



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for Infrastructure

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Road Safety Strategy:
Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership

5 June 2024

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

Committee for Infrastructure

Road Safety Strategy: Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership

5 June 2024

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 Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): Chief Superintendent, you are the chairperson of the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership (NIRSP). *[Laughter.]*

Chief Superintendent Sam Donaldson (Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership): That is changing somebody's hat.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): Sam, do you want to speak a wee bit on the partnership, and then we will come to questions?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: I will make a couple of very brief comments. There are a couple of overlaps with my evidence in the first session. There is a little bit to say about the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership. I know that the Committee is interested in the road safety strategy, and I also get a sense that the Committee is interested in public transport safety, which I am happy to talk about too.

The Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership is a collaboration of the police, Courts and Tribunals Service, DFI and DOJ. It oversees — that is probably the right word — the resourcing, deployments, performance and budgets relating to our speed camera deployments and detections all across Northern Ireland. I am the chairperson of the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership. That does not mean that it is about me; it is about the partners who sit around the table and have an equal voice.

On the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership — this is where it gets a little bit confusing — you may have heard people talk about the fixed penalty processing centre. If you can imagine it, the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership comprises the partners, and all the processing, administration and deployment. However, within the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership is the

fixed penalty processing centre, which is based in the PSNI's Lisnasharragh station. If you hear me interchanging between the fixed penalty processing centre and the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership, they are two slightly different things, but one sits inside the other.

The fixed penalty processing centre, and, indeed, the vast majority of the staff in it, are on a managed service contract. G4S provides almost all the resources to the Road Safety Partnership and the fixed penalty processing centre, with the exception of three senior staff who are provided by the PSNI. So, you have three senior staff leading it: they are PSNI staff and they are based at a PSNI location. The resources are provided by G4S, and they do everything from the deployments to the administration.

I was going to comment on public safety as well. I mentioned in the previous session how good relationships are with DFI. I reassure you that relationships with Translink in particular are very positive. We have a quarterly steering group and a weekly tasking meeting. We have established a safe transport team — a sergeant and six constables — and I am happy to talk about that in detail. We also engage with Translink on a day-to-day basis on the Grand Central station and Weavers Cross, which is going to change transport and the entire dynamic of that part of the city. I sit on the board of that development, which gives you a sense of how all the elements interact with one another. I could talk about that all day, but I go back to you, Chair, for questions.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): Thank you. It is a huge area, and we are very keen to discuss it. We talk an awful lot about the need for education, and, as was mentioned earlier, that is not just about learner drivers and R-plate drivers — it is about education across the piece — but it is important to get to people at an early age. For example, I remember Tufty from primary school. It is important because kids can bring messaging home to their parents. Looking at the Road Safety Partnership, there are two Departments missing: Education and Economy. I say that about Education because I am aware of incidents that have happened outside the school gates. To put it bluntly, the Education Authority (EA) washes its hands of such incidents because they happen outside the school gates. However, from an education point of view, it is still important to look at the issues that arise outside school gates. I mention the Department for the Economy because of the likes of lorry drivers, private companies that have vans on the roads, people who drive long distances for work and all that. Why are those Departments not included? What are the relationships like there? Education is a huge piece that we have talked about a lot in Committee today.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: First of all, Chair, I am glad to hear you talk about Tufty. I remember Tufty too. It was in my late education, I hasten to add. When we use the name, "Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership", people instantly think that that is the group that is responsible for road safety in Northern Ireland; it is not. Maybe that is where a little bit of the confusion comes in. If you were to examine the terms of reference of the Road Safety Partnership, you would see that it has barriers around its remit, which is for static and mobile safety cameras, the vans and the processing of all the related activity. When the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership was established, it was entirely about the cameras and the processing. Maybe the title is a little bit misleading — a number of people have asked me that question — as it is not about road safety in its broader sense.

In the previous session, I mentioned the establishment, with DFI, of a strategic forum that has met twice. My colleagues in DFI and beyond in the other emergency services very much see that as a much broader approach. In policing, we talk in terms of gold, silver and bronze all the time. Without going into all the detail, I see the new strategic forum, with its broader responsibilities, as the gold group, and I see the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership as a silver group, with boundaries around the deployment of safety vans and all the processing that relates to that.

