

Roads Policing: Not optional

An inspection of roads policing in
England and Wales

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Foreword

The police have a vital part to play in ensuring that the road network operates efficiently and that those who use it can do so in safety and security.

There can be no starker illustration of the importance of that role than the number of people killed on the roads of England and Wales. Between 2015 and 2018, an average of 1,610 people lost their lives each year. Many more were seriously injured.

Yet, we found that the importance of roads policing has been in decline for some years. For example, we looked at the police and crime plan for each of the forces in England and Wales, to see if roads policing was a priority. Often, these plans made little or no reference to roads policing.

This lack of importance has serious implications for road safety. It inhibits forces' ability to:

- enforce the law and educate those who, due to their behaviour, increase the risk of death or serious injury on the roads;
- develop effective partnerships and co-ordinated joint working with highways agencies and local authorities;
- exchange information and intelligence with these organisations about dangerous roads and road users;
- work effectively with vulnerable road users, such as motorcyclists and young people; and
- evaluate the effectiveness of police initiatives intended to make the roads safer.

Roads policing officers have a much broader function than the conventional notion of a 'traffic officer'. However, alongside additional duties, these officers are still expected to fulfil a 'traffic' role. This requires specialist training and support from forces. Yet we found roads policing officers whose training was so inadequate they couldn't identify and prosecute offences relating to heavy goods vehicles (HGVs). In one force, a lack of intelligence support left the roads policing team relying on social media and their personal mobile phones to share intelligence.

This wasn't the case in all seven of the forces that we inspected; West Midlands and the Metropolitan Police Service were notable exceptions. Strategic leaders, officers and staff were all able to demonstrate a strong commitment to roads policing and the positive effect that this had on road safety.

We have made 13 recommendations, to the police and other bodies, which are intended to:

- give clarity and guidance to the police and other bodies about their collective responsibilities;
- improve forces' understanding of the risks faced by road users in their areas;
- make sure forces and road safety partners work together effectively;
- bring about compliance with national guidance on the use of speed and red-light cameras; and
- provide greater support and training to officers who investigate road deaths.

Summary

We examined how effectively the road network of England and Wales is policed. We sought to establish:

- Are national and local roads policing strategies effective?
- Does capability and capacity match demand?
- Do the police engage effectively with the public and partners?
- How well are police officers trained to deal with roads policing matters?

How effective are the national and local strategic approaches to roads policing?

Roads policing in some forces is inadequate

In 2018, the [National Police Chiefs' Council](#) (NPCC) published its latest national roads policing strategy, [Policing our Roads Together](#). The strategy sets out three main objectives:

- safe roads, free from harm;
- secure roads free from the threat of serious crime and terrorism; and
- efficient roads that promote public confidence and satisfaction.

Some forces have only adopted parts of the national roads policing strategy. Some were unable to provide us with any evidence of a strategic approach to reducing deaths on the road. Partner agencies – particularly local authorities – are often not involved in police road safety initiatives, which can result in a disjointed, and inefficient approach to road safety. With some notable exceptions, forces were unable to demonstrate that their enforcement activity was based on a comprehensive understanding of the causes of deaths and serious injury on the roads in their area. Best practice, such as problem-solving approaches to reducing serious collisions, isn't being shared effectively.

How well are capability and capacity matched to demand?

Often capability and capacity doesn't meet demand

The number of dedicated roads policing officers has declined, while their responsibilities for supporting general policing have increased. In some cases, resources have been reduced without any understanding of demand. The lack of analytical support means that enforcement activity is often unfocused and haphazard, and its effectiveness isn't evaluated. We also found examples of forces removing road policing patrols from motorways and main roads with little consultation with highways agencies. And the support provided to those in specialist roads policing roles varies considerably.

How well do the police engage with the public and partners?

A lack of co-ordination hinders effective engagement with the public and partners

Police and partner agencies don't have a shared understanding of road safety issues. This inhibits effective operational activity both nationally and locally. There was also a lack of evaluation of what road safety activities work. This can prevent meaningful engagement taking place with identified vulnerable groups, such as young drivers. More effective road safety partnerships use analysis and shared information to make roads safer.

How well are police officers trained to deal with roads policing matters?

Roads policing training should be standardised and accredited

There is no accredited national training programme for roads policing officers. The [College of Policing](#) has a range of training modules, but they aren't mandatory, and forces have developed their own approaches. As a result, there is inconsistency in how, when, and to what level officers are trained. The continued professional development of officers is inconsistent and insufficient. This has led to skills gaps in some forces such as the inability to routinely deal with heavy goods vehicles, or to manage incidents on the strategic road network. Welfare support for roads policing officers is also inconsistent.

We make 13 recommendations to improve the effectiveness of roads policing in England and Wales.

