



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Infrastructure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Road and Public Transport Safety:
Police Service of Northern Ireland

5 June 2024

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Mrs Deborah Erskine (Chairperson)
Mr John Stewart (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Danny Baker
Mr Cathal Boylan
Mr Keith Buchanan
Mr Stephen Dunne
Mr Andrew McMurray
Mr Peter McReynolds

Witnesses:

Chief Superintendent Sam Donaldson Police Service of Northern Ireland

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): We welcome to the Committee Chief Superintendent Sam Donaldson from the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Sam, you are welcome to the Committee. Apologies for, as you can hear, my voice. It is holding up OK. We appreciate your attendance to talk about this important issue. Members are interested in and keen to hear about it. You are wearing two hats today, but we will focus on the policing side in the first session. I invite you to give a brief outline for five to 10 minutes. I am keen to get to members' questions, which we will come to after that.

Chief Superintendent Sam Donaldson (Police Service of Northern Ireland): Thank you for the welcome. I think that I have what you have, Chair, because my throat has been playing up this morning, but, hopefully, I will be OK. Thank you very much for the opportunity to attend. I know that there are two sessions, and, at the Chair's discretion, I am happy for them to overlap. I will make some opening comments on road safety in general, the road safety strategy, the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership and safety on the public transport network. Those are the things that you wanted to discuss this morning, but I am happy to talk much more broadly on road safety from a policing perspective. I will make some brief opening comments and then take any questions. I am also happy to push through into the second session, if that works. There is no requirement for me to take a break.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): Sam, it would be easier to keep to the policing side of things. It will make it easier and cleaner for note-taking and the minutes. If you do not mind, we will keep to the policing side for the first session and then move on to the partnership, if that is OK.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Yes, no problem.

I want to open up with a few headlines on road safety. On average, five people die on our roads in Northern Ireland every month. I will repeat that: on average, five people die on our roads in Northern

Ireland every month. If you take an all-Ireland view, five people die on our roads on the island of Ireland every week. The UK statistics suggest that five people a day die on the roads in the UK. That five is just consistent, but it is a scary statistic. I will talk later about that being more than a statistic. Hopefully, you have had the documents circulated, and I will talk a little about some of the communication that the Police Service is trying to do.

With those statistics and that kind of challenge, obviously, there is a long way to go until we reach the vision of the Share the Road to Zero programme, and a lot of investment is required. Another thing to say from the outset is that there is a perception, in my opinion, that road safety is a matter for the Department for Infrastructure and the Police Service of Northern Ireland. Sometimes, beyond that, I do not see an awful lot of evidence that other people see that it is their responsibility. I will talk in a bit of detail later about individual and personal responsibility, which is really important.

In my notes, I have put in bold what I am about to say, and I speak as a senior police officer with almost 30 years' experience. Driver behaviour and driver decision-making are the number-one factor in all our fatalities and, indeed, all our collisions. I have no doubt that we will chat today about the main reasons why collisions take place and injuries and fatalities occur, but driver behaviour and driver decision-making are where it all starts. Significant collaborative work is ongoing on education, engineering and enforcement. I am happy to talk about those today.

I turn to the road safety strategy. The PSNI absolutely supports the "Safe roads, safe vehicles and safe people" approach. It blends in really nicely with the three Es that I just talked about: education, engineering and enforcement. The police are key contributors to the strategy, and I reassure you that we have been and will continue to be very much engaged with DFI. I suggest that relationships between the PSNI and DFI in how we do our day-to-day business are probably as good as they have ever been.

I am happy to discuss all the arrangements for the strategy, how we engage and the governance arrangements that exist, but, at the outset, I must caution the Committee about the road strategy and road safety full stop. Enforcement, engineering and education all cost money. They all require investment. Perhaps we can discuss this later, but it is no coincidence that 2023 had the highest number of fatalities for some years. It was also the year in which we spent the least on education and, by coincidence, took 21 police officers out of our proactive road policing unit. There is something there around the fact that, if we want to keep people safe on our roads, we must invest in all the agencies, including the police, that are required to deliver a service.

I was going to mention the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership, but I will pause that for now. I have a few opening comments to make about safety on the public transport network, but I will pause that as well and come back to that in the next session, if that is OK.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): That would be super. Thank you, Sam, I appreciate that.

You have given us stark figures. At the start of this session, it would be remiss not to sympathise with all the families and people who have lost loved ones on the road. As public representatives, we know all too well what it is like when you hear of a road traffic accident and the impact that it has on a community.

You touched on the difficulties around enforcement. We know of the difficulties in policing at the moment as well. Will you touch more on that? You said that 21 active police officers were taken out of the road policing unit: what does that mean on the ground for enforcement? We have seen a rise in the number of deaths, so, obviously, the correlation between those things is clear.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: First, like you, Chair, our hearts go out to the families involved. That is why our campaign includes the phrase "More than a statistic". Every number that we talk about today represents an individual. It represents a family and a group of friends who will never be the same again. There are people who are picking up the pieces from this kind of thing. In Northern Ireland, 26 families have already been through that experience this year, which is horrific when you think about it. I do not know everyone in the room, but perhaps someone here has also been through that. If people realised the reality of a road traffic fatality and the impact that it has on a family at the time and, indeed, for the rest of their lives, mindsets would change.

When it comes to enforcement, I would not want to come to the Committee today and have it think that the PSNI is not delivering or that it does not have enough resources to police the roads. First and foremost, there are uniformed police officers in every district, and, whilst their immediate

responsibilities are always to attend calls and respond to requests from the public, they have a responsibility to tackle road safety as well. A lot of day-to-day operations are ongoing. Speeding operations, inattention operations and things like that are all going on across the districts. I want to reassure the Committee to that effect.

From a specialist perspective, we still have a roads policing unit, and there are about 170 people in it. Some are in what is called our "strategic unit", which is always on patrol on the motorway. There is an obligation on us to have patrols on the motorway to keep the motorways clear and to respond to incidents. We then have what we call our "road policing interceptors", and they are proactive teams. They try to tackle road safety matters, and they try to tackle criminal matters on the roads. There are a lot of mobile organised crime gangs now, and they try to intervene in those circumstances.

We have a collision investigation unit as well, and the clue is in the title. It responds to all of our fatal road traffic collisions. That is a traumatic job. We have a small team for that. We have professionalised the staff on that team. We have a small team of officers who are responsible for the development of policy, engagement with DFI, engagement with partners, delivery of traffic management, delivery of road education and things such as that.

I will go right to your question, Chair. Last year was a particularly difficult year for the Police Service from a financial perspective, and this year will be a particularly challenging year as well. We are about £141 million short this year. Last year, we had no choice but to reduce the number of officers in road policing roles. One inspector, two sergeants and 18 constables were removed from proactive roles. Those are the interceptor roles that I talked about. They are not tied to the motorway or to the strategic network. They have the flexibility to go to various locations and tackle road safety concerns in areas where the community, for example, has raised issues. Whilst 21 posts were removed, we still have proactive officers based in Sprucefield, Maydown, Omagh and Enniskillen, so be assured that there are still four teams there. My plea is that, if you really want to tackle road safety, we have to reinvest in road policing officers. I will conclude my answer to the question with a figure. I gave the figure of 170 road policing officers: we have exactly 10% fewer road policing officers than we had in 2014. Over the past 10 years, there has been a 10% reduction.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): Thank you for that. Can you detail the process for when you catch offenders who have been speeding? If they get community orders for speeding or have to go on a course, for example, surely that should act as a deterrent. Can you detail the levels of penalty for drivers, and do you think that they should be strengthened? Are they a sufficient deterrent?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: On road policing-related offending, if you allow me to use that term, I am talking about everything from speeding to drink-driving to careless driving to construction in use, as we call it, which is about defects in vehicles and things like that. With all of that, we are consistent in having about 40,000 detections by police officers in any 12-month rolling period. It is slightly down in the past 12 months, and I think that that is related to the fact that we now have fewer police officers on the ground; therefore, it is inevitable that the detections will go down slightly.