There is another tactical group, which is chaired by DFI and has the involvement of the PSNI and many other agencies. That group is responsible for taking forward the road safety strategy. I hope that that makes sense, folks. The recently formed steering group — the gold group — is about the road safety strategy and coordinating, at a strategic level, the various organisations. The tactical group that already existed has been engaging with various organisations to take forward the road safety strategy, but, as chair of the partnership, I felt, after seeing some of my staff going to the tactical group, that there was a gap. That gap has now been filled by the strategic forum that is chaired by Julie Thompson from DFI. I really welcome the formation of that group. The Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership needs to continue overseeing the safety vans and the static cameras. It is the other groups that probably need to develop a little bit more

At the first meeting, we had a conversation on whether, with DFI, DOJ, DAERA and the emergency services on the group, that is where it should stop. The answer is probably no, but we have met only

twice and we want to get it up and running at that strategic level and then develop it. We have even started talking about engaging universities, academics and people such as that.

Hopefully, that provides a bit of clarity on the NIRSP and its functions and responsibilities.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): Thank you. I appreciate that.

You get data and detections from vans and cameras, and we report to you community concerns that we get through our offices and one thing or another. The areas where those community concerns come through and where you deploy your vans are like hotspots. Where is the limit at which the likes of you and the partnership, when you look at the data that comes from those cameras, say, "Right, DFI, there is an issue here with engineering. There is something that we need to look at here regarding the road"? We talked earlier about how you cannot blame the road all the time and how it is about decision-making. Where does it tip from decision-making to the engineering piece?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: I think that I mentioned earlier that there are 99 permanent locations. Those are locations that have been regulated, and cameras are there. Those are the ones that we chatted about earlier, where people will know where the cameras are going to be. There are 162 community concern locations. You are exactly right, Chair: those might be the result of community groups gathering a little bit of evidence. It may be, for example, that a local MLA has had a number of people come to them and mention a particular road, or say, "There's a school there. It's just not working". That will be a community concern location as well. Community concern locations will also be in places where police officers or police staff — it could be a road education officer, a traffic officer or a traffic management officer; there are various specialisms — have identified issues. So, those community concern sites are identified by a number of different sources.

We deploy the vans at those locations for a period of time. You will recall that I talked earlier about what success looks like. Is success loads of detections, or is it people standing on the brakes as they go past a school? That is a debate that we could have all day, but it are ongoing. I mentioned earlier there are 80,000 detections by the speed vans. We have all of that data collated in terms of location and time of day; you name it, we have it. That is all communicated at a number of different levels across to our DFI colleagues. First of all, that is where the strategic forum needs to kick in and really go to another level. At the meeting last week, we discussed the fact that, although we all have collated data, we need to share that more and make sure that we overlay it. We need to ensure that we are putting our limited resources and budget in the right place.

The tactical group that I talked about has been in existence for some time. It involves one of my superintendents, a senior official from DFI and many agencies coming together. Towards the back of the road safety strategy document, there is reference to many of the agencies that come together. We provide information on locations and detections to that group.

I need to talk about the tactical level as well. I mentioned the traffic management officers earlier. We have four traffic management officers who are based in various locations around Northern Ireland. They deal with DFI practitioners every day. As a senior police officer, and as an operational police officer down through the years, I know about occasions in different locations where an MLA has raised a concern. In such instances, the MLA, the local senior police officer, the traffic management officer and the DFI practitioner have all come together and looked at a specific site. I am pretty sure that people in this room have experience of such cases. The speed limit will, perhaps, change from 60 mph to 40 mph, there might be agreement to deploy other means or technical measures or there might simply be agreement that the site will become one of our community concern locations for a period of time.

I want to reassure you, Chair, and Committee members that that communication is happening and that sharing of data is absolutely happening. That is why it is important that the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership is very clear on its responsibilities and brings that information to the tactical group and then, if necessary, to the strategic group so that they can be more informed. I do not think that the partnership is the right place to talk about those broader education principles and broader investment opportunities.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): Lastly from me, the draft road safety strategy document includes targets like a reduction of at least 50% in the number of people killed or seriously injured in road collisions by 2030, based on a 2014-18 baseline. What are the partnership's views on the targets and strategic outcomes in the strategy? How achievable are they?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: A similar question was asked in the previous session about the Share the Road to Zero campaign, and my response is almost the same. I support the strategy: it is absolutely the right thing to do and is based on the right principles. I am very content with the people who sit around the strategy, the agencies that are involved and the commitment that is there. You are right, Chair: it talks about a target of fewer than 35 fatalities by 2030. It also refers to a 5% reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured (KSIs) and a reduction in the number of children and young people who are injured and killed on our roads. Your question was whether I am concerned? I think that that is what you asked. I repeat what I have said a number of times today: if, over the next six years, we continue to invest in the way that we have invested over the past 10 years, I am not convinced that we can reach those targets. I, personally, am not convinced that without —.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): Sorry to interrupt. Investment is a key challenge, then.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Yes. This is 2024. We have six years to go. In the next six years, we have to drive — pardon the pun— down the number of fatalities to 35 without investment in education, policing and enforcement. Those are still the right targets — indeed, the target, as mentioned earlier, is zero — but without investment, I am not convinced that we can reach them.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): OK. Thank you.