Recommendation 1

By 1 August 2021, the Department for Transport and the Home Office should develop and publish a national road safety strategy that provides clear guidance to the police, local authorities, highways agencies and other strategic partners. The strategy should include an explanation of the roles and responsibilities of each agency and the expectations of central government.

Recommendation 2

By 1 August 2021, the Home Office should revise the Strategic Policing Requirement to include an explicit reference to roads policing. Any revision should also include guidance on which bodies the requirement to collaborate with extends to.

Recommendation 3

By 1 April 2021, the Home Office should use the statutory power under [section 7\(4\) of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011](#) to issue guidance on what should be included within future police and crime plans. The guidance should require reference to roads policing in all police and crime plans.

Recommendation 4

With immediate effect, chief constables should make sure that roads policing is included in their force's strategic threat and risk assessments, which should identify the areas of highest harm and risk and the appropriate responses.

Recommendation 5

By 1 April 2021, the National Police Chiefs' Council should review the role and structure of national roads policing operations and intelligence.

Recommendation 6

With immediate effect, chief constables should make sure:

- their force has enough analytical capability (including that provided by road safety partnerships) to identify risks and threats on the road network within their force area;
- that information shared by partners relating to road safety is used effectively to reduce those risks and threats; and
- there is evaluation of road safety initiatives to establish their effectiveness.

Recommendation 7

By 1 August 2021, the Department for Transport, in consultation with the Home Office and the Welsh government should review and refresh Department for Transport Circular 1/2007. The Circular should include a requirement that forces, or local road safety partnerships should publish the annual revenue received as a result of the provision of driver offending-related training and how that revenue has been spent.

Recommendation 8

With immediate effect, chief constables should make sure that their force (or where applicable road safety partnerships of which their force is a member), comply with (the current version of) Department for Transport Circular 1/2007 in relation to the use of speed and red-light cameras.

Recommendation 9

With immediate effect, in forces where Operation Snap (the provision of digital video footage by the public) has been adopted, chief constables should make sure that it has enough resources and process to support its efficient and effective use.

Recommendation 10

With immediate effect, chief constables should satisfy themselves that the resources allocated to policing the strategic road network within their force areas are sufficient. As part of that process they should make sure that their force has effective partnership arrangements including appropriate intelligence sharing agreements with relevant highways agencies.

Recommendation 11

By 1 August 2021, the College of Policing should include a serious collision investigation module for completion along with the Professionalising Investigation Programme. This should include:

- minimum national training standards; and
- certification for all serious collision investigators.

Chief constables should make sure that all serious collision investigators in their force are then trained to those standards.

Recommendation 12

With immediate effect, chief constables should make sure that appropriate welfare support is provided to specialist investigators and family liaison officers involved in the investigation of fatal road traffic collisions.

Recommendation 13

By 1 April 2021, the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council should establish role profiles for defined functions within roads policing and identify the required skills and capabilities.

Areas for improvement

- Force-level support to national roads policing operations and intelligence structure is an area for improvement.
- The efficient and effective exchange of all collision data with other relevant bodies is an area for improvement.
- The awareness and understanding of the changes in the Professionalising Investigation Programme within police forces is an area for improvement.

Introduction

About HMICFRS

HMICFRS independently assesses the effectiveness and efficiency of police forces and fire and rescue services – in the public interest. In preparing our reports, we ask the questions that citizens would ask, and publish the answers in an accessible form, using our expertise to interpret the evidence and make recommendations for improvement.

Context

Roads policing

Police officers, road safety partnership staff and volunteers carry out roads policing every day. It takes many forms including [community speedwatch](#) schemes, the use of speed cameras and police officers on patrol.

Roads policing has evolved from ‘traffic officers’ who were mainly focused on enforcement of road traffic legislation, and dealing with road traffic collisions, to a wider concept of policing the roads. This wider concept includes the use of roads policing resources to target criminals who use the road network for their criminal purpose.

Road traffic collisions involving fatal and serious injury

The Department for Transport publishes annual reports on the number of road traffic collisions including those that result in people being killed or seriously injured. In 2016, the police changed the way they record how severe the injuries from these collisions are. This means that comparison between figures before and after this change isn’t an effective means of forming an accurate judgement on the number of collisions involving serious injury.

In 2018, 23,931 people in England and Wales suffered serious injury in traffic collisions.¹ Often these injuries are life-changing and have profound implications for the people involved and their families.

¹ [Reported road casualties in Great Britain: 2018 annual report](#), Department for Transport, 2019, p1.