We are talking about 40,000 detections. I will talk about the Road Safety Partnership later. Over and above those detections by police, last year, there were almost 80,000 detections for speeding alone by the road safety vans. I will explain how that works later. There are 120,000 detections in a year for road-related breaches of the law. As I said, that includes drink-driving, speeding and all of those offences.

I think that your question is about, first and foremost, what happens at that point and what the outcomes are. There are three basic outcomes. You can go on a speed awareness course. I will not ask for a show of hands as to who has been on a speed awareness course, but, if you are over the speed limit but not too far over it — I cannot remember the exact figure now — you are offered the opportunity to go on a speed awareness course. Some people in the room may have availed themselves of that. The feedback from speed awareness courses is positive: people seem to learn and recognise the risks. In case I neglect to mention it later, we are looking at the possibility of introducing speed awareness before you get caught. That is one of the things that we are thinking about as a concept now. Rather than put people through that course after they have been doing 45 mph in a 30 mph zone, we are asking whether there is any way that we can invest up front. I do not have the money to do that right now, but it is one of the things that we are thinking of. Speed awareness is the first thing.

You can get a fixed penalty notice as well. A fixed penalty notice will be a fine, and that can be issued as a result of being caught. I will use your term: I know that some people do not like us using the term

"caught", but it is a very natural term. If you are caught by a speed van or by a police officer, you can get a fixed penalty notice, and you have to pay that fixed penalty notice. If you pay it within a specific time, it is a lesser fee. If you take longer to pay, the fee rises. If you do not pay it at all, the third option arises, and you can go to court. Those are the three possible outcomes. Obviously, what happens to the offender is at the discretion of the court. You have everything from first-time offenders through to people who have literally hundreds of road safety-related detections. The outcome is a matter for the court.

You asked me, Chair, whether the fines are great enough. I would not be doing the Police Service or myself any justice if I came here today and said that the deterrents were sufficient: they are not. It is a long time since the fee for fixed penalty notices rose, and we have been having some early conversations with DFI around that. We have a control strategy for 2024-25, and, on that control strategy, we have simply written, "Explore the possibility of an increase in the fines and fees for fixed penalty notices". I know that that will not be popular in the community, especially at this time, but there is something here around the penalty notices.

I have to say that I am frustrated with the courts at times, but I have to be respectful to the courts, given that there is a lot more than meets the eye about an individual standing in front of a court. Sometimes, it is frustrating when the consequences are insufficient for people who have been caught — again, I will use that term — such as, for example, disqualified drivers who are repeatedly caught for disqualified driving. If the consequences are insufficient in my mind, perhaps the consequences are insufficient in your mind, and maybe the consequences are insufficient in other people's minds. It takes me back to the comment that I made at the start about driver decisions and driver error.

Sometimes, I think that the biggest issue of all on our roads — I would like to talk about this, if possible — is that people do not realise the consequences. People absolutely do not think that it will happen to them. Sometimes, I think that people, even if they get caught speeding, see breaking traffic laws as lesser than breaking criminal laws. If you were to ask the average member of the public which of those offences is more serious — is speeding or assaulting someone more serious? — I think that the vast majority would say, "Absolutely, if you are involved in disorder and assault, that is much more serious". They are all breaches of the law, and they all carry significant consequences. There is something in my mind around trying to get people to see the consequences.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): I will pick up on that. What do you think the penalties should be? What increase would you like to see, if you were to put a figure on that?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: I would not like to put a figure on it, but, in my mind, because they have stayed the same for so long and because of inflation and because of the circumstances, there is something in my mind about engaging with our DFI colleagues around what that figure is likely to be. I do not know. I know that some fixed penalty notices in England and Wales are now at £200. I would hate that to be the headline when I leave here today, but there is something around raising those penalties, more than anything to allow people to recognise the consequences a little more.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): If you do not mind, before I go to other members, I will pick up on what you said about relationships between the PSNI and DFI being better than they have ever been. Another interesting point that you made was that, as we know, the PSNI and DFI have responsibility, but you do not see anybody else recognising that it is also their responsibility. I have two questions. How has the relationship between DFI and the PSNI been made better, particularly when we are looking at higher road deaths at the minute? What were the problems beforehand, and why do you now perceive it to be better?

The next question is this: are you talking purely about the public not realising their responsibility, or are you talking more widely about government?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Again, there are two parts to that. Relationships have always been good. They have always been positive and collaborative, and, looking back, I have no concerns about how we have worked together on road safety — not only PSNI and DFI but PSNI and other Departments. Following on from my earlier comment, I sometimes get a sense that people think that road safety is about the Department for Infrastructure and that enforcement of road safety is about the Police Service of Northern Ireland. To a senior police officer, that is how it feels. Maybe that is not the case, but I would not like the Committee to think that those relationships are not positive.

We have introduced a couple of things recently. For years, there has been a road safety strategy, and there was always operational and tactical, as I would call it, engagement. We have recently introduced the road safety strategic forum, chaired by DFI, with DOJ, DAERA, the police, the Fire and Rescue Service and the Ambulance Service all sitting on that. We have met only twice — four months ago and not that long ago — but you can already see the collaboration on communication and data sharing. To my mind, things are improving because we are getting together at a more strategic level. It is encouraging to see the heads of the Fire and Rescue Service and the Ambulance Service and senior people from other Departments coming together and saying, "We have to intervene in road safety".

Another thing that we have done recently — we are trialling it — is that I said to one of my police officers, "I want you to go and work in the DFI offices". That is about simply working down there, engaging daily and seeing whether the model of working in the same office would add value when it comes to things like changing legislation, developing strategies and talking about communication. That strategic engagement is improving, and, hopefully, day-to-day operational engagement will also improve.

Your second question was about public responsibility, and, absolutely, that is what I am referring to. I will not go around the room and ask people what they see when they travel on the roads, but, when I talk to people who know what my day job is, they tell me what horrendous driving they see on our roads. They say that they see people driving dangerously, driving carelessly, using mobile phones, speeding, trying to get through lights, dangerously overtaking, emerging from side junctions and all those things. I commented earlier that people do not recognise the consequences. The world has got so fast and crazy, and everybody is in a hurry. Looking at how some people drive — I am sure that it is the same for you — I see something about personal responsibility. With every decision that every driver takes come consequences. They can be minor, or, sadly, on some occasions, they can be catastrophic and even fatal. I am happy to talk about the main factors in collisions, but they always involve a human being. There is no getting away from it: it is always about human decision-making. We need to do more to convince people of the consequences of that decision-making, hence the "More than a statistic" communication that we are working on.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): As somebody who travels on the road quite a bit, coming up from Fermanagh and South Tyrone, every day that you go up the motorway, it is on a wing and a prayer. Yesterday, I saw somebody driving in front of me who was putting on make-up, and the number of near misses on the motorway was crazy.