Mr Stewart: My point leads on from that, and it is on the impact of communication and advertising on awareness raising and informing the public. First, how do you go about assessing the impact of advertising and what is working? They say that 50% of advertising works, but they are not sure which 50% that is. How do you go about assessing the impact? Are we getting the most value from that? Are we spending enough on it, or is that related to the critical point about funding?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: The short answer to whether we are spending enough is no. We can always spend more. I think that I said earlier that you should not be able to get in a vehicle and travel from any location to any other location without being reminded of the dangers that exist on the roads.

The cause-and-effect analysis that we are looking at will tell us when education was to the forefront and when that education had an impact. Until the information is forthcoming and that analysis is complete, I would simply be guessing. As a citizen and as somebody who lives here, my heart tells me, having looked at it at a high level, that that high-impact, hard-hitting communication absolutely works. People need to understand the consequences. However, I have neither the evidence nor the stats to be able to prove that right now. I am 100% sure that other colleagues in DFI have already looked at that. I know that there is a communications group in DFI, and I am 100% sure that it has already looked back and worked it out. I am looking at it from a policing perspective, a legal perspective and a vehicle safety perspective. You are right: a lot more digging needs to be done on what works.

To conclude, we have to do more comms and invest in more education. We have to let people see what that looks like. At the minute, we have a partnership with U105. Hopefully, you have heard some of the messages on U105. That came about after the manager of U105, who was sitting next to me at an event, said, "Sam, is there anything I can help you with in terms of road safety?", and I said, "As a matter of fact, there might be". We are getting some free advertising from U105. I commend Business in the Community as well, as it has come on board, and we have done a couple of sessions. We are now rolling out some of our education, particularly the "fatal five" message to organisations that have a lot of vehicles and vans on the road. We are targeting that education and communication.

I conclude by saying that we are only scratching the surface. We need to spend a lot more money, which is why I mentioned earlier the amplification of messaging; we can do so much more communication with the public.

Mr Stewart: I take my hat off to U105 for that collaborative approach. It is really worthwhile, and it would be nice if our public broadcasters, which can do it for free, gave up some of their time to broadcast some of the important images and messages.

I have two other points. On the collaborative approach, we have PCSPs in local areas. What is the collaborative and overlap approach? Often the PCSPs are best placed to understand the key issues in local areas, particularly with antisocial behaviour and the transport teams at halts and train stations but also in community concern locations. Is there enough overlap and strategic work?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: The short answer is yes. I have spent many years engaging with the PCSPs, and they are the right forums for us to be involved in. Some people have suggested that we engage on road safety via the community planning forum, but I am not convinced; it is not the right forum. The PCSPs are the right forums.

On our control strategy, you will be pleased to hear there is re-engagement with the PCSPs. All the messaging, communication, data and pleading with communities is part of what we will do in 2024-25. We will go back to the various PCSPs and re-engage them. I commend the PCSPs because the speed indicator devices (SIDs) that you see on the roads have been driven forward — again, that is a terrible pun — by them. I take my hat off to them. On our control strategy, this year I have asked that we do a little bit more work on maximising the number of SIDs. It is a wee bit like the conversation earlier about what happens when someone flashes their lights at you or you know where the camera is: when people see the sad face on a SID, they tend to stand on the brakes, which is positive. We want to invest a little bit more in SIDs.

Mr Stewart: You have led me to my final point and stolen my limelight because I was coming to the value of SIDs. I often drive over to Scotland for another job, and every village that I pass through after I get off the boat has a SID installed, often by the local community. As you said, everyone wants to get the green smiley face. In Northern Ireland, getting SIDs installed is like pulling teeth. I take my hat off to the PCSPs and the work that has been done to install the big SIDs that can be moved around, but there is a difficulty for community groups, particularly in rural areas, that want to see SIDs installed on the lamp posts or at the entrances to their villages. The communities come up against barriers with DFI and with funding. What more can be done to open up the opportunity for local village and community groups to avail themselves of SIDs, outside of those that are funded and moved around by the PCSPs?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: There are a number of barriers, but they are not insurmountable.

Mr Stewart: Definitely. I have been trying to get over them, but it is proving difficult.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: There are some difficulties with the ownership and purpose of particular lamp posts.

Mr Stewart: They are OK for an election poster, but not for a SID.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: I am not going to make any comment on that whatsoever.

Mr Boylan: Is there electioneering going on there, John? Fair play, boy.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: That is not something that the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership can fix; the strategic group will have to look at that. Certainly, I want to maximise the use of SIDs as part of our control strategy. It is like a lot of things in this place: sometimes it feels like it is dead easy to do, but when you go to do it there are various hoops to jump through. That is where I can have a little bit of influence, but I would argue that the people in this room probably have more influence than me when it comes to Departments and changing legislation.