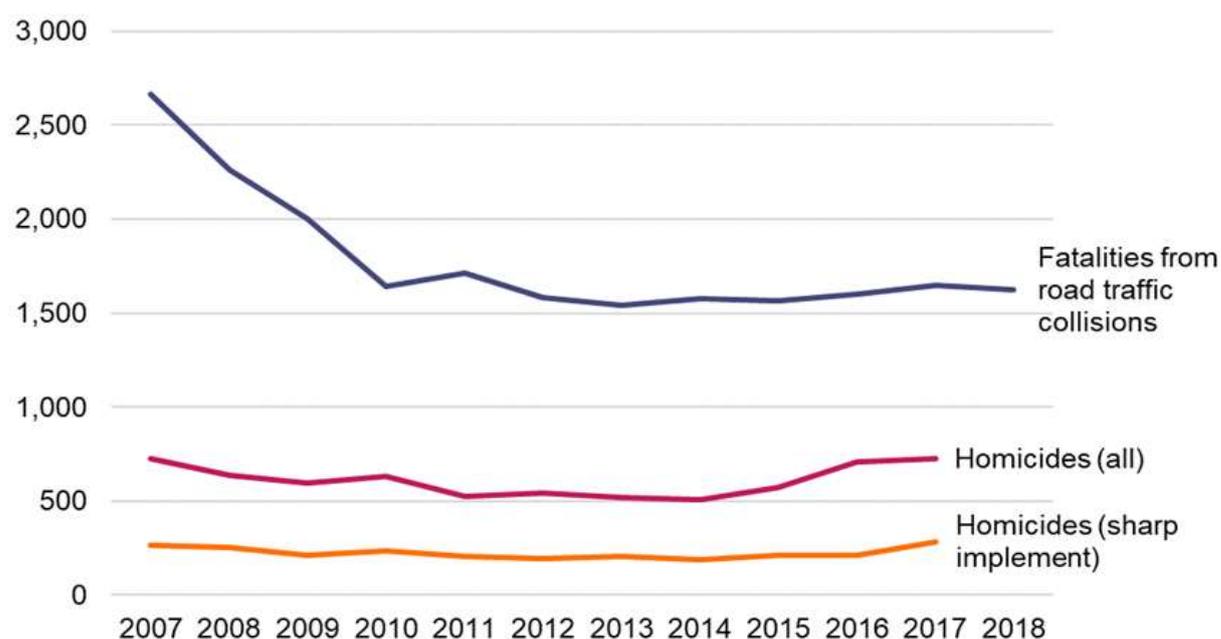
Fatalities

Since 1979, the number of people killed on the roads in England and Wales has steadily fallen. This was particularly the case between 2006 and 2010 when, according to the Department for Transport, there was a “substantial reduction in fatalities”.²

A combination of several factors possibly brought about this long-term reduction. These include improvements in the design and manufacture of vehicles and the engineering of roads; developments in medical care; and a greater presence and purpose of police officers on the roads.

But, since 2013, the number of deaths caused by road traffic collisions in England and Wales has gradually increased, rising from 1,541 fatalities in 2013 to 1,624 fatalities in 2018.³ In the 12 months to March 2018, 726 people lost their lives as a result of homicide.⁴ Of these, 285 were killed as a result of knife crime (or other sharp implement). Figure 1 shows the trend in road collision fatalities and homicide since 2007.

Figure 1: Road traffic collision fatalities compared with homicides in England and Wales, 2007 to 2018



Source: Department for Transport

Note: Homicides are in financial years, and road traffic collisions are in calendar years

² As before, p3.

³ As before, p1.

⁴ [Homicide in England and Wales: year ending March 2018](#), Office for National Statistics, 2019.

Every one of these deaths is a tragedy, but we found that road safety isn't prominent in the consciousness of many politicians, police leaders and the public. This is reflected in the level of priority that some forces and police and crime commissioners (PCCs) give to roads policing.

Our commission

In this inspection, we examined the effectiveness of roads policing's contribution to road safety in England and Wales. We did this by considering:

- How well understood are national and local police strategies for roads policing, and how well are they applied?
- To what degree do police forces have a co-ordinated and well-resourced structure for policing the road network (including the ability to allocate appropriate investigative and enforcement resources at a national, regional and local level)?
- How well understood are the roles and responsibilities of police forces and partner agencies? How effective are police forces at engaging with these partners and the public to reduce casualties on the road network?
- How, and to what degree, do police forces develop and share learning products to enable effective first response as well as specialist capabilities?

Our full terms of reference can be found at Annex A.

We also compared the results of our inspection with the recommendations of the Criminal Justice Joint Inspection by Her Majesty's Crown Prosecution Service Inspectorate (HMCPSI) and HMIC (now HMICFRS) of the [investigation and prosecution of fatal road traffic incidents](#) in February 2015. That report contained recommendations that had relevance to this inspection.