Mr Stewart: Thanks very much for coming today. Thank you for all that you and your officers do to keep us safe. I echo the Chair's comments: our thoughts are with all the families on every occasion. Sadly, we hear about it far too often.

I want to tease out a couple of points. I am conscious that we always say that we want to ask just one more question, but this is such an important issue that I want to get into the nuts and bolts of it. I often wax lyrical about invest to save — Cathal will know that from sitting on the Public Accounts Committee with me — but, on this occasion, it is about invest to save lives. You talked about the fact that it is no surprise that there is a correlation between having the highest number of deaths last year and what looks like a lesser spend on logistics, personnel, education and advertising. That is not a coincidence. To that end, how realistic is the road to zero without investment? That is the first one.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: I am doing a little bit of cause-and-effect analysis. If you go back 50 years — this is a fact — you find that, on average, 314 people died on our roads each year in the 1970s. If you take that figure of 314 and plot it over the decades, you see that — there is no doubt in my mind about this — our roads are safer now than they were in the 1970s. Having looked back over those 50 years, I asked myself this question: what was it that caused the roads to be safer? Was it vehicle safety, legislation, the introduction of seat belts, for example, or education? I am not in a position to say right now exactly what had the most positive impact. On the basis of that backwards look, one of the things that we have to do is ensure that we identify which interventions created the greatest reduction in lives lost. My heart tells me that it was probably things like the introduction of seat belts and a lot of the education — the adverts that we saw on our televisions 10, 15 and 20 years ago, which people in my household refused to watch because they were so horrific. Until that analysis is complete — it is ongoing — I cannot say, looking back, what has been the greatest intervention and, therefore, more importantly, what we should invest in going forward.

The second part of your question was about the road to zero. That should still be our ambition.

Mr Stewart: Absolutely.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: If we leave the Committee meeting today having said that the road to zero is not deliverable, we should pack up and forget about it. That should still be our vision, and it is the vision in many parts of the world. As I said, we will not reach that unless we invest in education, in engineering, which, in essence, is about how we change our roads and the safety mechanisms that are associated with individual roads in particular, and in enforcement by changing our legislation. Perhaps I have a simplistic view, but I would love to have more road safety vans and more road policing officers and the ability to detect more people driving in the way that you see every day and in the way that the Chair mentioned. We have to invest in road safety, but it is not just about investment in one element. That is why the strategy is so important: it is all about enforcement, engineering, prevention and education. We have to invest in all that. Only when we get a balanced approach will we be able to push on in the right direction.

When you look at the figures over the last five years in particular and you plot those against the figures from 1970 and keep doing that, decade after decade, year after year, you see that the number of deaths drops until about 2010. However, since 2010, we have — I will use this term — plateaued. I am not saying that we tolerate it, but we have almost got to the point where there are five a month, which is around one a week. We really struggle to drive it down any further than that. That is where the strategy and the investment come in, and it is why I value the opportunity to talk to a Committee such as this today. Importantly, the public have to get it. It is one thing us and the emergency services getting it, but the public have to buy into the road to zero, and their behaviour has to reflect that.

Mr Stewart: Coming out of that, we all remember the horrific adverts that were on TV for many years and the impact that they had, not only the long-lasting impact on your mindset but the positive impact on drivers' habits. Anecdotally, I see many more people being blasé about using their mobile phone at the wheel, which did not seem to be the case in the immediate aftermath of the law change and the advertising campaign on that. I am curious to know whether that is borne out in the stats on enforcement and collisions.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Yes and no. Anecdotally, there is a lot of evidence to suggest that mobile phones are a factor. I guarantee that you will see people using mobile phones as you drive on a day-to-day basis. Interestingly, people do not use their mobile phones much any more to make phone calls; they now use their mobile phones to communicate via WhatsApp or to check the news. You can see where I am going here. When you are in a vehicle and have that smart technology in your hand, the temptation is to check it when you are driving. In the past 10 or 15 years ago, the issue was the person with the phone up to their ear who was making a call; now the issue is that the person's attention is diverted from the road to the device that is on their lap or in their hand, and they are focusing on something other than the road.

I use the term that, I think, the Chair used: the "catching rate". It is really difficult to catch people using their mobile phone. Whilst you and I see people every day, unless I am in uniform, on duty and can get right beside the vehicle and see the person at that moment, it is really difficult. We can invest in technology, such as specific cameras, that can detect people who are speeding, using a phone or not wearing their seat belt. However, they cost a horrendous amount of money, and we simply do not have the money to invest in them right now.

There is something here about education, but, more importantly, the answer to the mobile phone issue probably lies in the vehicles and with the manufacturers. This is just my humble opinion, but, when you get into a vehicle — I do not know what the right technical term is — you should not be able to use your mobile phone. That is the answer.

I will finish with this important point. A lot of international research now suggests that using a mobile phone, even to make a call, distracts you from the road. I will ask the Committee this question: have you ever travelled from location A to location B, been on the phone the entire time and been unable to remember the journey because your focus has been on that conversation? It may be about a family emergency or important business, but you are not 100%-focused on the road. That is the issue.

We have a culture of phone usage, but, in my mind, we need a really broad technical solution to fix that and stop people doing it as opposed to trying to catch people who ignore the advice and continue to do it.

Mr Stewart: Absolutely. There is a place as well for the Department to get more involved in advertising and educating young people. That is somewhere that it can make an impact.

The final thing is that you referred to both social and driver responsibility. Absolutely everyone of us agrees with that. I live in the countryside, as, I am sure, many members do. You talked about enforcement on the motorways. In comparison with what I see on a daily basis in the countryside, they are night and day. Some of the driving that you see, particularly at this time of year when there are tractors on the road and grass cutting is going on, is horrific. I drive down the road from my house to Carrickfergus, which is 5 miles. Nearly four or five collisions happen on that road just from idiotic driving. What more can be done to police those areas? It seems that that is where the majority of accidents — the ones that I see — take place. It is difficult to police, but people see the national speed limit sign and think that it is a licence to do what they want, when it is clearly not. What more can we do through education or enforcement to limit that?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: There is a lot there. I agree with your comment about the national speed limit or the 30 mph or 40 limit. One of the things that I say to people is that that speed is not the target. There is a sense that you have to be driving at the speed limit or else you are not making sufficient progress.

There are 16,000 miles of road in Northern Ireland, 170 road policing officers and 10 road safety vans. Even with district officers, we cannot cover all those roads. Some 55% of our fatalities are on rural roads. There is absolutely no doubt in my mind that our rural roads are more dangerous places to be; in fact, if you asked me what the themes are right now in collisions and fatalities, I would say that they are rural roads and men. That is the reality, folks: more men are involved in collisions, including fatal collisions, than women. There is something about people being drivers. You are talking about a male who is a driver on a rural road and whose attention is diverted or they are taking some kind of risk. If you put all those things together, you have a fatal concoction.