Mr Stewart: Maybe we could tie up on that, as a Committee. I know of one group locally that got funding for a SID but gave up because they could not get through the red tape to get it installed. That is frustrating because the group's intention was the right one: to protect life.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: I am happy to work with you guys on that.

Mr Stewart: I appreciate that.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: I know there are issues with the supply of electricity, and whether a SID is electrical or solar powered. There is a big opportunity for us there.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): I want to put on record our thanks to our local PCSPs because they do some brilliant work on the ground. There is a great community link-up within our PCSPs, so it is great that we have them.

Mr Boylan: We are back again, Sam; it has been an interesting conversation. Obviously the Committee has a job of work to do following this presentation. I have a couple of observations. I put on record our thanks to the like of Road Safe NI and the Road Ahead support group, which is led by Monica Heaney. There are a number of partners out there that can play a part, and we welcome that.

I was interested in what you said about the SIDs. We fought hard to get them in Middletown village, which is on the border. Due to the road type, they could not put up ramps there, and the SID works. My thinking on SIDs is simple: you are getting the message out, and that is the important part. You said that it did not matter if it was a SID or a van. I know, from travelling in the South, that you know that the vans are going to be in the same places. You do not know what day they will be there, but the point is that people may slow down. It is about getting the message out, consistently, regardless of whether people get done. My frustration is this: on the Knock dual carriageway, the speed limit is 50 mph, then it is 40 mph and then 30 mph, and then it goes back round again. Sometimes, that can be frustrating. It is about road users and getting buy-in, and then there is the enforcement side. It may not be a bad thing to have 20 mph speed limits, but it is all about the messaging: if you repeat the same message all of the time, that will be key.

Following on from that, you used to see, in the South in particular, big, physical signs showing how many road deaths — 120 or whatever the number was — there had been every year. It might not be a bad idea to put up a sign on the motorways to remind people that there have been x number of deaths so far this year. It would get the message out; it would not do any harm to repeat the message. I will leave that point there.

I want to raise another couple of points, Chair. You mentioned the safe transport team. How are you engaging with Translink? What are the barriers and challenges with active travel?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: There is a lot there. Hopefully, you understand my view on the SIDs; they are really positive, and we should find a way to roll them out as much as possible. I also agree about education. Remember, SIDs are not going to catch anybody. They record speed data but for information only; they do not catch anybody. However, people put their foot on the middle pedal going past a school when they see them, which is the answer.

You talked about the Knock dual carriageway. Perhaps, I can take the opportunity to talk about my frustration on issue of the deployment of speed vans. We — the partnership — receive a lot of criticism and negativity about where the vans are parked and a lot of commentary that they are behind bus stops, hidden behind trees or places like that. There are occasions when they could be parked in a better location — I am not going to say that their location is always perfect — but, when challenged, the vast majority of images that you see or information that is presented to you, as MLAs, is not as it first seems. When someone walks into your office or phones you about the location of a speed van, I respectfully ask you to challenge them. We have started to ask that, every time someone deploys a van, they take a photograph of the exact location, and we are discovering that the information that is being presented to you, as MLAs, is wholly different from reality. In other words, when the van is driving off, people might take a photograph of it as it passes behind a lamp post, and that is the image that goes on social media or is presented to you. Earlier, I mentioned that we are reviewing all the sites for speed vans. As part of that, we are going to make sure that they are wholly visible and not behind trees, because the trees can grow up and block the site.

We have talked over and over again about displaying the number of road deaths per year. In the South, not only do they display the number for the whole of Ireland, they display the number of deaths on specific roads. On N2, for example, there could be a sign saying, "25 people died on this road last year". We are mixed on that, to be honest: some of us think that it is a good idea, and some of us think that it is a really bad idea. We think that it might confuse some of the messaging in the 'More than a Statistic' document. There is no right answer, and we are actively looking at it. We have access to the gantry signs above the motorways and, on occasion, we put messages up there. Maybe that is a solution. We will take that away.

You also mentioned the safe transport team. I think that I mentioned earlier that relationships with Translink are very good. About three years ago, myself and Richard Knox, who is still there, sat down and tried to work out the gaps between the PSNI and Translink. Relationships and cooperation were good. A lot of really good stuff was going on, but one of the things that we agreed to do was to develop a strategy and plan around how we could work better together. We very quickly realised that one of the things that we were probably missing was a dedicated resource, from a PSNI perspective, to work on the transport network. A strategy and plan are in place. A steering group is in place. Earlier, I mentioned that there is a weekly tasking meeting. The safe transport team and some senior staff in

Translink meet on a Tuesday morning and work out where the safe transport team should be for that week. That is all in place.

