12mph). The sound generated will be similar to that made by a conventional engine and can be temporarily deactivated by the driver if judged necessary³⁹.

E-bike, e-scooter and e-vehicle safety initiatives may include:

³⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2018/sep/14/e-bike-crash-death-prompts-debate-over-safety-on-uk-roads>

³⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/legalising-rental-e-scooter-trials-defining-e-scooters-and-rules-for-their-use/legalising-rental-e-scooter-trials>

³⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/new-noise-systems-to-stop-silent-electric-cars-and-improve-safety>

- A review into the use and sales of electric bikes within Northern Ireland to determine if more can be done to promote their use as a via alternative mode of transport
- An additional section added to the Highway Code to incorporate the use of electric bikes, and vehicles
- Review the DoT trials of E-scooters and if appropriate introduce the necessary legislative framework for their use.

Motorcyclists

Northern Ireland has a rich heritage for motorcyclists and is famous for road racing events such as the North West 200, Ulster GP and the Cookstown 100. As a result, Northern Ireland is a popular spot for motorcyclists, tourists and locals alike, who enjoy these popular sporting events and our magnificent coastal roads. However, motorcyclists are one of our most vulnerable road users and there is a fine line between thrill and danger. Every year on our road's motorcyclists lose their lives. In 2019, three motorcyclists were killed on Northern Irish roads⁴⁰. Whilst speeding is a major risk with motorcyclists, there is also the problem of driver awareness of motorcyclists. Over recent years there have been many public awareness campaigns and media advertisements by the Police Service of Northern Ireland to encourage drivers to look twice for motorcycles, particularly at road ends, junctions, and in slow moving traffic. There have also been national campaigns to encourage and promote safer riding techniques, such as BikeSafe, and these are supported by the Police Service of Northern Ireland^{41 42}.

As motorcyclists do not have the protection of an enclosed vehicle, it is imperative that motorcyclists dress correctly. Public awareness campaigns remind motorcyclists to 'dress for the slide, not for the ride', yet it does not appear to be a legal requirement for motorcyclists to wear protective gear other than the helmet. According to the Highway Code, motorcyclists must always wear a helmet, even on quad bikes under the Motor Cycles (Protective Headgear) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1999 (as amended) regulation 2 and the Road Traffic (Northern Ireland) Order 1995, Articles 27 and 28⁴³. Aside from this, the correct equipment, including boots, reinforced leather trousers or jeans, armoured jackets and gloves, appears to be up to the decision of the individual rider. This should be raised as

⁴⁰ <https://www.psnipolice.uk/inside-psni/Statistics/road-traffic-collision-statistics/>

⁴¹ <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/news/northern-ireland/new-biker-safety-campaign-launched-31053945.html>

⁴² https://www.psnipolice.uk/advice_information/roads-and-driving/bikesafe/

⁴³ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisr/1999/170/contents/made>

part of the consultation process to see if more needs to be addressed within legislation to promote the use of correct protective equipment and clothing.

Motorcycling organisations, such as the Motorcyclist Action Group UK, have raised concerns surrounding the use of post and wire central barriers on carriageways across the United Kingdom. Concerns include both the risk of injury to motorcyclists crashing into these barriers and the risk of other vehicles crashing through barriers and hitting motorcyclists. In Great Britain, these barriers are being removed and replaced as they need repairs, or as road works are being completed. However, Northern Ireland has been slower to address these concerns. Money has to be found to ensure that our road barriers and central reservations are fit for purpose and that they are providing the relative level of safety which is needed for all road users.

Initiatives to enhance the safety of motorcyclists may include:

- A review of the use of post and wire central barriers in Northern Ireland and an assessment of the cost of replacing these to more motorcycle friendly barriers
- Further education and awareness campaigns aimed at encouraging motorists to think of motorcyclists, particularly at junctions, road ends and in slow moving traffic
- Promoting the importance of the correct protective clothing and equipment for motorcyclists

Horse riders

Horse riders are a particularly at-risk group on our roads with an average of one accident involving horse riders happening on roads in the United Kingdom every day⁴⁴. One of the biggest challenges facing horse riders is lack of understanding from other road users. Horses are unpredictable animals and can be easily scared. Passing too close, passing too fast, revving engines and sounding of car horns can all scare even the most well-trained horse. Young or nervous horses will require more consideration than others. Horse riders themselves also tend to be children, adding an extra layer of vulnerability on the road.