Your question was about what more we can do. Again, with more road safety vans and more police officers, I could carry out more enforcement and catch more people, but we have to introduce the other elements: the other two Es. We have to educate more. Those are the themes. You will see some stuff relating to the "More than a statistic" scheme. It may be appropriate to refer you to the document that I handed out so that we can talk about some of the themes. We have to educate people about the risks on a 60 mph road, for example, that may be pitch dark, have other vehicles on it and with rain coming down. An inexperienced driver may take a risk on that road, as they may be on a mobile phone at the same time as doing 55 mph or maybe even 65 mph. That is such a high-risk activity.

Mr Stewart: I will not go on. I have several more questions, but I am sure that other members will tease things out. I do not want to hog the limelight. Thank you very much. I appreciate it.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): I know. It is a big topic that all of us are interested in.

Mr Dunne: Thank you, Sam, for your presentation. Those are startling statistics. As others said, the NI, Ireland and UK statistics are alarming. They are a reminder for us all as road users and as legislators.

I will pick up on a couple of points on the fact that 55% of fatalities are on rural roads. There are rural roads in the constituency that I represent. Those are the roads where you see speeding every day, and some of them are not that far from this Building. Do you feel that that figure of 55% for fatalities is matched by policing resources, or should there be more of a balance towards tackling the rural roads issue? We often see speed vans in more built-up areas where there are sometimes more natural obstacles that keep people's speed down. Do you feel that there is a gap there that requires action and improvement?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: The short answer is no. There is a reasonable balance. I talked about motorways. We have significant resources devoted to the motorways, because they make up the strategic road network. Any kind of bump on them brings traffic chaos, and those of you who use the M1 and the M2 in particular will know that. We have wrestled with that a number of times and have asked ourselves whether we could lift some of the people who patrol the motorway and push them further into the rural roads. However, the risks of impacting on the economy, people's lives and stuff like that are too great. We are content that the number of people who are on the motorways is the right number. If you look at the rural roads, you will see that — I mentioned this earlier — the locations of

the proactive teams are Sprucefield, Omagh, Enniskillen and Maydown, all of which are rural locations. If you were to imagine that on a map, it would be an L shape.

The answer to your question is this: I would love more. I would love more people, but I am satisfied with the balance in the urban/rural split. If I had more resources, I would reinvest in places like County Antrim and mid-Ulster and places like that. Mid-Ulster had a bad year in 2022, when it had the highest number of fatalities.

When I look at the locations for the road safety vans, I see that they have permanent and temporary sites across all the districts. They are well balanced by being in those locations. I am content that there is a good urban/rural balance, but I would like to be able to put out more. Although this may have been somewhere else, I think that it was when I was at the Policing Board — I know that you were at the board, Cathal — that somebody asked me, "How many road safety vans would you like?". I said, "If money were not a problem, I would have a road safety van on every road in Northern Ireland. I would catch people speeding on every road in Northern Ireland every day". That is the answer. That is where it is important to work with partners.

Mr Dunne: I appreciate that. That links back to the volume of cars on the motorway and other big roads.

I have another couple of points. I am keen to hear your assessment of the fact that budgets for roads and road maintenance have been cut over recent years. Many of our roads are in poor condition. We regularly see warning signage not being maintained, faded crossings and sight lines blocked at key, busy junctions. What impact do you feel that has had on the statistics on fatalities and injuries on the road?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: I have no evidence to suggest that the condition of any road has caused a fatality; I need to be really clear about that. I would not want you leaving here today thinking or me walking out the door leaving you thinking that I had communicated anything to the contrary. There were a couple of fatal collisions on the M1. The speed limit was reduced to 50 mph for a time, and an assessment was done of whether the curve of the motorway was correct. Those are the only two that I can think of.

Your question was not just about fatal road traffic collisions. I have no statistics or data to suggest that the state of the roads is causing collisions, including serious or fatal collisions. However, speaking as an advanced driver, I can say that, when I am driving on the roads, the state of some of them means that my focus sometimes goes to the road as opposed to the environment that is around me. Maybe there is something in that, and other people may have a similar view: instead of lifting your eyes and looking at the traffic and the junctions, you are worrying about whether there is a pothole in the road. There is probably an anecdotal impact. I am sure that people could give evidence to that effect, but I reassure you that there is no statistical evidence to support it, particularly when it comes to fatal road traffic collisions.

Mr Dunne: I recently asked the Minister about spending on road safety advertising, including the hard-hitting TV adverts. It was quite alarming, in that over £1.4 million was spent in 2021-22 but that reduced to £470,000 in 2023-24. If money became available, would you like to advertise like that beyond TV and move on to social media platforms?

I know that school visits still happen, but will you touch on that? I recall the effect in my school of the advert of the car arriving upside down. Having the fire service and the police at schools is effective for young drivers: is that still a priority for you?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: We are talking about education and prevention. The Roadsafes Roadshow is an award-winning vehicle, for want of a better term, that goes from school to school. If you have not seen the Roadsafes Roadshow and it is at a local school, I encourage you to go and see it.

Mr Dunne: Has that been impacted by the reduction in the budgets?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: No, the Roadsafes Roadshow has not, but the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership, which, I know, you want me to talk about later, is now sponsoring part of the Roadsafes Roadshow. The policing budget reduced, and, because I am a police officer and the chair of the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership, I asked the Road Safety Partnership whether it would

sponsor the Roadsafe Roadshow. That was agreed. The number of roadshows that are delivered has not been affected, so the education at that level continues.

If money were not a problem, would I like to see those hard-hitting adverts? Absolutely. I would like to see them on television, I would like you to hear them on the radio, and I would like you to see them on Adshels. Maybe this is the time to draw your attention to a particular document. There was a gap last year in DFI investment — maybe "expenditure" is a more accurate term. Last July, I was appointed the gold for PSNI, which, effectively, means that it is my responsibility to come up with a plan for road safety. I asked our strategic comms people to come up with a brand new approach to education and communication. They came up with a couple of things. If you flick through that document, you will see two particular concepts. One is in what is called "More than a statistic", which is about consequences and getting people to see that, whilst we might come here to talk about five deaths per week or 71 fatalities in 2023, those statistics are irrelevant: those are lives.

The other thing that we are trying to communicate is the "fatal five". Hopefully, you are now aware of the "fatal five". We are trying to prevent that behaviour. The document that I have was all about consequences and about trying to communicate to people that there are consequences of the decisions that you make. In an ideal world, if money were not a problem, I would love people to have this everywhere. I would love to invest significantly more in it.

When I was with DFI last week and we had our strategic meeting, we simply agreed that the PSNI and partners must amplify the communication and education that DFI does and that partners must amplify the communication that the PSNI does. We need to be careful that we are not all doing separate pieces of education.

I would love to see those advertisements coming back and an investment being made in them. I am pretty sure that the cause-and-effect analysis that I mentioned will probably show that, when they were rolled out, the number of fatalities went down.

Mr Dunne: Thanks. There was certainly effective messaging in there.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): A number of members want to ask questions. I do not want to curtail things too much, because we are having a vital conversation, but, if you do not mind, there are a number of members who have questions. I do not want to take up too much of your time either.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: I could stay all day. *[Laughter.]* Honestly, I am happy to stay all day.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): Unfortunately, the room is needed for another Committee.