The safe transport team comprises one sergeant and six constables. I am almost nervous to say that publicly because I think that some people out there think that there are around 20 people in the team. It is because the team is so clever about where it is going and its communications that the staff — more importantly, the public — seem to think that there are loads and loads of them. There is a sergeant and six constables on the transport network, which covers 16,000 road miles and 200 miles of railway. They cannot be everywhere at the same time. That is why there is a clever approach to deploying them.

The team's objectives are very simple; they are about keeping people safe on the transport network and working more collaboratively. When the team was established, I gave it three targets. Target one was to tackle crime and antisocial behaviour on the transport network — on the buses, on the trains, and in and around the transport hubs. Target two was to build local capacity. What I mean by that is that, with six constables, you cannot fix all the issues that exist at the respective transport hubs, so you have to engage with local neighbourhood teams, managers and elected representatives and ensure that you bring that good practice to various different locations. Target three was unapologetically to build confidence among Translink staff through the team's visibility and its ability to respond to the assaults and abuse that happen on the transport network. We have not even talked about that today.

I have to say that the safe transport team has been a fantastic success. It has made, I think, 29 arrests and seized drugs worth around £1,600 on the transport network alone. That is six constables doing that. They have done 188 stop-and-searches. That is in the past year, by the way. I asked for some stats on that for the past 12 months. It is really good in terms of detections. Whilst I want to see them get those detections, perhaps more importantly, the major message that we want to communicate is that it is safe to get on a bus or train or to be at a transport hub. If you are drunk, disorderly or abusive, not only will staff challenge you, because they, rightly, have a zero-tolerance approach to that — hopefully you are aware of that — but if Translink staff are unable to deal with it, the safe transport team will respond if it is on duty. If the safe transport team is not on duty, because it cannot always be there and respond to everything, the staff have the confidence to lift the phone and speak to our comms people — our control room — and police officers will be deployed instantly. I want to reassure you that that is the case.

The safe transport team is doing a fantastic job, but, importantly, relationships exist in the wider approach to everything from disorder to drugs, and even fare evasion right through to keeping people safe and responding. There was a really good example a couple of weeks ago. I am sure that you saw it on the news. An individual in Larne seriously assaulted a Translink member of staff. Police responded brilliantly. The safe transport team was involved. The individual was arrested and charged and has been remanded in custody. As far as I am concerned, that is exactly what police need to do to send out that message to people who use the transport network. Sorry, that was a really long response, but hopefully there was a lot there for you.

Mr Boylan: And on the active travel stuff?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: When you talk about active travel, are you talking about encouraging people to —?

Mr Boylan: Yes.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Yes. Listen, I know that the safest way in which to travel in Northern Ireland is not necessarily to get into your car. We have spent an hour and a half talking about that. The statistics for safety when travelling on public transport are very encouraging. I am not going to make any comment on cost or anything like that; that is not my responsibility today. Yes, we are working with Translink on that. The top of our MOU refers to encouraging people to use the transport network. If people feel safe on the transport network, they will feel encouraged to use the transport network. Yes, a lot of that is going on.

The Chief Constable and the chief executive of Translink met recently. I was in that meeting, and they agreed that, in an ideal world, they would love to have about 20 constables in the safe transport team and that they would deploy those constables across transport hubs in various parts of Northern Ireland. We do not have the money to do that right now, but that is where we are going.

Mr Boylan: Following on from that, I am thinking about cyclists and everything else and the barriers and challenges that they face. That is something that I want to try to promote over the next number of years.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Are you talking about on public transport?

Mr Boylan: Yes: cyclists using the roads, pedestrians and everything else around road safety. Have you had that conversation?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Those kinds of conversations are ongoing. I would be lying if I were to sit here and tell you that I was able to give you a lot of evidence in relation to that; it is only anecdotal stuff, but those conversations are ongoing. When we talked about the types of road users who are at risk, we did not mention cyclists, and we have not mentioned motorcyclists at all today. It was a bad year for motorcyclists in 2022. If I remember right, 17 motorcyclists were killed in 2022, but 2023 was not as bad. From a cycling perspective, we encourage people to stay safe. Part of that communication around that is very much about them using public transport.

Mr Boylan: Thank you.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): As part of Bike Week, we will have the Department's active travel team and Sustrans next week. It will be good to get some evidence from them in relation to everything.

