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Assembly

Committee for Infrastructure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Road Safety Strategy: Department for
Infrastructure

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The previous road safety strategy was extended. The impact of the COVID crisis meant that we were unable to replace the strategy that ran until 2020. In common with many countries across Europe, including GB and Ireland, there was a delay in bringing forward a new road safety strategy. We are now working on that new strategy. The Department prioritised the financial support schemes to alleviate the impact of COVID. Road safety continues to be an everyday priority for the Department, however.

The new strategy will take an outcomes-based accountability (OBA) approach, with which members are probably familiar, as the draft Programme for Government (PFG) takes that approach. The focus is on what makes a difference, but it is important to realise that ongoing road safety work continues. Nothing that is going on will therefore stop. It is about trying to identify the factors, issues and actions that will make the biggest difference. That is a different approach, and it may well lead to there being fewer targets in the next strategy.

We are currently working at pace to develop the strategy after that initial delay. Work started in the summer with a preconsultation with a number of bodies. The Minister agreed that we would talk to statutory bodies. Key among them were the blue-light organisations such as the PSNI, the Fire and Rescue Service and the Ambulance Service. We also talked to other Departments, local councils and health trusts. We took the opportunity to meet other road safety groups that had got or had wanted to get in touch with us. That preconsultation was a safety valve in advance of a full consultation. A full and proper consultation process will give everyone with an interest in road safety the opportunity to have their say.

As a result of the preconsultation process, there was a lot of support for the OBA approach. The process identified that people recognise that the key causes of road traffic collisions remain the same. The principal cause is human error, as is set out in paragraph 7 of the briefing paper. There was a lot of keen engagement and passion shown, as has been our experience with everyone involved in road safety. People recognise its importance: the impact of getting it wrong and the importance of getting it right.

The key challenges identified in the preconsultation are in paragraph 8 of the briefing paper. They reflect the causes and what people thought that we should look at and identify in the new road safety strategy. The key challenges to be addressed are as follows: road users' behaviour and the need for change, which is an education-type intervention; enforcement; road and vehicle safety, which is the engineering aspect; roads infrastructure; rural roads; and issues that affect young and older drivers. The preconsultation event also identified that we have a very wide range of road users who need to be considered, particularly as the Minister is looking to promote walking and cycling. We must consider young and elderly road users and pedestrians, as well as other vulnerable road users such as motorcyclists. As members will have anticipated, one of the issues that came up very strongly was the needs of rural road users and the rural population.

I take this opportunity to give the Committee an update on what the planned next steps are. We are currently preparing the full consultation document, which will launch in November. The plan is then to analyse the results of the consultation. The Minister intends to publish the final road safety strategy before the end of the current mandate. Given the timing of the consultation, its publication will take place next year.

With your permission, Chairman, we hope to take the opportunity today to hear the Committee's views before we go to the full consultation and to answer, where we are able to, any questions that the Committee may want to put to us. Thank you, Chairman.

The Chairperson (Mr Buckley): Thank you, Dr Hughes. Does Ms Hobson have anything to say before I go to members for questions?

Ms Caroline Hobson (Department for Infrastructure): I reiterate what Chris has put across. The key thing to take from the preconsultation engagement is the acknowledgement that we have a shared responsibility for road safety. Everybody who uses the roads has an impact, so it is down to us all to make sure that our actions protect us and prevent collisions with other people. Thank you, Chair.

The Chairperson (Mr Buckley): I thank you both for coming to the Committee. We, as a Committee and as elected representatives, take road safety very seriously, so it is timely that you are before the Committee this morning.

I congratulate the Department on the roll-out of the 20 mph zones at schools. That is an extremely productive use of resource, given the challenges that many of our local schools face as a result of increasing numbers and, indeed, busier roads. That is therefore welcome. I am keen to see further roll-out, and I know that there is an intention to do so. I appreciate and welcome the downward trend in all the key target areas that you highlight in the paper. Given, however, that all four 2020 targets have not been met, do you think that they were they too ambitious, or was the strategy not fit for purpose?