Mr K Buchanan: I will try to go through my questions as quickly as I can. I am conscious that, although I will start talking about stats, those stats are more than numbers on a page; they are people's lives. I am totally appreciative of that.

I asked some questions through the Policing Board about the districts across Northern Ireland, and I have the numbers in front of me. I appreciate that other members do not have that information. I presume that the statistics are for a calendar year and not a financial year.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: It depends on the statistics that you have in front of you.

Mr K Buchanan: I have numbers.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: It could be for a calendar year or for a financial year.

Mr K Buchanan: Unfortunately, your statistics are correct that there are five deaths every month. If you look at the 26 deaths that have occurred to date, you will see that you are on target. That is a bad way of putting it, but, unfortunately, you are.

My question is about causal factors. It does not matter how a person loses their life, unfortunately; they have lost their life. However, there is a narrative that it was because of the road. The figures that I have are from 2019-2020 and 2021-22. For the benefit of the rest of the Committee, I will say that there were 56 deaths in 2019; 56 in 2020; 50 in 2021; 55 in 2022; and 71 in 2023. That is a total of

288. Of those 288 deaths, four were in the category that involved the physical road. The figures back up your point about the road not being not a cause. Everyone says that it is the fault of the road, and the road can be a cause to a degree. How do we get people to the mindset that the road cannot be blamed? It is the person with the right foot, and it is here. How do we get that message across?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: That goes back to the Es that I talked about. We can do all the engineering we want and make every road as safe as we can to the point where it is like a bowling alley with buffers on either side and where cars cannot bump into each other. That is not physically possible, because we do not have enough money to have roads like that. Therefore, it is about education and enforcement.

One of the key things I have tried to say over the last year and a half is that sometimes people home in on a specific road being the "most dangerous", and the A5 is a good example of that. I hear people making throwaway comments like, "The A5 is the most dangerous road in Northern Ireland" or, "The A5 is the most dangerous road in Ireland". I take the view that every road is dangerous. The road that you live on or the road that you take your children to school on is as dangerous as the A5.

I have the figures on causal factors for last year in front of me. The top five causal factors for killed and seriously injured (KSIs) are, first, inattention, and that is one of our "fatal five" on careless driving; secondly, alcohol and drugs, and that concerns an impaired driver who cannot make good decisions from behind the wheel of a vehicle; thirdly, overtaking; fourthly, driving too close to other vehicles; and fifthly, emerging from a minor road. I looked up those figures the other day so that I could communicate them to the Committee.

Let me read the five causes again, and I will ask you to realise that they are all about a driver making a decision: inattention; alcohol; overtaking; driving too close; and emerging from a minor road. Not one of those is about the state of a road. Not one is about the amount that you may be fined if you are caught doing them. Every causation is a decision that a driver has taken on a road with consequences for themselves and, sadly, consequences for another road user, whether it is a driver, a cyclist or a pedestrian.

Going back to the question, it is simply about more education, more enforcement and more consequences.

Mr K Buchanan: I have two more questions. Road safety events were held recently in Dungannon, Cookstown and Magherafelt. I went to the Dungannon event, and I was disappointed not with the police but with the number of people who turned up. It was embarrassing, considering that it was in Dungannon, where people refer to the A5 as an issue. I am not taking away from the deaths on the A5 or any deaths, but I was disappointed at the number of people who turned up to the event. To be fair, the police ran the event, and it was very good.

Several years ago, there were more regular vehicle checkpoints (VCPs), and, if people went out on the road, there was a possibility of being stopped. People knew that the police were out, so they could not misbehave. Is there a correlation between the number of accidents and the reduction in vehicle checkpoints? Vehicle checkpoints are not the same as they used to be. Secondly, what country has got it right or does it better than us?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: You alluded to the A5, and I will give you a scary statistic from the A5. Since 2007, there have been 40 fatal road traffic collisions on the A5 with 48 fatalities. There were 40 collisions that involved fatalities, with 48 people dead. Again, I would not want people thinking, "Sam came here today and dismissed how dangerous the A5 is". It is a dangerous road, as are many other roads.

I have never thought of the VCP thing, to be honest. However, I will say that, when I joined the police service nearly 30 years ago, there were 13,500 police officers. Getting people on the roads doing VCPs and stopping people was a lot easier than it is now with around 6,300 officers. There are definitely challenges with our generic visibility, full stop, never mind our ability to do VCPs.

We have powers around drink-driving and stuff like that in that the duty inspector in any area can give authority to do VCPs for drink-driving. However, we certainly do not do the number of VCPs that we used to, so we do not have the same footprint with those as we have on the roads. Nonetheless, we have a lot more investment in automatic number plate recognition (ANPR), CCTV and gantry technology and stuff like that, so that plays a part as well, and we have access to it.

I cannot remember the second part of your question.

Mr K Buchanan: What country does it better? I am not saying that we are doing it badly, but who does it better or does it right? Has any country got it right, and what can we learn from that?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: No country in the world has cracked it. I have somebody working on that at the moment, doing a bit of international research. People often point to Scandinavia and say that those countries have got it right. Maybe they have, but I am not convinced. Sometimes, people point to other parts of Europe and say that they have got it right, but I do not think that there is anywhere in the world that has absolutely cracked it. That is evident from the research that has been ongoing for a number of years.

I will say it in really simple terms: if somebody had cracked it and got it right and there was a country that had managed to get to zero, we would all be going there to look at it. I am not aware of anywhere that has absolutely cracked it. I am aware of many countries that are innovating and trying different things, but nowhere in the world has got it right. That takes me back to the fact that you can have all the innovation and investment in the world, but it is still about human beings getting behind the wheel of a car, driving and making decisions.

Maybe there is something in the longer term with driverless vehicles, and it will be interesting to see whether those reduce or increase the number of collisions. A lot of risk comes with that technology as well, just as it does with electric vehicles. To answer your question, I do not think that anywhere in the world has got it right. If you pick up anything when you are doing your international research, I would be keen to hear it.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): Likewise, if you pick up anything from your international research, the Committee would be really grateful to see that.

Mr Boylan: You are welcome back. I reflect that, in November 2023 in my constituency, the community in Madden was devastated by an incident in which people were killed outside Newry. The community, including the GAA, rallied around the people who were involved. I remember that you made a presentation on a Thursday and that, by the end of the weekend, five people had been killed in Newry and Armagh when there was a single-car accident and a pedestrian was knocked down.

I have been on the Committee for a number of years, and we have tried several things. About 10 or 15 years ago, there were road safety groups in each council area. We stopped investing in those groups, and we now see the effects of not getting the message out. That is my personal opinion.

You are welcome, and I welcome the presentation. For the sake of the Committee, however, and the work that we are doing now, we need to drill down into the causation, to be honest. You gave the five reasons, and I received the presentation in March. We need to drill down into inattention. If an accident involves a single person, you have to look at that. It used to involve 17-to-24-year-olds, but that has changed, and it is now about a broader group of people. My fear is about that.

We have a number of things to tackle with age groups, and there are a number of messages to get out. I agree with you. As elected representatives, we take phone calls and use our mobiles when we are coming down the road. We are all connected in our cars. The fact is that you can pick up some other kind of media, be it WhatsApp or Google, to search for or buy a pair of shoes or to buy tickets online. Even if somebody else is doing that in the car, it is a distraction for the driver. We definitely need to look at that across the board. Collectively, we are responsible.