Methodology

Fieldwork for this inspection took place between October and December 2019. We visited seven police forces in England and Wales. We used a common set of questions and interviewed staff in similar roles in each force.

We invited the PCC or local policing body for each of the seven forces to give us their views. A full list of those inspected is in Annex B.

In each force, we interviewed the people responsible for roads policing and held focus groups with relevant operational staff. We also spoke to people from other relevant organisations, including local authorities and highways agencies. And we spoke with other interested parties, to get their opinions and find examples of best practice. In total, we spoke with about 300 people. (The highways agencies aren't within the scope of our responsibilities, but we are grateful to those who gave their time freely to contribute to this inspection.)

We reviewed documents such as strategies, action plans, policies and procedures, some of which were specific to each organisation. The Department for Transport also provided us with data.

Strategy

In this chapter we consider:

- How effective are the national and local strategies for roads policing?
- Is policing activity appropriately supported with analysis and evaluation?
- Is best practice efficiently identified and shared?

Main finding: Roads policing in some forces is inadequate

In 2018, the NPCC published its latest national roads policing strategy, [*Policing our Roads Together*](#). The strategy sets out three main objectives:

- safe roads, free from harm;
- secure roads free from the threat of serious crime and terrorism; and
- efficient roads that promote public confidence and satisfaction.

Some forces we inspected have only adopted parts of the national roads policing strategy. Some were unable to provide us with any evidence of a strategic approach to reducing deaths on the road. Partner agencies – particularly local authorities – are often not involved in police road safety initiatives, which can result in a disjointed, and inefficient approach to road safety. With some notable exceptions, forces were unable to demonstrate that their enforcement activity was based on a comprehensive understanding of the causes of deaths and serious injury on the roads in their area. Best practice, such as problem-solving approaches to reducing serious collisions, isn't being shared effectively.

The NPCC national strategy for policing the roads

The [NPCC strategy](#) is clear that the focus of all police activity, especially enforcement, should be the 'fatal four' offences: "drink and drug driving; the non-wearing of seat belts; excess speed and driving whilst distracted"⁵ (see below, 'Other enforcement activity').

The strategy, although not extensive, sets out in clear terms what forces' priorities should be for roads policing. However, forces aren't obliged to follow the strategy. PCCs, along with chief constables, are responsible for setting priorities in each force area. [Section 5 of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011](#) requires each PCC to publish plans that set out these priorities.

⁵ Some forces have adapted this to include driving without due care and attention or driving without insurance and refer to the 'fatal five' instead.

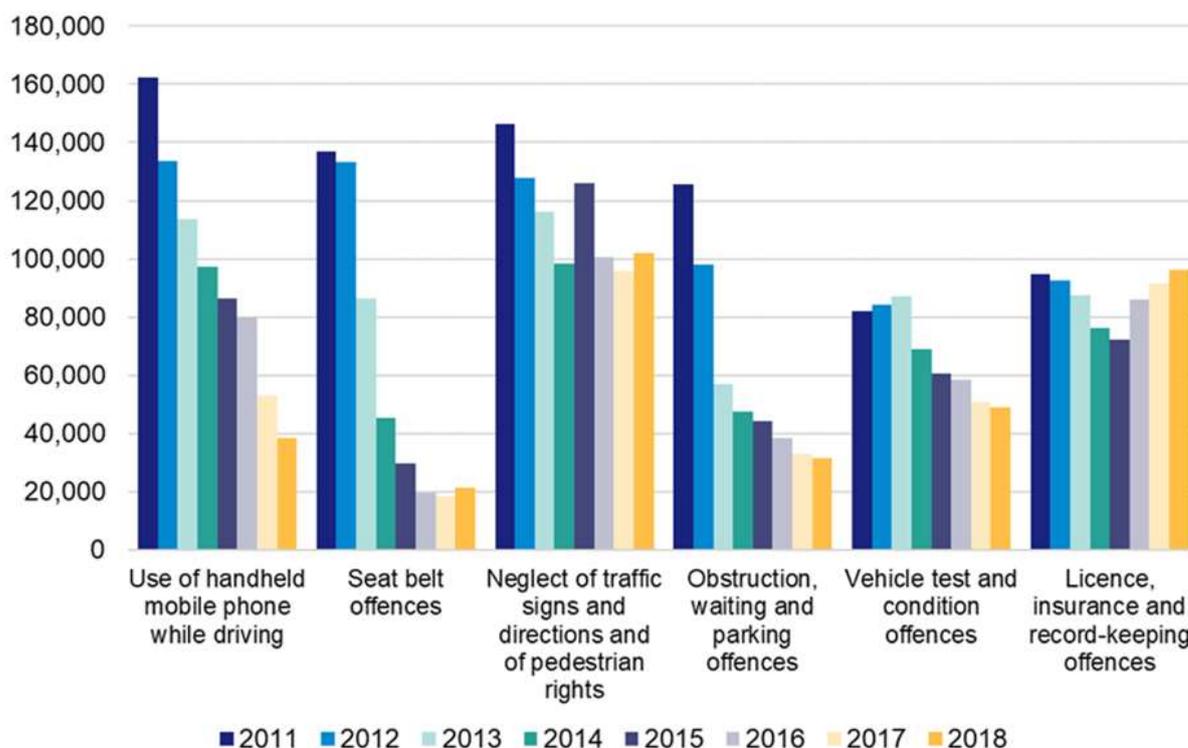
We reviewed the police and crime plans for each of the 43 police forces in England and Wales. Roads policing or road safety was listed as a priority in only 19 of 43 force plans. In one 21-page plan, the word 'road' appeared only once, where it referred to partner agencies (not the force) being concerned about road safety issues. In another, there was no reference to roads or road safety at all.