Dr Hughes: As ever with target setting, ambition has to be key. The title of the road safety supporting campaign is Share the Road to Zero. The decision was taken at the time to make that strategy as ambitious as possible. Can more be done? Absolutely. That is why we are looking at reviewing the strategy and at what we can do to improve things. In tackling behavioural change, there comes a point at which you have to tackle more deeply embedded behaviour and more-difficult-to-reach people, and we are possibly at that stage. That does not allow for any complacency, but it perhaps means that the issues that we are trying to tackle are harder to address. We hope to make sure that the final bit that we want to get addressed is addressed in the upcoming strategy. We very much want to hear ideas and views on what we should be looking at in order to take them further and improve the situation.

The Chairperson (Mr Buckley): I thank you for that. We have to be realistic in our target setting so that we as a Committee can judge performance based on realistic targets. I put my local cap on here, and I am sure that Dolores will mention this as well. One of the key drivers of road safety is making drivers much more aware of their speed and their surroundings. One thing that I have noticed in the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon (ABC) Borough Council area is the roll-out, in conjunction with the local policing and community safety partnership (PCSP), of speed indicator devices (SIDs). The Department should look proactively at such an arrangement with all councils, particularly in rural areas that border more urban zones.

The purpose of a speed indicator device is twofold. First, it makes drivers aware of their speed, and we automatically see a reduction in speed when the red light flashes. Secondly, it helps with the collection of data. As a result, departmental officials can pull together some of the trends etc and also target resource better to ensure that we have safer roads. I would like to see much more proactive targeting from the Department, in collaboration with local councils and beyond, to try to see a much larger roll-out of speed indicator devices. I think that doing that would prove successful.

Can the Department advise how much money has been devoted to the implementation of the 2020 strategy? Have the costs on advertisement, enforcement etc for a new scheme been calculated?

Dr Hughes: I do not have figures for the implementation of the 2020 scheme. I will need to go back and see whether implementation figures per se are available. One of the issues is that road safety is integral to the work of the Department, so I will need to take that question back, Chairman, and have a look. I am not sure because the idea is to make it just part of what we do.

At this stage, it is way too early to provide any costings for the new strategy, because we do not know what the strategy is going to be. We are very much at the development stage. We have to go through the consultation stage and analyse that. We will have to take away your views and consider the issues that you have raised today. It is therefore too early to say what that will be like, Chair.

The Chairperson (Mr Buckley): You mention in paragraph 3 of your briefing paper that the pandemic and the lockdown have impacted on the monitoring figures. Can you expand further on what sorts of discrepancies or disparities we are looking at?

Dr Hughes: Yes. The main issue is that, as you will recall, Chair and members, there was a great reduction in the volume of traffic on the roads. That was a distortion in itself, and the behaviour of those who were using the roads also altered, in that, although there were far fewer users, there seemed to be an increase in people driving above the speed limit. There were therefore different circumstances, and we saw anomalous behaviour at that point.

The Chairperson (Mr Buckley): Finally, before I go to members, when do you think that the new strategy will be in place?

Dr Hughes: The Minister wants to get it in place before the end of the current mandate. As I said, the consultation will launch in November, so, just allowing for the time for the consultation to run and for us to provide our analysis and advice to the Minister, it will be into the new year before the strategy can launch. The Minister is aiming for before the end of the mandate.

The Chairperson (Mr Buckley): Thank you, Dr Hughes.

Mr Hilditch: Does the grant have to be spent in this financial year?

Dr Hughes: Yes. That is correct.

Mr Hilditch: Thank you. My question on COVID has already been asked.

I made my declaration of interest at the outset, but it would be remiss of me not to mention the road safety committees that operate locally. Under the 26-council model, there was one in virtually every council area. Under the new council structure, I am not sure that that is the case, but many people work in a voluntary capacity at that level, and they work quite well with the officials in each area in which they are operating. For instance, a pilot scheme for a 20 mph zone was introduced in Carrickfergus at the Model Primary School on the Belfast Road. That came about through the committee's work with officials to make it a success.

The Department is up here and the voluntary road safety committees are down there. What sort of engagement do you have with them? Are you even aware of how many road safety committees are currently operating across the Province?