I want to ask a wee bit more about the causations. I know that you will pick up on those, and the two presentations cross over, but causation is one point that I would like you to elaborate on a bit more.

The other thing is that there are the same features in the South, such as rural roads, and road deaths there have increased as well this year, as they did last year. What collaboration and conversations can we have, and how can we learn across the board? I will leave it at those two questions.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: There is a lot there, Cathal. Thank you. I could talk about that all day.

On causation factors, I draw your attention to the document that you have. If you have not already seen the "fatal five", they are there. I read out the main causes of KSIs, and they came from analysis

of the feedback that officers on the ground give about what has happened. They fill out a statistical report at every KSI event, and those are collated over the year. That is where the top five causes, including inattention, alcohol and overtaking, come from. They are specific.

With the "fatal five", we have tried to lift the message up a little. If I go to the public and say, "The main cause of people dying on our roads is people emerging from a minor road", that will just not land. That is why we have gone for the "fatal five". It is not a new concept — the "fatal four" has been on the go for a long time in England and Wales — but, when we looked at our analysis last year, we felt that it should be the "fatal five". Without patronising anybody, I will say that they are all listed there. I should say that the new versions do not have the numbers. I was challenged at the Policing Board. I was asked, "Why do these have numbers on them? Is number 1 more important than number 2?". Because of that, all our versions since the board meeting no longer have 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5.

Take drink-driving as an example. We ran our drink-driving campaign for four weeks in late 2023. I launched it, and my plea was this: do not get behind the wheel of a vehicle when you have alcohol or drugs in your system. We arrested 600 people — 600 people were arrested. That is not the total number of people who were on the roads drink-driving, but 600 people whom we arrested in that four-week period. That is horrendous. That tells me that people are still prepared to take the chance, drink and get behind the wheel of a vehicle. Every time I get asked the following question, I shudder, because I wish that I had a pound for every person who has asked me: "How many drinks can I have before I get behind the wheel of a vehicle?". The answer is, "None". If you are ever asked that question, I plead with you to just say, "None". The alcohol limit is 80 mg per 100 ml of blood, and we are considering reducing that. DFI is looking at that at the minute. There is an argument that it should be zero, and there is an argument that our vehicles should be equipped with breath-testing devices that prevent them starting. That is the kind of technology that we should think about in the longer term.

The next of the five is "Slow down". I have given you some of the stats on the number of people we detect speeding. Speeding is nearly always a factor. My father-in-law always says to me, "Sam, if people just slowed down, there would not be the accidents that there are on the motorway". I guarantee that, as you travel day to day, you will see people who are simply going too hard not only for the speed limit but for the conditions on the road. I will repeat the statistic that I gave you: the road safety vans detected 80,000 people speeding last year alone.

"Don't get careless": that is the big one. "Inattention" does not land with people, so we use, "Don't get careless". That is so broad, it could include number 5, which is "Stay off your mobile phone", because, if you are not 100%-focused on the control of your vehicle, arguably, you are careless and your attention is diverted.

Seat belts are not as big an issue for us as they used to be. From being a police officer years ago, I recall that we could go out every day and catch people who were not wearing their seat belt. It is a bigger issue when it comes to serious collisions. There have been serious collisions recently where people were not wearing their seat belt and would have survived if they had been. That is the bottom line. Going back to the cause-and-effect analysis, we will plot when the seat belt legislation changed for both the front and the rear of vehicles, and, as I mentioned, I think that there will be a significant alteration in that. The last one is "Stay off your phone". You will note that it does not say "Do not make calls" but "Stay off your phone" full stop.

Cathal, the "fatal five" overlay the five reasons that I communicated to the Committee. Those are the causation factors. The bigger question is this: what we do with that information? We have to break it out. We have to get the causation factors out to the road safety groups about which you talked. We have to light the touchpaper and get the average member of the public to think, "When I get behind the wheel of a vehicle, these are the 'fatal five'".

This has been a good campaign for us, but we are only scratching the surface with our comms. We are only doing social media, because that is all that we can afford to do right now, but we would love to invest in the campaign a little more. Sorry, that was a rather long answer, but there was a lot in what you asked.

Mr Boylan: That is OK. What about collaboration with the guards?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Yes. I met the guards last Wednesday and again last Friday. Cross-border collaboration is very positive. It has been for many years, both at a strategic level and at an operational level. We share good practice, resources and operations, and we agreed last

Wednesday that, between now and December, we will plan a number of days on which to do operational activity.

An Garda Síochána (AGS) and Ireland are sitting at 80 fatalities today. I checked the figures this morning. We are sitting at 26, which is down six from this time last year. That is good, but I am touching wood and certainly not celebrating. As I mentioned, the answer is to get to zero. That is where the figure comes from: add 26 and 80, and you are talking about five fatalities a week across the island of Ireland.

I reassure you that the engagement and learning taking place is really positive. We are developing a three-year PSNI-AGS strategy that contains seven areas of focus. I am working on it at the minute, and one of the areas is road safety. Out of seven biggies that we need to tackle, one is road safety.

Mr Boylan: Thank you.

Mr Baker: Thank you, Sam. The evidence session has been really good. A lot of my questions have been asked, but I still have two. I am glad that you said that the numbers 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 are being removed, because I was going to ask about that.

I would like to think that the drink and drugs message has got through. There is nobody whom I know in my life who would take a drink and then drive a car. I do not think that I could say the same about looking down at a mobile phone, however. In the comms, is there messaging to say that, if people take their eyes off the road for x amount of time to send a text message or read a WhatsApp message, that is the equivalent of having six pints? Would that be a sort of statistic?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: I am not sure. I have never thought about it before, to be honest. It might confuse the messaging, but there may be something there for us to consider around comparing and contrasting.

From a drink-driving perspective, there are two types of people who drink and drive on our roads. There are the people who blatantly do it in the knowledge that they are drunk and should not be driving a vehicle. There are then the others, who are not sure how much alcohol they have consumed. Perhaps "careless" is the right word for them. They get behind the wheel, their mates may know and they may have an idea themselves, yet they are careless about how much alcohol is in their body. They are equally dangerous on the roads.

As to your question, I do not know. I will take it away and think about it with our comms people.

Mr Baker: Even driving the day after the night before may be a factor.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Yes, it still is a factor. Mr Buchanan talked about VCPs. My experience of being a police officer for many years — there is a police officer sitting behind me at the back who will have a similar one — is that a lot of people are still drunk the morning after. A lot of people think that, by the time they get in a vehicle at eight o'clock in the morning to go to work or wherever, they have dropped below the limit; in fact, they may be higher at that point than they were when they stopped drinking at three o'clock or four o'clock in the morning. That is part of our communication.

For the 600 arrests, I do not have the figures in front of me of to tell me how many of them were arrested in the evening and how many were arrested in the morning. My experience tells me that the vast majority of people who are drink-driving do so in the early hours. Midnight through to three o'clock in the morning is the big issue. We have talked to the guards about trying to do joint operations and stuff like that. That is not to say that people are not drink-driving at 3.00 pm or at 8.00 am on the way to work. That is all factored into our patrols and how we deal with that. It absolutely has to be part of the communication as well.