Mr Dunne: I will ask a brief question on the issue of school safety. I appreciate that you have covered a lot and that this may overlap with your other hat. This goes back to 20 mph zones outside schools. I understand that there are over 200 of those zones across Northern Ireland, and I am pressing the Minister for a further roll-out of them. Last week, there was an incident of a very near miss at a school in Bangor. There was CCTV video. We have arranged a meeting for Friday, and I appreciate your colleagues' assistance and interest in that, along with DFI. There was another one a month ago as well. I am keen to hear your views on the effectiveness of the 20 mph safe school zones. I know that it is not a silver bullet. In the particular incident last week that I mentioned, the lights were not flashing. They are not working at the moment. We got one of them fixed, but there are a few more to fix. I am keen to hear your views on the effectiveness of those zones.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: From a speeding perspective, the faster you go, the more likely you are to cause damage. There are very specific statistics around the difference between being hit by a vehicle when it is travelling at 30 mph compared with when it is travelling at 20 mph. I do not have those statistics in front of me, but there is a massive jump in terms of a vehicle coming into contact with a pedestrian, particularly a child. I am totally in support of the 20 mph zones, particularly around schools. I know that there are a whole lot of those zones in which you slow down when the lights are flashing. I have a slight concern, however, about the ability to police them all. I talked about there being 16,000 roads, and you talked about there being 200 schools. There is no way in this world that we can have road policing officers at all those locations. There is probably no way in this world you could even have police officers at all those locations.

Whilst the 20 mph zones are really important, educating people about them is even more important, because catching people — I am sorry for using that term; I know that some people hate it — in those zones is very difficult. I will reassure the Committee, however, that, when issues arise at a specific school, not only do the police officers in the local neighbourhood team get involved, but the traffic management officer's role also comes in. If necessary, we can deploy road policing officers at those particular schools. My experience is that the issue is not necessarily just at the school but that, quite often, it is in the community and the broader local geography, in which people are driving like maniacs and it just happens that they pass the school. I am totally in support of those zones.

Mr Dunne: Thank you, Sam.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): I am just conscious of time. We should keep as concise as possible.

Mr K Buchanan: Thanks, Sam. You talked about 80,000 detections. What is that figure like year-on-year? Is it about the same sort of figure?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: In 2021, it was 63,000; in 2022, it was 66,000; and in 2023, it was 80,000. It was 79,700 and something, but it is not too far off 80,000. There has definitely been an

increase there. The reason for the increase is probably the roll-out of additional vans. There are currently 10 mobile safety vans. If you go back a couple of years —.

Mr K Buchanan: Today?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: There are 10 at the moment.

Mr K Buchanan: Following on from that, the whole Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership funding model — I am not suggesting that the vans are relevant to that, but what does it take to run that organisation in a year, and where does that money come from?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: The money comes from the fines and the fees, so —.

Mr K Buchanan: I did a quick calculation — you can correct me if I am wrong — but what is the cost if you are done by the van? "Done" is the wrong term; if you are caught speeding, what is the figure? *[Laughter.]*

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: I think it is £90 at the moment.

Mr K Buchanan: I did a quick calculation that, at £60, that equates to £4.8 million. Does it take that amount to run the organisation?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: No, it is not that high. Last year, it was £3.35 million.

Mr K Buchanan: Incoming?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Yes, and all —.

Mr K Buchanan: Have I done that calculation wrong, Sam? There were 80,000 detections, and I based that calculation on a figure of £60, which gives me £4.8 million.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Yes, but those are the detections for the calendar year of 2023.

Mr K Buchanan: OK.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: So the figure of £3.35 million is the figure —.

Mr K Buchanan: It cost £3.35 million to run your organisation?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Yes. The £3.35 million is the 2023-24 income. The figure that I am quoting you of around 80,000 detections — or 79,790 or whatever — is for the 2023 calendar year, so there will be a little discrepancy there.

Mr K Buchanan: I cannot understand how your funding model works, if you base it on detections. Right? Your organisation should cost so much to run. Theoretically, let us say that you are getting more detections. You could say, "OK, people are speeding more and we are getting more detections, so we will put another van on the road". Theoretically, you will get more detections. How is your funding model arrived at? Is it based purely on detections?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Yes is the short answer.

Mr K Buchanan: Is that the right way to do it? I know that you need the money to run the organisation, but is that the right way to fund the model?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: It may not be. If someone has a different way in which it could be funded, I am happy to do that. In very simple terms, the fines and the fees that come from people who are detected speeding are what funds the organisation.

Mr K Buchanan: There is no other income from anywhere else?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Not that I am aware of.

Mr K Buchanan: Fair enough. Effectively, it is circular.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Yes. I am not an expert on where all the money comes from. For the record, I know that the headline is around £3.35 million. However, it is not just as simple as, "If you get more detections, you have more money, and therefore you can put more vans on the road". With more detections comes a requirement for more processing, so I would first have to go to G4S to say that I need more staff to do the work. There is always that balance around making sure that I have the right number of staff to be able to process them all.