⁴⁴ <https://www.horseandhound.co.uk/news/road-safety-bhs-dead-slow-statistics-rider-road-accidents-646269>

As highlighted by the British Horse Society, the correct way to pass a horse on the road is:

1. *Slow down to a maximum of 15mph*
2. *Be patient, don't sound your horn or rev your engine*
3. *Pass the horse wide and slow, (if safe to do so) at least a car's width if possible*
4. *Drive slowly away.*⁴⁵

The British Horse Society runs a *Dead? Or Dead Slow?* road safety campaign which highlights the risks faced by horse riders on our roads and aims to encourage reporting of incidents and educate both horse riders and other road users on how to share the road safely⁴⁶. Between November 2010 and March 2019:

- 3,737 road incidents involving horses have been reported, although the real figure is believed to be much higher.
- 315 horses have died on British roads.
- 43 riders killed on British roads.

Statistics for 2018/2019 highlight that:

- 32% reported being the victim of road rage or abuse.
- 73% of incidents caused by vehicles passing too close to horses.
- 31% of incidents caused by vehicles passing too fast.

One of the biggest problems for horse riders in Northern Ireland compared to their counterparts in Great Britain is the lack of off-road riding which is available⁴⁷. With so few bridlepaths to safely use, horse riders in Northern Ireland have no choice but to share the road with other road users. This is something which needs to be addressed.

⁴⁵ <https://www.bhs.org.uk/advice-and-information/common-incidents/riding-on-the-road/advice-for-motorists>

⁴⁶ <https://www.bhs.org.uk/our-work/safety/dead-slow>

⁴⁷ <http://www.ukroads.org/ukroadsafety/articlespapers/roadsafetygoodpracticeguide.pdf>

As stated within the Highway Code, horse riders must keep to the left-hand side of the road, moving with the flow of traffic⁴⁸. All horse riders should be familiar with and use the correct hand signals when they are riding on the road⁴⁹. This is to allow them to notify other road users of their intentions in a safe and timely manner. Horse riders must be taught the correct hand signals from an early age. Organisations such as the British Horse Society and the Pony Club promote and teach equine road safety⁵⁰. There is also a responsibility on riding schools to teach their pupils how to stay safe on the roads and how to share the road with other road users. However, there is an added dimension to this that it is not always safe for a horse rider to remove both hands from the reins in order to either signal or thank another road user and as such other road users should be aware that this can happen.

*'Mutual courtesy and care between motorists and riders is important to prevent intolerance and improve safety. A horse rider should acknowledge a courtesy. However, a wave or acknowledgement is not always possible as two hands are often needed to keep control of the horse.'*⁵¹

Motorists and horse riders both have a right to use the road. They also share a responsibility to consider each other's needs.

The correct equipment is vital in promoting safety. Horse riders who are under 14 must wear helmets by law when riding on the road, unless they are a follower of the Sikh religion and wear a turban (Laws H(PHYR)O Art 3 and H(PHYR)R). While it is not a legal requirement, it is highly recommended that all horse riders wear helmets. Reflective and bright clothing for both horse and rider is also important in increasing their visibility to other road users⁵². There is a large market of reflective equipment available for horses, including exercise sheets, tail bandages, tendon boots and brushing boots. It is also good practice for horse riders to check their tack before each ride to ensure that nothing is broken or fraying⁵³. Helmet cameras are also becoming increasingly popular among riders who hack frequently. The road safety charity Think! also recommends that all horse riders 'Leave details of your intended route and estimated time of return with a responsible person' each time before they leave for a hack as an additional level of safety⁵⁴.

⁴⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/the-highway-code/rules-about-animals-47-to-58>

⁴⁹ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Road%20safety%20education%20leaflet%20-%20Horse%20sense%202016.pdf>

⁵⁰ <https://www.bhs.org.uk/advice-and-information/common-incidents/riding-on-the-road>

⁵¹ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/horse-safety-road>

⁵² <https://www.bhs.org.uk/advice-and-information/tack-and-equipment/what-to-wear/hi-viz>

⁵³ <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/horse-safety-road>

⁵⁴ <https://www.think.gov.uk/advice-for-road-users/#horse-riders>

Initiatives to promote the safety of horse riders on roads may include:

- The creation of more accessible off-road bridlepaths, and greenways which specify equine access, across Northern Ireland to provide a feasible alternative to riding on the road
- A public awareness campaign highlighting the risks faced by horse riders on our roads and the correct way for other road users to interact with them
- The development of a programme or initiative which encourages all riding schools and equestrian centres across Northern Ireland to correctly teach their pupils the correct rules and signals for riding on the road and sharing the road with other road users

Speed reduction

Speed is a serious concern for all road users. Regardless of what type of road, measures must be introduced to ensure that the speed limit is in fact appropriate for the road layout and conditions. Take for example a stretch of country road with no footpaths which has a speed limit of 60 miles per hour. A car travelling at 60 miles per hour will not be breaking the speed limit, but for a vulnerable road user being passed at that speed this would be a terrifying, reckless and dangerous situation. National campaigns for cyclists and horse riders have highlighted the need for motorists to pass vulnerable road users at a reduced speed, and preferably at 15 miles per hour. No one knows roads better than the individuals who live on them or who use them on a daily basis. The Department of Infrastructure is responsible for local speed limits in Northern Ireland and speed limits are created using a pre-existing list of criteria⁵⁵. However, the criteria used by the Department to determine what speed limit should be set sometimes should not be used as a one-size-fits-all approach. Rather, the Democratic Unionist Party values the input of the local community and local road users on what speed they believe is appropriate.

Reducing speed limits are not the only option available to policy makers in terms of improving road safety. Various speed reduction measures such as speed bumps, speed reduction road surface, and electronic speed signs can help reduce speed without the need for changing a speed limit. However, any initiative to introduce such speed calming measures would need to be discussed in consultation

⁵⁵ [https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/speed-limits-how-they-are-set#:~:text=Department%20for%20Infrastructure%20\(DfI\)%20Roads,ational%20limits%20are%20not%20suitable.](https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/speed-limits-how-they-are-set#:~:text=Department%20for%20Infrastructure%20(DfI)%20Roads,ational%20limits%20are%20not%20suitable.)

with local vulnerable road users as sometimes these measures can cause problems for vulnerable road users, as addressed in a 2007 *Traffic Calming* paper by the Department of Transport⁵⁶.

Initiatives to ensure that excessive road speed is addressed in Northern Ireland may include:

- Working closer with local communities through organisations such as Police and Community Safety Partnerships to discuss concerns over local speed limits
- A public awareness campaign highlighting the effects of excessive speed on vulnerable road users, including first hand video footage of what this looks and feels like
- The introduction of various speed reduction measures or reduced speed limits on roads where it is deemed appropriate

Rural roads

According to the road safety charity Think!, an average of three people die every day on rural roads across the United Kingdom and in 2018 '60% of all fatalities in Great Britain occurred on rural roads'⁵⁷.

A report by the Northern Ireland Assembly in 2014 noted that:

'Most road traffic collisions occur on urban roads, however, most deaths and serious injuries happen on rural roads'.

Rural roads are particularly dangerous for a number of reasons. First, there is often a lack of clear visibility due to a lack of street lighting, lack of road markings, lack of footpaths and verges, bends in the road and overgrown hedges and trees. Speeding can also be a problem on more rural roads due to the lower volume of traffic which can often be found on them. Lastly, vulnerable road users such as pedestrians, cyclists and horse riders can often be found using rural roads as they may feel safer on these rather than busier main roads. Measures are being introduced to address this, such as the Safer Roads Fund discussed in the *Road Safety Statement 2019: A Lifetime of Road Safety*.

Initiatives to improve safety on rural roads may include:

- The introduction of various speed reduction measures on rural roads, if deemed appropriate

⁵⁶https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/883183/ltn-1-07_Traffic-calming-guidance.pdf

⁵⁷<https://www.think.gov.uk/themes/country-roads/#:~:text=60%25%20of%20all%20fatalities%20in,in%20Great%20Britain%20in%202017.>

- Better education of motorists and vulnerable road users surrounding the risks on rural roads
- Ensuring that rural roads are well maintained and that hedgerows and trees are not allowed to overgrow and reduce visibility

Questions

1. Are there any groups of vulnerable road users who have not been included within this paper?
2. Are there any measures not discussed within this paper which you believe could protect vulnerable road users?
3. Are public awareness campaigns beneficial in promoting road safety for vulnerable road users?
4. How do we continue to promote walking and cycling in Northern Ireland?

Please send responses and comments to Ashleigh Perry at ashleighperry@dup.org.uk by 23/04/2021