Mr Baker: I have a final question. From a youth perspective, I represent the Collin area, and we have had fatal accidents in which young boys have been using scramblers. I realised last Christmas that there is a new issue: electric motorbikes. You cannot hear them, yet young people are flying about on electric motorbikes and electric scooters. Are you finding the fact that young people are using them to be a growing problem? The electric motorbike issue, in particular, really scares me.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: I mentioned electric vehicles more generally earlier. The risk is that people cannot hear them coming. They are therefore a risk for pedestrians and, perhaps more importantly, for elderly pedestrians. There is a lot of risk involved for people who are over 65.

If you broaden the discussion to include electric vehicles such as mopeds and scooters, you will see that there is still no definitive legal position on such vehicles. They are arguably motor vehicles. If people are driving on a road, they should have a driving licence, insurance and, if necessary, an MOT certificate. That is where it becomes really hard to police, because, if we stop a 14-year-old on one of those, we know that they do not have a driving licence or insurance. How do we police that? That is why I said that there is no definitive legal position on whether such vehicles are motor vehicles.

I do not have the answer right now. The law needs to define how we approach the issue. The PSNI's approach right now is one of prevention. If we stop a 14-year-old or a 15-year-old who is using an electric vehicle, whether that be in a public park, on a footpath or even on a roadway — I was in Belfast recently, and a chap who was probably 13 or 14 came off the footpath and went straight across the road, up on to the other footpath and away — our approach is one based on prevention. If possible, we will remove the vehicle from the young person and hand it over to a parent. It is really complex and difficult to deal with, so we need a legislative solution.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): I suppose that accountability among young people is also necessary. It is about getting out that message so that, if they are out for a night and see their friends doing something, they do not get into the car with them. We need to ram home that messaging.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: We have tried to communicate that from a drink-driving perspective and a pedestrian-safety perspective. I talked earlier about rural roads and males. I did not mention darkness. I do not have the figures in front of me, but, in 2022, there were something like 12 or 13 pedestrian fatalities. A lot of those were a result of alcohol, darkness, rural roads and circumstances that could have been avoided if a friend had put an arm around a shoulder and said, "Don't be walking home, mate. Get in the taxi. I will pay for it", or "I'll give you a lift home". We live in a very rural environment. A vast part of the place in which we live is rural. We have tried to communicate that message, but it needs to be communicated more.

Mr McReynolds: Thank you, Sam. It is good to meet you finally, because, in the past number of months, I have been doing a lot of work with Davy Jackson from Road Safe NI.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Good.

Mr McReynolds: He has sung your praises every time I have met him, so it is good finally to put a face to the name.

You touched on advertising. We lost that for a couple of years, and there were no road safety advertisements on our television. I remember having a conversation with Davy in which he said that 2012, I think, had the highest spend on road safety adverts and there were no deaths that year. Are we in a better place now? We will be trying to roll out such adverts out more consistently, and I certainly agree with the comments that you made.

We should go further in trying to connect with people on social media. My wife is a marketer, and she always says that something needs to be said seven times before it will sink in. The adverts that I see here are great, but we need to really hammer home the message. Are we now in a better place, given that the Assembly has been restored and there are Ministers and functioning budgets, to educate people via advertising?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Thank you for the compliment, and please return the compliment to Davy and his team. People such as Davy, who is absolutely committed 24/7 to keeping people safe on the roads, deserve medals. He works with family members of those who have died in fatal road traffic collisions. I do not mean this disrespectfully, but they have a much more powerful voice than you or me. My voice just fades away, but, when people such as Davy or someone with whom he works who has experienced a fatality come out and say, "My child got in a car", or "My father got in a vehicle and never came back", that message resonates with people. That takes me on nicely to your question about education and spend. To be clear, we did the "fatal five" and the "More than a statistic" campaign because we saw a gap. I was disappointed, not last year but the year before, when the money spent on education by the Department for Infrastructure was reduced. I was disappointed at that, because education is a big part of what we do.

If you saw or heard the careless driving advert late last year — it ran on television and on the radio — I can tell you that DFI did not pay for it; rather, I convinced the Road Safety Partnership to pay for it. That was the first time that the Road Safety Partnership had paid for education. That is the same group that is also sponsoring the Roadsafes Roadshow. I am encouraged that that little blip, where we did not invest for a time, has now been overcome. There is an energy and decision-making now that acknowledges that we need to invest in advertising, and that is really positive.

In my opening comments, however, I mentioned that, from a policing perspective, an infrastructure perspective and even beyond, we have to invest. This stuff is really good, but we are only scratching the surface with education. The policing is really good, but we are only scratching the surface. The road safety vans are only scratching the surface. The education provided is only scratching the surface. We can do so much more.

The one positive thing about taking the social media approach is that we can connect people to the historical adverts. I am not sure whether you have noticed them on social media recently. One line in our strategy is that, if you cannot afford to do a careless driving campaign now, communicate the "fatal five" and "More than a statistic" messages but connect people to the careless driving advert that existed 15 or 16 years ago. Hopefully, you have seen those adverts re-emerge.

To answer your question in a nutshell, I am content that we are going in the right direction, but we are only scratching the surface with investment and education. We should have investment and education absolutely everywhere. The Share the Road to Zero programme was mentioned: if we want that programme to be a reality, education and enforcement need to be everywhere. You should not be able to get into a vehicle and travel a journey without being reminded by your radio — I was going to say by your phone, but I do not mean your phone *[Laughter]* — or by a billboard that the consequences of the way in which you drive are significant.

I am encouraged, but we have a long way to go.

Mr McReynolds: That is education covered.

On enforcement, you touched on officers being out with speed cameras and in speed camera vans. I raised before at the Committee a conversation that I had with an engineering consultant in which he told me the difference between a fixed speed camera and an average-speed camera. What is your opinion of those?

I live in Ballyhackamore. We go to the gym early in the morning, and I see people at 5.00 am and 6.00 am slowing down — I have described the Upper Newtownards Road as being like a motorway — when they see the fixed speed camera outside Marks and Spencer and speeding up again when they have passed it. The guy whom I was talking to said that the average-speed cameras that you see — I think that there are four of them in Bangor — are great for road safety. Bizarrely, a week later, I was at a dinner talking to someone who told me that, when you get off the ferry in Scotland, they are everywhere. What is your opinion of those for enforcing road safety in Northern Ireland?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: I take a simple view: we have average-speed cameras, fixed speed cameras and mobile speed cameras, which are the vans, and we have to have all three. If you think that the answer lies in using one but not the other two or in using two but not the other one, that is not the answer. We have to have all three.

The slight concern that I have is that, if it is an average-speed camera and people know that the average speed starts at location a and finishes at location b, they will drive in the way they should between location a and location b but then the right foot, the use of which somebody mentioned earlier, is suddenly re-engaged. Likewise with the fixed speed cameras, if we have locations where, over a long period, people come to know that there are cameras, they drive in the manner in which they should in and around that camera.

The other thing to mention is the mobile speed cameras. Who on the Committee has been driving their vehicle when two or three vehicles travelling the opposite direction have suddenly started flashing their lights? We all know exactly what that means. They are saying, "Slow down, because there is a mobile speed camera nearby". That is the reality.