Each force that we inspected told us that they had adopted the NPCC's roads policing strategy. But, although some forces had an effective response to the whole strategy, others appeared to be selective in which elements of the strategy they chose to implement. This resulted in an inadequate application of the strategy.

For example, the second objective of [the strategy](#) is "secure roads free from the threat of serious crime and terrorism". Proactive, intelligence-led activity that denies criminals the use of the road network is vital in combatting all types of crime, from high-volume crime to drug supply and modern-day slavery. The more effective forces had a balanced approach to the strategy, combining effective tactics to promote road safety while, at the same time, targeting criminals. But, in other forces roads policing officers were focussed entirely on tackling criminality on the road. This came at the expense of those parts of the strategy focused on reducing fatalities and casualties.

The low priority that some forces give roads policing is demonstrated by the reduction in enforcement activity by police officers. The following chart illustrates the general decline in the number of fixed penalty tickets issued for certain road traffic offences. Fixed penalties issued for speeding, which have increased, have been excluded from this graph as they are mainly identified by cameras (see below, 'How effective is enforcement?').

Figure 2: Fixed penalty tickets issued for traffic offences in England and Wales, 2011 to 2018



Source: Home Office

In addition, our analysis of [data collected by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy](#) shows that annual police expenditure on roads policing in England and Wales reduced by around 34 percent in real terms (taking inflation into account) between 2012/13 and 2019/20 (see below, ‘Reduction in capacity and capability’).

Local strategies

Unsurprisingly there is a lot of variation in how the national strategy is translated into local plans and activity. In those forces with a better approach to roads policing we found a clear line from the national strategy to the local police and crime plan. This then influenced the local road safety plan, which was structured around the national objectives. Officers and staff were aware not only of the plan but also their role in achieving it.

Other forces had no plans, or if they did staff had little knowledge of them. Consequently, roads policing officers felt isolated. They weren’t set roads policing priorities and were rarely asked about their contribution to reducing road casualties. One senior officer told us: “There is no connection between the strategy and the people running around doing the doing”. This observation was borne out by our inspection roads policing supervisors from the same force, who told us that they were unaware of either the national or local strategies.

In another force, the PCC explained the absence of roads policing from their priorities by saying that they were “not aware of anything that made us worry about it”. Over 100 people were killed on the roads in that force area between 2015 and 2019.

Strategic partnerships

During our inspection we spoke with partner agencies, such as local authorities and representatives of highways agencies, to establish how well the police worked with them to improve road safety (see below, 'Road safety partnerships').

Unfortunately, we found that in several force areas the partnership approach to road safety was poor. Often this was as a result of the force and partner agencies having different (or even contradictory) priorities and objectives.

Local authority staff told us that they had previously understood that their local force's approach to roads policing was focused on road safety. However, in their view, those priorities seemed to have changed in recent years, putting more emphasis on serious crime. This didn't necessarily fit with the immediate priorities of partners.

Where partnerships worked well, the police and their local partners were closely aligned; an example would be the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) and Transport for London (TfL). Contractual and financial arrangements between them create a close working relationship, with a sharp focus on road safety. Their shared action plan also reflects the national strategy. (This arrangement is helped by the fact that the MPS and TfL are the responsibility of the Mayor of London, which facilitates their close working relationship.)

Unfortunately, in other forces, we found examples where police and partners were working in isolation. In some, the relationship was even described as adversarial. Senior officers told us of the difficulties working with partners and different local authorities that have no obligation to comply with a roads policing strategy. Others told us that roads policing is "often an afterthought" and that it was no longer considered to be a priority. One PCC called for "a much heavier steer from central government to set the 'mood music' for the roads policing approach".