Dr Hughes: We had our engagement with local councils. That was one of the things that the Minister agreed to in our preconsultation engagement, and it was the councils that decided who would represent each of the organisations. Several of the elected members, as well as officers from councils, attended the preconsultation meetings with us, and some were from the road safety partnerships.

One of the pieces of feedback highlighted quite good cooperation, both with statutory organisations such as the PSNI and the Ambulance Service locally and with the local departmental representatives from Roads Service. I will need to check to see whether there is a road safety partnership in every single one of the local government areas. Caroline, are you aware of that?

Ms Hobson: We have met some of the policing and community safety partnerships, and they were representing from the road safety perspective. We had very good engagement with them. It may be important at this point to highlight one of the key reasons that we are applying the OBA approach, which is that it requires us to work collaboratively to co-design and co-produce actions and measures. As part of that process, we will engage with stakeholders to make sure that they are involved in the process. I cannot reflect on the previous strategy, but I can say that it is definitely a big commitment of ours to make sure that stakeholders are involved in and part of this and that we get their buy-in. We acknowledge that they have the local knowledge of what is happening on the ground, and that is so important. Again, so much work is going on out there through the engagement, and so much dedication to and support for road safety, that we want to pull all of it together and exploit it. It is in everybody's interest to do so. There is definitely a commitment that that will happen.

Mr Hilditch: That is good to hear, because, as chair of one of the local groups — Roy is treasurer — it seems to me to be very disjointed. The local council does not really talk to us either. There used to be a governing body called the Road Safety Council. Is it still operating across the Province? Have you heard of it?

Ms Hobson: No.

Dr Hughes: No.

Ms Hobson: Was it possibly the Road Safety Forum?

Mr Hilditch: No. Under the 26-council model, it was termed the Road Safety Council. It was an umbrella group for all the local road safety groups that were operating across the Province. Perhaps you can check that out as well.

Dr Hughes: Yes.

Ms Hobson: I will add that part of the OBA approach is a requirement to put in consistent reporting, monitoring and governance arrangements for the strategy. Those things will be considered in order to

make sure that appropriate reporting, monitoring and governance structures are in place. We will definitely take those into account as we move forward with the strategy development.

Mr Hilditch: OK. Thank you. It was very frustrating for me, as an elected representative, and others who have served locally that, when the Department identified a real problem area, there used to be a policy by which there had to be a fatality before anything was done to improve the situation. Is that still the Department's policy?

Dr Hughes: It is very helpful that you raise that issue. It was raised in our preconsultation, so it is helpful that you raise it again. The response to issues at this point is data-driven. How well data is recorded for a near miss, for example, is an issue that has been raised, and you have raised it again, Mr Hilditch. That is something else that we will need to look at as we move forward with developing the new strategy.

Mr Hilditch: Yes, please. Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr Buckley): I echo David's comments. When constituents and elected representatives are requesting that work be done, because they know that there is an evident road safety issue, nothing is more frustrating for them than to get the reply, "There is no fatality history at this site". Data about fatalities is what the Department looks for before it does anything, whereas we want to be able to say, "We are telling you that there is an issue that could lead to a fatality". That should be taken up. I am glad that the Deputy Chair raised it.

Mrs D Kelly: I concur with what you said earlier about SIDs, Chair. They have been particularly helpful in rural areas. Speeds of up to 85 mph were, I believe, recorded through the village of Magheralin by an SID recently.

Enforcement is a huge issue. We know that, as a result of austerity measures, a previous Chief Constable reduced the number of police in the road traffic branch and in enforcement. Has the Department received any signals from the PSNI about enforcement, particularly in hot spots where SIDs have produced such stats? Are the stats then shared with the police so that they might look at doing some speed monitoring and enforcement?

Another question that I want to ask concerns the increase in size of tractors and other farm vehicles, and the speed at which they can travel on roads. I know that I will not be popular for saying this — I come from a rural area — but it is an issue of concern that has been raised with me. There is no checking of licences being done. I ask that because there have been reports of people under the age of 16 driving such vehicles. Where is that factored into your thinking?

I also want to ask about the Department of Justice and the Community Safety Board. Others mentioned the road safety committees etc. I think that a previous Minister stood down a number of them. It may have been your party colleague Minister Poots, Chair. I am fairly sure that it was, although I am not 100%. How much, if any, input from the community safety side feeds through PCSPs to the Department, or will its input form part of the broader consultation when it is launched?