Mr Boylan: *[Inaudible]* about it, Sam.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Again, there is something here around people complying at the point where the camera exists but failing to comply at all the other points where there is no camera. I mentioned that there are 16,000 miles of road in Northern Ireland. There are 99 permanent locations for cameras in Northern Ireland, and there are 162 community concern locations. That is 99 permanent locations where there are cameras and 162 locations around which we are moving the mobile vans because people are concerned. I will conclude with this: the difficulty is that, as soon as people know that there is a van there, they will comply, but, as soon as they know the van is not there, they will not comply. That is why education, engaging with people and getting them to change their mindset is the answer.

Mr McMurray: Thank you for the briefing. The number of questions being generated is a testament to the amount of information that you are giving us.

Chair, I promise that I will try to rattle through my questions. On the previous point, at what stage do those deterrents become part of the furniture, and how do you go about keeping things fresh? How do you keep re-energising things, rethinking things, tweaking things or doing completely new things?

This is in one of the reports, and you referenced it as well. I cannot remember the exact figures, but the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council area has very high statistics for tragic road accidents. Mr Dunne mentioned the break in resources being provided, and you referenced the motorway leading to rural roads. Is it the Sprucefield traffic unit that covers the Newry, Mourne and Down District Council area? I did not really notice anywhere that jumped out at me as covering rural places. I am a South Down MLA, so I have a vested interest.

This is my last point. You mentioned the top five reasons for people being killed or seriously injured on our roads. Again, Mr Buchanan mentioned this, but at what stage does speed become a factor? When do we just call that out? Perhaps this is your opinion more than anything else, but at what stage do we just say, "You know what? Let's just reduce the speed limits here"?

In a past life, I spent a summer travelling around Norway. I was kayaking, but that is a different story. The speed limit over there —.

Mr K Buchanan: There is no speed limit for kayaking.

Mr McMurray: No, there is a speed limit in Norway, but it is 50 mph. Every road that you go on, it is 50 mph.

Mr K Buchanan: Not on a kayak.

Mr McMurray: Not on a kayak, no, although some of them were a bit quick.

Mr Boylan: Did you go 100 mph on the kayak?

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): We will just stick to the land.

Mr McMurray: The speed limit there is 50 mph on the main arterial roads, which are equivalent to our A roads. I discerned that driving at that speed is much more sensible. I noticed that when I came back. I was scared, because, bloody hell — sorry — everything was going so quickly. It was really noticeable. Drivers in Norway have their lights on all the time as well, but that may not be as relevant. Speed is the real issue.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: There are three questions there. The first is this: how do we keep the sites up to date and live, and how do we review them? Chair, I have not talked about the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership today — I could talk about it all day — but such issues are its responsibility. In essence, that is a collaboration between the police, the Northern Ireland Courts and Tribunals Service (NICTS), DFI, the Department of Justice and a couple of others, and it is their responsibility to look after the deployment, performance and resourcing of all the road safety vans, as well as of the static cameras, and to process the fixed penalty notices. That is the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership in a nutshell.

To reassure you, I will tell you that that partnership is at present going through a process of reviewing every one of those sites, and the review will look at the number of deployments, the number of

detections and the speeds at which people are being detected driving. We have a debate in the Road Safety Partnership all the time about whether catching people counts as success. Interestingly enough, I take the view that the most effective deployments are those in which we identify the speed of loads and loads of vehicles but catch hardly anybody speeding. The vision is that we measure the speed of hundreds of vehicles but detect few people breaking the speed limit. There is then a balance to be struck between investment for prevention and investment for detection. I reassure you that the Road Safety Partnership has responsibility for that. I am happy to explore it in a bit more detail if you want.

The second question was about Newry and south Down. I mentioned some themes earlier. I talked about the theme of a male driver involved in an inattention-related collision, and there is definitely a theme in the south area. I am not sure whether you folks have seen a map of where collisions are taking place. I will split Northern Ireland into three geographical locations. There is Belfast; there is the north area, which includes everywhere from Strabane across to Larne; and there is the south area, which goes from Belleek across to Bangor. There is no doubt that a theme is emerging on the number of fatalities in the south area. I do not have the exact figures in front of me, but more than half of our fatal collisions are taking place in the south area. That is why it is so important that we work with the guards, and that is why we met last Wednesday. We met to work out how the three gardaí policing areas on the other side of the border engage with the four PSNI policing areas on this side of the border. That is so important.

You asked about the traffic unit that covers that area. Yes, it works out of Sprucefield. The officers who work out of Mahon Road also cover the motorway, but they are more focused on the motorway. There are, however, proactive local police officers in places such as Newry and Armagh, including some of the tactical support group officers. We have a tactical support group based in Ardmore, and it is one of the best-performing units in PSNI, because it is always on the A1 in particular and is always detecting people speeding and committing other offences.

The last one is the biggie, and I thought that it might have come up earlier. The ultimate question is this: should we reduce the speed limits on our roads? I take a simple view on that, and this is how I will communicate it. All you folks drive on the roads that I drive on day-to-day. The motorways are arguably the safest roads that we have in our country, and the speed limit on them is 70 mph. That looks and feels right to me, and it looks and feels like the right speed limit for our motorways. That is evidenced by the low number of accidents and collisions. If you are travelling along a motorway and move straight on to a dual carriageway that has different infrastructure, you will find that the vast majority of our dual carriageways have the same speed limit as our motorways. Speaking as a police officer, that does not feel right to me on occasions. It does not feel right when some of our dual carriageways have private laneways, with articulated vehicles, tractors and other agricultural vehicles emerging straight on to the road. My personal opinion is that something needs to be done to address the speed limits on not all our dual carriageways but some of them.

We have already discussed how the majority of collisions here are on our rural roads. Who in the room thinks that our 60 mph speed limits on all our rural roads are appropriate? I do not, personally, but I would not like to adopt a blanket approach whereby every 60 mph zone is reduced to a 50 mph zone. There is work to be done on high-risk roads, and perhaps there is also work to be done on having different speed limits at different times of the day.

The biggie and now the debatable one is that of 30 mph zones becoming 20 mph zones. All that we have to do is look to Wales and the South of Ireland. Wales introduced 20 mph zones and is now crawling back a little from them, because it is finding that many of the roads that are 20 mph zones do not need to be. It will be interesting to see where Wales goes with all of that, and it will be interesting to see in the longer term whether its fatality statistics and KSI statistics are positively affected. I do not know the answer to the question of 20 mph zones, but — this is where I need to leave this — I know that, when the South reduces from 30 mph zones to 20 mph zones — I do not have the exact miles per hour figures in front of me — the bigger issue will not necessarily be changing the signs but how that speed limit is enforced. I know that the guards are wrestling with that. If we have 20 mph zones, how do we make sure that people drive at 20 mph?

To conclude, there is some work to be done, particularly on our dual carriageways. Arguably, there is also work to be done in our 30 mph zones around residential premises, schools and places like that, where, in my mind, the limit probably should be brought down to 20 mph. I ask the Committee to consider the fact that each time you change the speed limit, you have to change the education, engineering and enforcement that goes with that. Therefore, investment is required to deliver such

change. Those are conversations that I am having with colleagues and officials in DFI, and it is my intention to continue them.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): Thank you, Chief Superintendent, for that information on the policing side. There is a lot of overlap with the work of the partnership, but it is good to get both perspectives.