Collaboration

The [Strategic Policing Requirement](#) (SPR) sets out the Home Secretary's view of the national threats that the police must prepare for. The SPR states that forces "need to work collaboratively, and with other partners, national agencies or national arrangements, to make sure such threats are tackled effectively". The SPR doesn't go as far as to state which partners and agencies this duty extends to.

Some we spoke with expressed concern that this lack of clarity, about which bodies forces were expected to collaborate with, could cause "differing strengths of relationships" between partner agencies and police forces. This was reflected in our observations on the different approaches taken by forces to engage with highways agencies (see below, 'How are motorways policed?').

They felt that greater clarity about the required relationship between forces and, for example, highways agencies, highways authorities and combined authorities (who all have responsibility for traffic management and road maintenance) would provide greater national consistency around who forces, and PCCs, should collaborate and engage with.

We agree with this sentiment and believe that clarity within the SPR would encourage stronger partnership working.

Role of government

In 2019, the Department for Transport published [The Road Safety Statement 2019: A Lifetime of Road Safety](#). This 69-page document sets out the Department's plans to improve road safety using "evidence, research, collaboration and consultation". The statement recognises the many different factors involved in developing an "integrated approach to road safety". It also highlights what it describes as a "combined roads policing project team", which will bring together representatives from the Department, the Home Office, the NPCC and Highways England.

We commend both the aspirations within the document and the multi-faceted approach to road safety that it describes. But we are concerned that it falls short of making clear what central government expects from the police (and other agencies) in promoting road safety.

We believe that the statement should be developed into a cross-departmental government road safety strategy. This would provide clear guidance not just to the police but also to local authorities, highways agencies and other strategic partners – although we recognise that the existence of a strategy doesn't guarantee that activity will follow, or that the strategy will be complied with.

In 2013, the Welsh Government published the [Road Safety Framework for Wales](#). This document sets out the Welsh Government's aspirations for road safety. It contains clear targets for reducing collisions that cause deaths and serious injuries. Like the Department for Transport's statement, we think this is a useful document.

The Welsh force we inspected didn't have a force roads policing strategy. In addition, casualty reduction didn't feature in its strategic threat and risk assessment (the process by which forces analyse the threats and risks they need to commit resources to) or in any [problem profiles](#). This makes it clear that a strategy by itself isn't enough: it must be supported by a requirement to comply.

As highlighted above, it is for PCCs to establish the priorities for individual forces. They aren't obliged to reflect national government strategies, or those of bodies like the NPCC. They are however required by law to have regard to the [SPR](#).

The Strategic Policing Requirement

This document sets out the Home Secretary's view of the national threats that the police must prepare for and the appropriate national policing capabilities that are required to counter those threats.

The SPR is structured in two parts:

- **Part A** specifies those threats to national security and safety that either affect multiple police force areas or may need resources to be brought together from multiple police force areas.
- **Part B** specifies the policing response that is required nationally, in co-operation with other agencies, to counter these threats.

The SPR was introduced in 2012 and reviewed in 2015. The latest version identifies six threats that police and crime commissioners must consider when establishing local policing plans: terrorism; serious and organised crime; a national cyber security incident; threats to public order and public safety; civil emergencies; and child sexual abuse.

We don't suggest that roads policing should replace any of these identified threats. However, between 2016 and 2018, 4,872 people died and 69,580 were seriously injured as a result of road traffic collisions on the roads of England and Wales. The estimated cost of all road traffic collisions (including those that go unreported) is approximately £36 billion per year.⁶

Incidents or collisions on the road network have a serious economic consequence: for example, [in 2011 the estimated cost of motorway closures was £1 billion](#). Often, response to these incidents requires co-operation between forces and other agencies. Effective roads policing supports the law enforcement response to other threats identified within the SPR, such as serious and organised crime.

As a result, we believe that roads policing should be included within the SPR.

Furthermore, [section 7\(4\) of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011](#) enables the relevant Secretary of State (in this case the Home Secretary) to issue guidance on what should be included in future police and crime plans. If deaths and serious injuries on the roads are to be reduced, we recommend that the Home Secretary makes use of this provision.

Precedents

The idea of multiple government departments working together to guide the activity of police forces and agencies in relation to road safety isn't a new one. In 2000, the then government published a road safety strategy called [Tomorrow's roads: safer for everyone](#). The strategy called for government agencies, local authorities, police forces, and others to work together to improve road safety. This was followed in 2005 when the Association of Chief Police Officers,⁷ the Department for Transport, and the Home Office published a [joint roads policing strategy](#). The status of roads policing was further reinforced with the publication of the [National Community Safety Plan 2008-11](#). This plan identified the reduction in the number of people killed or seriously injured on the roads as a priority for the police.

