



Northern Ireland
Assembly

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Comparison of European Commission and DoE Road Safety Strategies

1 Background

The following is a comparison of two recent road safety strategy documents, from the European Commission and the Northern Ireland Department of the Environment respectively.

The document *Towards a European Road Safety Area: Policy Orientations on Road Safety 2011-2020*¹ aims 'to provide a general governance framework and challenging objectives which should guide national or local strategies'. It states a target of halving the overall number of road deaths in the European Union by 2020. The objectives are short and written in a general, high level and non-prescriptive manner. Rather than setting out specific new policy directions, they seek instead to orientate approaches taken at a national level in a common direction, drawing on good practice where this

¹ European Commission. *Towards a European Road Safety Area: Policy Orientations on Road Safety 2011-2020*. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Brussels, 20.7.2010.

occurs and harmonising approaches. Some of the policy directions are set out as a number of different options, with clear decisions not yet taken by the Commission.

By contrast, the *Consultation on Preparing a Road Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland*² is a longer, more focused and practical strategy, and states the aim of reducing the number of road deaths by 40% by 2020. It aims to highlight the main evidence, statistical analysis and research carried out to date, and sets out a summary of the actions proposed in the consultation in Annex B. Targets are also set out, and an impact assessment presented.

2 Comparison

The European Commission policy orientation document is structured around seven strategic objectives, as follows.

2.1 Improve education and training of road users

This sets the objective of introducing harmonised minimum requirements for accompanied driving during learning, driving tests, and post-test training.

The proposed DoE *Road Safety Strategy* contains a general aspiration to ‘undertake an audit of Road Safety and Education services and resources to ensure that they appropriately address today’s road safety issues’. Action Measures 101, 152 and 153 then outline specific initiatives related to improving driving instruction and tests, and carrying out educational programmes for the 16–24 age group.

2.2 Increase enforcement of road rules

This suggests that a strategy is created around the cross-border exchange of information in the field of road safety, calls for increased coordination and sharing of best practice to help enforcement, and states that vehicle technology should be used to assist enforcement, including the fitting of speed limiters on light commercial vehicles and the installation of alcohol interlock devices. The document also encourages the setting of enforcement plans at a national level.

‘Alcolock’ devices are specifically mentioned in Action Measure 134, and Action Measure 138 states a commitment ‘to disseminate information on freight and van best practise in NI’. In addition, a number of measures are described for informing and enforcing speed limits. However, no specific reference is made to the fitting of speed limiters on light commercial vehicles in the DoE strategy. In terms of enforcement plans, the NI document makes no mention of a national implementation plan *per se*, though it does contain a dedicated section in the strategy including nine individual measures.

² Department of the Environment. *Preparing a Road Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland 2010–2020*. 16.3.10.

With regard to cross-border exchange and increased co-ordination, the Northern Ireland document mentions inter-agency working with authorities in Great Britain and the Republic of Ireland, especially regarding drink driving, speeding, and the recognition of penalty points.

2.3 Safer road infrastructure

The Commission has stated that it will ensure requests for EU funding for road infrastructure will incorporate safety requirements. The NI strategy makes no specific mention of applications for EU funding, though it does outline a number of measures focusing specifically on the issue of making infrastructural changes to improve road safety.

Specific actions include targeting routes popular with motorcyclists, improving road markings and lighting, various measures to enforce (and in places lower) speed limits, increasing and improving road safety barriers, increasing pedestrian crossings, and deploying speed cameras at high risk sites. The strategy also states a commitment to 'continue to develop and maintain cycling infrastructure on appropriate routes', though no specific measures or plans are outlined.

2.4 Safer vehicles

Two-wheeled vehicles are highlighted as being of particular concern. Motorcycles and mopeds are given some attention in the NI strategy, with measures including the specific consideration of motorcyclists when designing new roads, the potential provision of specific route treatments for popular motorcycle 'runs' such as motorcycle 'friendly' barriers and additional signing. Consideration is also to be given to introducing different speed limits for motorcycles, improving training and safety equipment for motorcyclists, and considering amending the licensing system to prohibit provisional driving licence holders from riding motorcycles unaccompanied.