Dr Hughes: There are a couple of issues there, which I will address in turn. The first one is the targeting of speed enforcement. That is an operational matter for the PSNI. It is something that the PSNI does operationally.

Mrs D Kelly: I am aware of that. I know that the PCSPs gather the information, but, in the strategy, regarding enforcement, is there sharing of information and intelligence about black spots? You and I both know that the majority of people who go into a hedge in a rural area are pulled out by a local farmer or somebody, and it is not reported as being a black spot.

The Chairperson (Mr Buckley): I will let Chris come back in, but I think that I am correct in saying that SID information does go to the PSNI. There is an issue with how that data is then shared with departmental officials to ensure that we get an accurate picture.

Mrs D Kelly: That is correct.

Dr Hughes: The underpinning point is about the sharing of information. That is coming across quite strongly here, which is incredibly helpful. Thank you for that.

That was the first time that anybody had raised the issue of the size of farm vehicles, so thank you for doing so. That is now on our radar.

I am sorry, but I have forgotten the final point that you raised.

Mrs D Kelly: There is another point that I have written down, so I will raise it while I remember what the other one was. I wonder about the evidence for new developments. Constituents are constantly looking for speed ramps, yet they are not part of the planning design. When housing associations are doing the planning design for new developments, however, they have to take advice from the PSNI's community safety branch. What about planning design to combat speed? You hear about rat runs in new developments. Could policy development for speed ramps feature in the strategy?

My other issue was about DOJ and the Community Safety Board. I asked how the community safety strategy links to road safety.

The Chairperson (Mr Buckley): To link in with Dolores's comment, when we are talking about the size of vehicles, and agricultural vehicles in particular, it is important to highlight an increasing issue, which is that a lot of our rural roads were not built for the quantity or size and scale of vehicles that use them. For example, buses use some rural roads, and they could push people towards the verge, which, in itself, is dangerous. Yes, we can mention the size and scale of vehicles, but we should recognise that some rural roads were not built for the volume of vehicles that use them.

Dr Hughes: I welcome both those points. We will take them away.

The Chairperson (Mr Buckley): What was your point about DOJ, Dolores?

Mrs D Kelly: The Community Safety Board has been established, and it is doing its strategy. I wonder how that links into the community safety element of PCSPs. The evidence suggests that a lot of the accidents and fatalities occur on rural roads. How long has it been since the criteria for the design of or improvements to rural roads were assessed? How are those criteria assessed against what the accident history and the intelligence tells us?

The Chairperson (Mr Buckley): Dr Hughes, do you have any follow-up comment to make on that, or will you take it away?

Dr Hughes: Sorry, but was that to me, Chair?

The Chairperson (Mr Buckley): Yes.

Dr Hughes: Apologies. We will take that away. One of the bodies that we will speak to is obviously the DOJ. We will lift that point and take it up with it. Thank you for that.

Mrs D Kelly: Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mr Buckley): OK. Thank you.

Mr Beggs: I would like to make a brief comment on that.

The Chairperson (Mr Buckley): It is your turn to come in now, Roy.

Mr Beggs: On large farm vehicles on rural roads, I declare an interest as my Mum and Dad have a small family farm. I am aware that the economics of farming mean that fewer farmers are buying farm equipment, because they cannot afford it, and there has been a move towards using contractors. Contractors do things the most efficient way, which is to move larger items.

Mrs D Kelly: True.

Mr Beggs: I do not know how the Department will regulate that industry and where people have a right of way to get to their properties. It is complicated.

Mrs D Kelly: It is. I accept that.

Mr Beggs: OK. I want to turn to excessive speed, which you indicated is a major factor in road safety and, I dare say, accidents. We have the Road Safety Partnership, and the PSNI occasionally does its own speed checks, but, like others, I have a high regard for the speed indicator devices — the SIDs. Those have been very effective in rural areas, particularly where there may be lower levels of population and the police and the Road Safety Partnership vans are less likely to get to. They may also not be able to be located safely in rural areas; that is a frequent problem.