Each of these documents reinforced the status of roads policing in the context of police duties. But we have concluded that, for a variety of reasons, that standing has diminished. We believe that the implementation of these recommendations will generate a much greater strategic focus on roads policing and safety.⁸

⁶ [Reported road casualties in Great Britain: 2018 annual report](#), Department for Transport, 2019, p23.

⁷ In 2015 The Association of Chief Police Officers was replaced by the [National Police Chiefs' Council](#).

⁸ In making recommendation 1 we recognise that the Welsh Government already has an appropriate document in place.

Recommendation 1

By 1 August 2021, the Department for Transport and the Home Office should develop and publish a national road safety strategy that provides clear guidance to the police, local authorities, highways agencies and other strategic partners. The strategy should include an explanation of the roles and responsibilities of each agency and the expectations of central government.

Recommendation 2

By 1 August 2021, the Home Office should revise the Strategic Policing Requirement to include an explicit reference to roads policing. Any revision should also include guidance on which bodies the requirement to collaborate with extends to.

Recommendation 3

By 1 April 2021, the Home Office should use the statutory power under [section 7\(4\) of the Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011](#) to issue guidance on what should be included within future police and crime plans. The guidance should require reference to roads policing in all police and crime plans.

Analysis, evaluation and sharing best practice

Effective analysis of information and intelligence helps to make sure that resources are deployed in the right place, at the right time, and on the right activity. Timely evaluation of that activity enables the police to either revise deployments or identify what works and share best practice.

Analysis

We found some notable examples of forces that recognised the value of analysis. But in most of the forces that we visited, there was a poor understanding of vulnerable road users, repeat offenders, or the causes of collisions. And there is little evidence, either nationally or locally, of roads policing activity being effectively evaluated, or of best practice being efficiently shared.

In West Midlands Police, we were pleased to find that senior officers clearly recognised the benefits of analysis. The strategic lead advocated taking a public health approach to roads policing, similar to that being used to tackle knife crime. In that force, daily tasking is informed by data relating to collisions, the ‘fatal four’ offences, motor insurance databases, and automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) information, which analysts have innovatively used to produce intelligence assessments. The force was clear that it needed to use this information to protect its communities and had invested in ensuring that enough analytical capability was available. We commend this approach.

And once again, the resources available to the MPS through its relationship with TfL mean that the force has a range of analytical products that help it make effective decisions. These include weekly data about serious collisions and the factors that contributed to them.

In other forces, we found little analysis of serious collisions or other relevant intelligence to help officers achieve the objectives of the national strategy or – where they exist – the local strategy. Disappointingly, the earlier example of a force not having a strategic threat and risk assessment relating to road safety wasn't an isolated one (see above, 'Role of government'). Several of the forces we visited were in a similar position. This reflected what one chief officer described as "an immaturity" in the approach to roads policing. One partner agency told us that they regularly provide a force with road safety data, but they suspected that the force "did nothing with it".

In one force whose assessment did include roads policing, vulnerable groups, such as motorcyclists and road users between the ages of 17 and 24 were identified (see below, 'Engaging with those most at risk'). But having completed this analysis, the force was unable to provide a corresponding plan.

These assessments are important, as are the tactical plans that come from them. They provide senior managers with the information they need to set priorities and make resources available to deal with emerging threats and risks. Excluding roads policing from these assessments, or limiting the analysis in them, means that activity is unlikely to be focused. And that makes forces less effective at improving road safety.

Recommendation 4

With immediate effect, chief constables should make sure that roads policing is included in their force's strategic threat and risk assessments, which should identify the areas of highest harm and risk and the appropriate responses.

Just as initial analysis is important, so is evaluating subsequent activity to make sure that it is effective and worthwhile. We hoped to find examples of this, as well as a clear process for sharing best practice between forces. In our view, this would encourage a national approach and help in the early adoption of tactics and participation in national roads policing campaigns.

In all the forces that we visited we found little evidence of activity being evaluated or shared, even where that activity seemed worthwhile. Most people we spoke with, including senior officers, were unaware of the national process for sharing best practice.

National campaigns and sharing of best practice

The chief constable, who is the national lead for roads policing, is supported by a national structure and a small team known as the national roads policing operations and intelligence (NRPOI). The team is responsible for co-ordinating national activity; it isn't a statutory organisation, nor is it mandatory for forces and partners to engage with it. NRPOI manages national roads policing initiatives and operations like the NPCC's regular national roads policing campaigns. It co-ordinates national meetings and events. In addition, it also circulates best practice between police forces and partner agencies.

Few of the practitioners we spoke with knew anything about NRPOI or its role in roads policing – even senior officers. As a result, the national influence of this group isn't enough to prompt police forces to commit to the national strategy.

Both the chair and deputy chair of the group are senior police officers who undertake these roles in addition to their full-time duties. However, NRPOI does have a small number of dedicated staff. They are funded by two external organisations: the [UK Road Offender Education](#) (UKROEd), and the [Motor Insurers Bureau](#).