There are also calls for a harmonisation of vehicle safety standards throughout the EU, and the document suggests further research into the safety of alternative power vehicles. The NI strategy specifically mentions vehicle safety standards in Action Measures 52–66, though alternative power vehicles are not specifically mentioned. The potential contribution to road safety is also expected from the deployment of 'co-operative systems', where vehicles exchange data and interact with the infrastructure and other vehicles, reducing accident risk and improving traffic flows. In the DoE document, a tentative proposal is made to 'assess how to best take advantage of technological improvements such as satellite navigation technology, interactive web services and 'live' information on roads'.

2.5 Promote the use of modern technology to increase road safety

It is suggested here that the Commission evaluates the feasibility of fitting vehicles with 'Advanced Driver Assistance Systems' (such as lane departure warnings, anti-collision warnings and other systems), and seeks to accelerate the deployment of a pan-European 'e-Call' service which automatically contacts the emergency services in the event of an accident. No mention is made in the DoE strategy of the e-Call service, or of 'Advanced Driver Assistance Systems' specifically.

2.6 Improve emergency and post-injuries services

Pointing out that while the number of fatalities has decreased in the last nine years, the number of injuries remains high, it is proposed that a 'global strategy of action on road injuries and first aid' is set up to share good practice and establish common standards. The DoE *Road Safety Strategy* contains one Action Measure (150), which focuses on reviewing response times to collision and benchmarking with other Fire and Rescue Service organisations.

2.7 Protect vulnerable road users

The high number of fatalities and serious injuries faced by 'vulnerable road users' (especially motorcycles, mopeds, cyclists and pedestrians) is cited, and plans proposed to monitor and research technical standards for the protection of vulnerable road users, including protective equipment. It is also suggested that infrastructural improvements are made to improve conditions for cyclists. A considerable degree of space is dedicated in the DoE *Road Safety Strategy* to the issue of safety for vulnerable users. As mentioned above, a number of measures are outlined to deal specifically with motorcycle safety. The European Commission strategy outlines awareness of motorcyclists among other road users, protective equipment and regulation of licensing. All of these objectives are covered in the DoE strategy.

Further measures are also proposed in the DoE strategy to address pedestrian safety, including awareness campaigns focusing on pedestrian visibility (particularly school children) and taking care when under the influence of alcohol. With regard to cyclists, some measures are included which address issues such as infrastructure and training.

2.8 Implementation

The Commission's role here will be to promote cooperation and the sharing of good practice across the EU, improve analysis of accident data and develop the role of the European Road Safety Observatory, monitor the implementation of European law on road safety, and examine the need for common principles in the investigation of accidents.

The timescale for the implementation of the European Commission objectives is likely to be a lengthy one, and it would be worthwhile to maintain a 'watching brief' so there is an awareness of more specific initiatives emerging from the European Commission in due course. However, the strategy states that the instruments of EU law are 'essentially in place', so further legislation seems unlikely. Further initiatives are more likely to take the form of sharing of data, research and good practice.

The various performance indicators outlined in Annex A of the DoE document, for example, are likely to be of use to other EU nations seeking to compare performance.

It is also suggested in the European Commission document that specialist road accident technical investigation bodies and the fitting of event data recorders in professional vehicles may be useful measures. Both of these measures are addressed in the DoE strategy.

3 Summary of Omissions

In summary, the following objectives described in *Towards a European Road Safety Area* are *not* specifically mentioned in the DoE *Road Safety Strategy for Northern Ireland*:

- In terms of enforcement, no specific reference is made to the fitting of speed limiters on light commercial vehicles.
- Although the DoE document does contain a dedicated section on enforcement, it does not make it clear whether there is a national enforcement implementation plan in place.
- No specific reference is made in the DoE strategy to the safety of alternative power vehicles.
- No specific reference is made into the use of, or research into, 'co-operative systems', though a tentative proposal is made to 'assess how to best take advantage of technological improvements such as satellite navigation technology, interactive web services and 'live' information on roads'.
- No specific reference is made to 'Advanced Driver Assistance Systems' or the e-Call service.