Does the Department have any data that show the effectiveness of SIDs? Certainly, anecdotally and from what I see and hear reported, they are very well received by local communities and seem to be effective, particularly when they are moved about and people do not just take them as part of the picture when they are driving by.

Dr Hughes: I do not have any data to hand, Mr Beggs. If you wish, I can take that up and see what is available.

Mr Beggs: OK. The other issue that is relevant to SIDs is that I understand that the Department does not allow local communities or, for that matter, the policing and community safety partnerships to fix the SIDs to lamp posts. In my area, they tend to be located on small trailer units, which become an issue because they are parked at the side of roads. Given the public interest in having those located in their area and located somewhere safe, why are they not allowed to be mounted on lamp posts?

Dr Hughes: I do not have an answer for that either. I would have to consult with my Roads colleagues on that. I can do that.

Mr Beggs: OK. I want to turn to the main causes of accidents. There is speed and, as you said, driver error. I am curious as to what extent vehicle failure — mechanical failure — has contributed to accidents, particularly over the past year, when many vehicles have only been tested over a two-year period. Have the public maintained their vehicles despite not having to have MOTs? Has there been any significant change in the number of accidents as a result of MOT exemptions?

Dr Hughes: Mechanical failure makes up a tiny, tiny percentage. I think that it is point something per cent of the cause of accidents. That has not impacted — or, at least, it is not showing through in the data as having an increased causal effect — on accidents since MOTs began to be delayed. It is a tiny percentage. The main issue is driver error.

Mr Beggs: OK. I am interested to learn that, particularly as there is a live consultation on that issue.

You said that the Department is taking a zero-risk approach to road safety. There is a theoretical risk that extending MOT test exemptions could contribute to road safety issues. You have told me that, from the data that you have, there is no significant risk. Given the pressures on the MOT system, why does the Department not continue to use MOT exemptions, rather than putting huge pressure on individuals to try to get MOTs when they are not easily available?

Do you recognise that when members of the public, in the rural community in particular, cannot get their MOT, they are forced to walk on rural roads, and that, in itself, is a risk factor? Is the Department aware that the risk to people in rural communities, who have to walk because of a lack of MOTs, contributes to adverse road safety? Basically, why not continue to use MOT exemptions?

Dr Hughes: There are a number of issues there, which I will try to unpack for you, Mr Beggs.

As you said, there is a consultation ongoing about extending the time period over which MOTs are taken. That consultation is on extending from annual to two-year MOTs. That consultation closes on 19 October. After that, we will be able to do an analysis of the evidence. Sorry, it is not a consultation. That is wrong, it is a call for evidence. The next stage would be consideration of that evidence before we get to a consultation on that.

We are looking for evidence to see the impact of that on people. Some of those issues are operational for the DVA, and I know that you raised those with its chief executive. One issue being looked at is that where people have not managed to book an MOT, they can continue to use their vehicle as long as they maintain it in a roadworthy condition. There have been discussions with the PSNI so that that will not be enforced. That is my understanding. That does allow people to continue to use their vehicle as long as they are seeking to get an MOT and they maintain it in a safe way, which is always the responsibility of the driver.

Mr Beggs: I was contacted by a constituent, who may, as you say, continue to drive their vehicle. However, they cannot get it taxed, and therefore they risk fines for having an untaxed vehicle on the road. So, that is not working. There are pressures on people in rural communities in particular and also people in the urban environment, who have cars that they cannot get taxed.

Dr Hughes: I do not have an answer to that. It is not something that we are looking at as part of this strategy. That is an operational matter, so I would be straying beyond my knowledge, Mr Beggs, which would not be helpful.

The Chairperson (Mr Buckley): That point is well on the record. To develop one of Roy's points in relation to SIDs, from what I have seen locally in my constituency, the partnership with the PCSP, and, I would hope, some partnership with the Department — I am not sure if that is the case and we can come back to it — is now moving towards fixed SIDs in rural areas, particularly in the Armagh City, Banbridge and Craigavon Borough Council area.