Mr K Buchanan: I will come on to G4S. I have no issue with G4S, but why are you using agency staff?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: It has been a contract for some years now.

Mr K Buchanan: Is that cost-effective, given that they are not your own staff?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: That is a wider debate. There is a wider debate around the cost-effectiveness of managed services, full stop, and the cost-effectiveness of managed services that G4S supplies to the PSNI. It is effective right now and it is working right now. We have the right number of resources there right now and it is delivering a service right now. Again, if analysis was done around a different funding model and it was presented to me, as the chair of the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership, and the committee, we would be happy to look at a different model.

Mr K Buchanan: I do not know whether we can, but it would be good to get an understanding of the running costs. I am not taking away from your figures, Sam. I understand the £3.35 million, but what are your ins and outs, to get a broad spectrum?

May I have one final question, Chair?

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): Very quickly, yes.

Mr K Buchanan: Which one? *[Laughter.]* You talked about all the different organisations that you chair in policing and DFI. I do not have an understanding of that, so it would be good to get a little bubble diagram to understand what the organisations are, what their objectives are and who sits on them — just a little A4 idiot's guide to what they are. It would be good to understand that, because there are loads of them. You have them in your head, but I do not.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: I am happy to share the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership accounts with the Committee. It is a public document.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): Yes, if you could. Keith is obviously reading our minds here, because that was one of the questions that we were thinking of. It would be good to get that. It would also be good, as Keith said, to get the bubble diagram.

Mr K Buchanan: Just a guide to what those organisations are.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): It would be good if you could come back to us on that.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: The only thing I would say is that that may not be for me to do. It may be for DFI to do. It is for the permanent secretary and the staff, because they will have a better understanding of the strategic groups than I do. There are probably groups that I am not aware of.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): OK.

Mr K Buchanan: I want to touch briefly on SIDs, and then I will be away. John and a few others raised that. I got local businesses to buy SIDs as a sponsorship for a village, but then there were big difficulties in putting them on a pole. They are not allowed to put them on a lamp post, because they do not have insurance. Then we get the PCSP to adapt them. You could look at that broadly, Sam, to make the process easy. Wee groups collect money and businesses want to do it, but all they get is

barriers, not solutions. You find that in government: everybody puts a wall up to prevent you from doing a good thing. It is about what you can do with PCSPs and local communities. Everybody sees a SID or a defib and they want one. You can see the benefits of having a SID, but it is painful to get it. What can you do to make that easier? It is slowing traffic down, especially by schools and in rural villages.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Maximising the use of SIDs is on my strategy for 2024-25. I will expand that a bit. The strategy talks about SIDs and PCSPs, but it may be about putting that together and making sure. I have worked in mid-Ulster; you have a very proactive PCSP there and a very proactive manager.

Mr K Buchanan: Yes, I know him.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: There is a can-do attitude.

Mr K Buchanan: Michael is very good, to be fair. He is very good.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: I am happy to take that away. Again, I do not think that the PSNI has the answer — the answer is collaborative — but I am happy to look at how we can improve that and maximise the number of SIDs by breaking down those barriers. I am happy to have a look at that.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): That would be great. Thank you.

Mr McMurray: I will be brief, Chair.

Thank you for all the information so far. Some of these points have been touched on slightly, but I will try to extrapolate from them a wee bit. I appreciate that they may not be relevant to you in your PSNI role, but it is because you are the chair of this Road Safety Partnership, if that makes sense.

My first question is on active travel. A big barrier to people using active travel, be it cycling, wheeling or walking, is the perception of dangerous roads. It is not even a perception: unfortunately, there are tragedies with cyclists. You half admitted that you did not have the knowledge right to the forefront of your brain, and that is understandable, given the amount of knowledge that you have already given us. That would be fine. How can the Road Safety Partnership remove those barriers to active travel? Speaking as a cyclist, on Stayin' Alive at 1.5, I would go as far as saying that 1.5 is not that far at all and that, if you overtake any vehicle on the road, you need to move into the other lane, but that is by the by.

In the previous session, you talked about engineering solutions. A big part of it, especially in rural areas, is that there are no safe footways for people. There are increasing numbers of settlements, if you will, where children are forced to walk along roadways to get to bus stops. That is probably outside your remit in the PSNI, but, as the chair of the Road Safety Partnership, do you have an opinion on how active travel ways, be they cycle routes or, in this case, footpaths, can be expedited, if that is the correct terminology?