I have seen the trailers with the SIDs that are moved around. Those are predominantly the responsibility of the PSNI. However, a fixed SID in a recognisable location does have an impact. Also, the data that is recorded feeds in to telling us where the black spots are. I have spoken informally to the PSNI about this. We have had vehicles going through villages at serious speeds, and at antisocial hours as well, when people think that there is no risk. We can learn a lot from SIDs, and their inclusion in any strategy could be essential.

Ms Kimmins: Thank you, Chris and Caroline, for your answers and briefing.

Mr Hilditch and others mentioned the partnerships with local safety groups. In Newry, the road safety committee for Newry, Mourne and Down District Council does excellent work. It did its own surveys, which were really good in picking up the key issues for the area. If there can be more partnership work, I would certainly advocate for that. They could play a prominent role in future strategy because they are so clued-up and passionate about what they do.

On the last road safety grant scheme, I worked with groups on the ground, including Road Safe. Quite a few people were turned down. I suppose that that was because they were not sure of the remit, what they could apply for and what met the criteria. Have any lessons been learned from the last call about how to get the money spent and how to make sure that it is being put to effective use by community groups?

The Chairperson (Mr Buckley): That is a very important question, Liz, and there is a desire among community representatives to have a grant scheme such as the one that has been provided, but only if it is effective for community road safety. Just to add to Liz's question: what types of projects would be fundable, and do community groups apply to the Department? I would like a wee bit more information on that so that we can get to a point at which, as Liz says, the budget that is allocated is used effectively, because we know that, in times past, it has not been fully utilised.

Ms Hobson: I will respond to that one. As you are probably aware, a budget of £100,000 is allocated to the road safety (safe travel) grant scheme each year. Last year, everybody who applied and met the criteria was able to avail themselves of the funding. That is the position. With the criteria, there was maybe a misunderstanding of what sort of projects and initiatives could be funded by it. The scheme for the current financial year was launched last Wednesday, 22 September, and applications close on 15 October. We have already received quite a few enquiries about the scheme and the eligibility requirements that have to be met. The Department is very willing to engage, and we have already organised a few Zoom meetings with different community groups. Feel free to get in touch with us. We are very happy to take any comments and to provide clarity on what the requirements for the scheme are.

The scheme is for groups in the voluntary and community sector, and they can apply for a grant of up to £10,000, which is to run projects that are aimed at improving road safety or, indeed, the uptake of active travel. Youth groups, schools and community groups can apply. In the past, projects have been funded that addressed issues related to the safe sharing of road space, motorcycle safety, modifying cars safely, and driver safety advice and training for younger and older drivers. As Ms Kimmins mentioned, Road Safe NI was successful last year, and it produced a highway code for children, which was really well received in primary schools. They are really beneficial initiatives, and, as I said, we are keen to work with the community groups and anybody who is interested to clarify the eligibility criteria. In short, we need to see that there is a specific issue that needs to be addressed, see their idea on

how to address it and then see how the proposed project will contribute to our road safety strategy targets and indicators.

The other key thing is to make sure that projects do not replicate what is already being done in the Department. As you are aware, the Department already runs certain schemes in schools. Basically, it cannot fund any capital project. If anybody wants speed ramps or similar capital projects, it will not fund those or anything already being done by the Department. It is for things that are done over and beyond what the Department does, and it is really to tackle local issues at a local level. That is the key thing.

To promote it, we had the formal launch last week, and we also put it on the website. We also work with some of our stakeholder groups. The Rural Community Network is one, and the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA) is actively promoting the scheme for us. Hopefully that gives you an idea.

I will give some examples of organisations that benefited last year. We had Belfast Healthy Cities, Road Safe NI, which I mentioned, Colin Neighbourhood Partnership and Cycling UK, so a variety of bodies have applied for the scheme and have been successful, and anybody who completes the application and meets the criteria, will, hopefully, be eligible for the funding.

Ms Kimmins: Thank you, Caroline. Last year, it was relatively new, and two groups that I had been working with were trying to apply. They thought that they could have got a SID or something like that through it. I know that PCSPs run that in partnership with the Department, but, obviously, there is a waiting list across the PCSP areas, and the groups thought that that would have been a really good thing to apply for. Unfortunately, that would be deemed a capital project, but they were able to review, in consultation with the Department, what they were applying for.

Maybe we could think about supporting groups where there are gaps. We have all talked about how effective SIDs are, as Dolores has mentioned. I have been an elected representative for many years, and everyone wants speed ramps in their area, but they are hard to get. Maybe we could look at those issues, which would be useful for smaller groups that do not have the manpower to deliver big projects. Thank you, Caroline.

My colleague Chris Hazzard introduced the 20 mph outside schools, as a pilot, during his time as Minister, and that has been very successful. I, too, am very passionate about that scheme. Are there any indications about that being rolled out in any future strategies? I would love to see that outside all schools. I have expressed disappointment about the most recent call out for applications. Schools that already have traffic calming measures were included, while schools that have very little of that sort of thing and could have benefited from being included were not. I can only speak for my constituency. Can we look at those areas and make sure that they are prioritised?

Dr Hughes: Thank you. We are now getting the data about the effectiveness of the pilot schemes, and it is something we will look at as we develop the strategy. Thank you for raising that matter.

Ms Kimmins: At this stage, I probably sound like a broken record, Chris. However, it is a really good scheme, and the further that it can be broadened out the better.

Has any consideration been given to developing walking and cycling infrastructure around school areas as a specific action measure in the new strategy?

Dr Hughes: As I said, we have not developed the strategy yet. We are very much at the consultation stage. If you raise that issue with us, we can take it away and look at it.

Ms Kimmins: It would be good to look at that, particularly as it ties in with the Minister's active travel priority. School safety is a key issue for us all, so can you look at that matter?

My final question is on some of the targets in the 2020 strategy. After looking at the four targets, it is good to see such a reduction in fatalities and serious injuries from the baseline figures. At the same time, the latest figures show that we have fallen short of some of our targets. Do you have any indication why we have not met those targets? It is good to be ambitious, but what factors have contributed to the failure to meet those targets?

Dr Hughes: As I said at the outset, we are at the stage of the harder-to-deal-with factors. You will be aware of the public campaigns. For example, the vaccine campaign has the same issue where you can reach a certain percentage, and, after that, a different approach is required. New targets have not been set because the strategy has not been developed, but it will need to be considered. Do you want to increase the targets? Will the acceptable number of those killed and seriously injured have to go up? The international consensus is Share the Road to Zero. It is about trying to reduce accidents to zero. It is regrettable to the extreme every time we fall short of that target. It is interesting to hear your views on the issue. We would appreciate the Committee's thoughts on that issue. We have not set targets for that, but what would the Committee like us to consider?

Ms Kimmins: It is certainly not a criticism because it is not an easy thing to do. We need to be ambitious because it is a matter of life or death in a lot of cases. I want to establish whether we need more robust action measures or more funding and resources to effectively meet or get closer to the targets. Based on an analysis of the figures, can you identify anything more that needs to be done?

Dr Hughes: That is the stage that we are at now, where we are trying to work through those issues. That is why we welcome every thought and comment that you have.

Ms Kimmins: That is grand. Thank you, Chris and Caroline.

Mr Delargy: I am looking at the information in the study. Clearly, there is a disparity, as you have highlighted, between the number of people who are killed in more-deprived areas and the number who are killed in more-affluent areas. The number went down in 2019. Will anything specific be put in place to target deprived areas in particular, because, while it has dropped, the number of people who are killed or seriously injured in deprived areas is still significantly higher?

Dr Hughes: We can certainly take that issue away and have a look at it. As I said, the strategy has not been developed yet, so we are very much in listening mode here.

Mr Delargy: My other issue is delivery of the A5. Obviously, in its current state, it is one of the most dangerous roads in Ireland. Will you include anything specific in the strategy to ensure that large-scale infrastructure projects like that are managed and that, with them, there is a move towards improved road safety?

Dr Hughes: As I said, we have not decided on the strategy. The aim is very much to have it at high level. The A5 is one of various key projects that the Executive have identified and are going forward. Obviously, it will contribute to that. Again, as I said, we are very much in listening mode if that is something that members would like us to take away and consider. Road safety underpins a lot of ongoing roadworks. We would need to see how that could fit into a high-level strategy.