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Again, there is a lot there, as there was in Cathal's question earlier. I am not suggesting for a minute that I am an expert on active travel. I hear people talk about it. My job is enforcement and chairing the various groups, so I confess that I do not know an awful lot about it. It is not for the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership to take forward active travel. It is part of the strategy, and that is being dealt with via the tactical group and the strategic group. I sit on those, but I do not want to leave here with you thinking that the Northern Ireland Road Safety Partnership has a role to play in active travel. The Road Safety Partnership is about the vans, the detection and stuff like that. Granted, we can make sure that the statistics and evidence that we gather on roads, particularly rural roads, are fed in.

When it comes to engineering, I am thinking about fatal road traffic collisions over the years. I can certainly think of some that would have been avoided had there been a footpath or a safer means for an individual to be able to cross a road. In fact, more and more are coming to my mind as I speak. We talked about money and investment a few times. All that I can do as the chair of the Road Safety Partnership is gather the evidence, and all that I can do as the gold lead for road safety in the police is to keep enforcing and gathering the information to allow the strategy to progress those. I think that your question is whether I support that. I absolutely support that. It is one thing sending a sergeant

and a constable from the collision investigation unit to a fatal road traffic collision to investigate it. It is a whole other thing spending the money in a different way and making sure that, where the kids are getting off the bus at the same location every night on a rural road and are having to cross the road, we spend the money on that instead and therefore do not have to deal with the catastrophic consequences of a car passing a lorry knocking a child down, and I am deploying my crew. I am absolutely an advocate for upfront investment and prevention, and I hope I have communicated that clearly.

Mr Baker: This is only a wee small point that has not really been mentioned today. You talked about everyone being in a hurry. I was listening to people talking about 20 mph speed limits outside schools. A growing problem — I suppose that it has always been a problem, but it is getting worse — is parking outside schools. It comes down to enforcement and not having enough officers. I will give you an example of a school in my constituency. Translink had to change its bus route because of how bad the parking was. It had an initiative that I actually first saw it on the Shankill Road: the wee road cones that are the shape of children. That particular school invested in them, and within two days, a Range Rover drove over them. That falls into the area of education. I highlight that because I believe that, in my constituency, that is a growing problem. A 20 mph speed limit is great, and I support it, but it is no good if a child is getting knocked down at 5 mph and killed. I just wanted to flag that up.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: In a sense, there is a selfishness about us when we get on the road. It is about me, my journey and where I want to park, and I want to park conveniently. That is why people park in disabled spaces and on double yellow lines and why people want to get right to the gate of the school so that the kid can get in. There is a lot of education required there. There is a whole culture shift required in terms of me, my responsibilities and my rights on the road. With regard to the enforcement of that, there is a little bit of responsibility on the police. There is a lot of responsibility on the traffic attendants, or the traffic wardens, depending on what age you are. It is about getting that balance.

You mentioned 200 schools with the lights outside. For the third time today, I am going mention the 16,000 miles of roads. It is really difficult to be in the right places at the right time. That is where good collaboration, communication and prioritisation come in. You will not find the police wanting when it comes to helping and trying to keep people safe. I give you that reassurance.

Mr Baker: One hundred per cent.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): Cathal, very briefly. One wee second.

Mr Boylan: Just a brief point on behalf of the rural community, because I brought this up earlier. People do not realise this, but rural people walk a couple of miles on rural roads. They do not all go around the football fields. I know that that is not a responsibility, but it is part of the broader conversation. That is what does happen, and people tend to forget that. When I used to do a lap of the town myself, there was no footpath on three quarters of it. I am just saying. That is what we should be encouraging. That should be part of it because, unfortunately, that poor man was knocked down coming home outside Newry that night. That is something that needs to be on our radar. We need to be having conversations. That is the point [*Inaudible.*]

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): We really appreciate your time. That was a marathon session of two hours and 15 minutes, and we still did not get covering everything. We only briefly touched on the likes of cycling and motorcycles and things like that. It just shows how massive this area is, and the importance of it as well. It would be remiss of us not to put on record our thanks to the police officers and for the work that the Road Safety Partnership is doing in collaboration with Departments, because it is important that we have those in place and we keep developing and pushing those messages. From a Committee perspective, we want to ensure that there are zero road deaths. There was some talk earlier about the 1970s and analysis of what intervention measures were the driving force — sorry, pardon the pun — behind reducing some of those numbers. If there is any work on that, it would be interesting for the Committee to see that as well with regard to developing strategies and moving forward on the issue. Thank you for your time today. We really appreciate it.

Chief Superintendent Donaldson: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Committee, for your interest in road safety. You can hold on to these documents, by the way, and leave them in your office or wherever. I am happy to come back with the international good practice that we are looking at, if there is any, and I am definitely happy to come back in due course with the cause-and-effect stuff. It will go through that strategic group first, and I will suggest that we bring it back to the Committee.

The Chairperson (Mrs Erskine): That is super. Thank you very much.