Just reflecting on the deprived areas, it may well be that, as we look at trying to tackle that rump of remaining numbers of killed and seriously injured, that may be an angle that would help us to identify and adopt a new approach. It is helpful that you have highlighted that. We can certainly take that away, as well as look to see where major road infrastructure projects fit into that.

The Chairperson (Mr Buckley): I have a couple of follow-ups to close with on some of the issues that members have mentioned. I think that it was Caroline who dealt with the question about the road safety grant scheme. It would be useful for the Committee to be supplied with a briefing document of the dos and don'ts, should we say, of the scheme; the type of projects that have been fundable and most successful in the past, and indeed that process. I know that you indicated that you are willing to have Zoom meetings, which is also helpful if we have interested groups, but, perhaps, a briefing note to the Committee spelling out exactly what the scheme is applicable for would help. Dolores is indicating to me that it is on the website, but could you, please, provide that to the Committee directly via a briefing note?

Another point, which was raised by both Dolores and Liz and is a fair point, is that there is always a real community drive for ramps. One thing that I would like to see included in the strategy is any model of international best practice. Are ramps the best way by which to reduce speed and therefore increase road safety, or are there other ways? What I get constantly from people is that they know that ramps are effective, but they do not like the way in which they can destroy the setting of a development, or whatever it may be. I suppose that I fall into that camp myself. I would like to see that come forward in the strategy. If you know, maybe you can say now whether there are international

models of best practice on the best way to reduce speed. Is it ramps, or are there other ways? If there are other ways, can we explore them?

My final point relates to an issue that Roy mentioned on MOT testing and its impact. Obviously, the Minister has announced a consultation on biennial MOT testing. It is important that we factor in evidence from DVA testers on what they are seeing on the ground, and how it might impact on road safety if we were to go to such a model. The jury is still very much out on that. I encourage everybody to feed into that consultation so that we have a direct comparison and feed into the strategy going forward.

Dr Hughes: I would need to talk to my Roads colleagues about the effectiveness of various traffic calming measures and to look at the operational detail on that. On the biennial MOT call for evidence, we have looked at the evidence that is available from the partial real-life test of the system, so the evidence from the DVA will feed into that.

Finally, on the point that Mr Beggs and other members made, there is an awful lot of local knowledge and enthusiasm that, clearly, we want to capture.

Chair, have I picked up on all the points that you wanted me to?

The Chairperson (Mr Buckley): You have adequately picked up on the points, and Caroline was nodding in agreement about the briefing note on the scheme.

Dr Hughes: Yes, absolutely.

The Chairperson (Mr Buckley): One other small point has been raised — we will receive a briefing on it next week — about the crisis facing the HGV sector. Anecdotally, from listening to a lot of people who are leaving the industry, the most common factor in the shortage of drivers is those who are retiring. There seems to be quite a dispute among them about the way in which the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA) is applying its own regulations. The retiring drivers almost feel that the industry is now so heavily regulated that it is driving people out of the sector. The police regulate our roads, road safety and the enforceability of regulations, but there is also the likes of VOSA. What conversations are feeding in to a strategy for taking into account the challenges facing the haulage industry at present?

Dr Hughes: Some of the issues that you touched on are devolved, and some have an impact across the UK. We are in constant contact, multiple times daily, with our colleagues in all the operational bodies in Westminster. We also have access to some of the issues that have been raised through the media. The trade bodies that represent the drivers and industry say that the issues are, in part, to do with the terms and conditions and operation. You are absolutely correct to say that many of the drivers are at retirement age. The average age of a driver in the HGV industry is 55. In GB, there are different issues. For example, there is a shortage of HGV tests, which we do not have here, so there are issues that are devolved and issues that apply across the whole UK and, indeed, beyond, into Europe, because, by the nature of what they do, those drivers cross borders of every description.

The Chairperson (Mr Buckley): I appreciate that. It is on a point of information, and I know that you may not be the direct person to ask in relation to that. I thank you both for your briefing; it has been helpful. This is something that is very real to a lot of members, and we will work collectively towards a better and safer environment on our roads. Thank you both. I know that you will follow up with information on those points at a later date.

Dr Hughes: Thank you, Chair.

Ms Hobson: Thank you.