The regional and national meetings are attended by representatives from police forces and partners who have an interest in roads policing and safety. They are expected to share information and contribute to the national calendar of events and projects. The meetings don't achieve this effectively as not all forces are members, engage in campaigns, or take up initiatives that NRPOI, despite a lack of evaluation, identify as best practice.

National campaigns

NRPOI is responsible for co-ordinating the NPCC roads policing campaigns calendar. To assist forces in prioritising campaigns they are separated into two tiers. Tier one campaigns are those sponsored by the NPCC, whereas tier two road safety campaigns are those undertaken simultaneously by European police forces. The NPCC lead for roads policing expects forces to participate in those campaigns that are designated as tier one; tier two are carried out on a voluntary basis.

However, we were told that the promotion of national campaigns wasn't very effective because forces aren't obliged to take part in them. Roads policing officers in one force told us that they don't participate in national road safety campaigns and haven't for some years. Senior managers tell them about the campaigns, but officers can't dedicate any time to them. This is because of competing demands from elsewhere.

In another force, we asked local officers about roads policing national campaigns. They told us that they only see the information boards meant for the public – information about campaigns isn't directly fed down to them through internal communications or 'tasking' requests. As a result, they don't feel any expectation to contribute to these campaigns.

This lack of engagement also prevented the effective evaluation of national campaigns and the sharing of information. Staff from NRPOI told us that they were often either not informed of the results of local activity or received data in different formats. They described how information and intelligence was shared but couldn't explain how

(or whether) it was translated into activity in forces. They told us that reports were given to strategic leads in the force, but they had no way of knowing whether they had been followed up.

Similarly, there didn't appear to be any structured method for NRPOI to achieve one of its further objectives: "To act as an advocate within partner organisations, police forces and regions in identifying, discussing and addressing issues of common concern and avoid unnecessary duplication of effort". Once again, we couldn't establish how this was achieved other than through attendance at meetings. We found a similar position with the sharing of best practice, which we expected to be a core function of the group.

For example, during our inspection we attended a NRPOI meeting. Only 12 police forces were represented, and the officers that attended were mainly constables, sergeants, or inspectors. Conversely, representatives from external organisations were generally at a senior level. The meeting received presentations on initiatives aimed at reducing serious injury or death and preventing criminals from using the roads. After each presentation, the chair suggested that the initiative be supported nationally, but there was no clarity on how to present it to chief officers for support in each force. The chair merely asked the relatively junior officers present to take the request to their force to seek interest and engagement.

The purpose of NRPOI is a good one. However, we concluded that it wasn't sufficiently equipped, supported or empowered to carry out its stated goals.

Recommendation 5

By 1 April 2021, the National Police Chiefs' Council should review the role and structure of national roads policing operations and intelligence.

Area for improvement

Force-level support to national roads policing operations and intelligence structure is an area for improvement.

Structure

In this chapter we consider:

- Do forces have the capability and capacity to meet their strategic roads policing objectives?
- Do forces have a good understanding of demand and effectiveness?
- Is enforcement activity effective?
- Are motorways policed well?
- Are investigations into fatal and serious injury collisions supported?

Main finding: Often capability and capacity don't meet demand

The number of dedicated roads policing officers has declined, while their responsibilities for supporting general policing have increased. In some cases, resources have been reduced without any understanding of demand. The lack of analytical support means that enforcement activity is often unfocused and haphazard, and its effectiveness isn't evaluated. We also found examples of forces removing road policing patrols from motorways and main roads with little consultation with highways agencies. And the support provided to those in specialist roads policing roles varies considerably.

Do forces have the capability and capacity to meet their strategic roads policing objectives?

'Capability' is the ability of a force to carry out a function. 'Capacity' is having the resources available to carry out that function. Specialist roads policing capability and capacity varies between police forces, as does the role of roads policing officers. For example, in some forces they are dedicated to enforcing road traffic law and investigating serious road traffic collisions. In others, the role is included in the duties of armed response officers. And some forces don't have any dedicated roads policing officers at all. For this reason, comparing one force with another or establishing a definitive number of specialist roads policing officers is difficult.

However, in March 2016, the [House of Commons Transport Committee](#) published its [report on road traffic law enforcement](#). The Committee identified that over the previous decade the number of specialist roads policing officers had consistently fallen.

During this inspection we didn't find any evidence to suggest that this national trend has been reversed. We also found little evidence that decisions that reduced or diverted capacity – or diminished capability – were taken with a clear understanding of demand or an awareness of their potential impact. Instead, we found that decisions to

reduce staffing levels or increase responsibilities were driven by financial constraints and the need for roads policing units to simply lose their fair share.

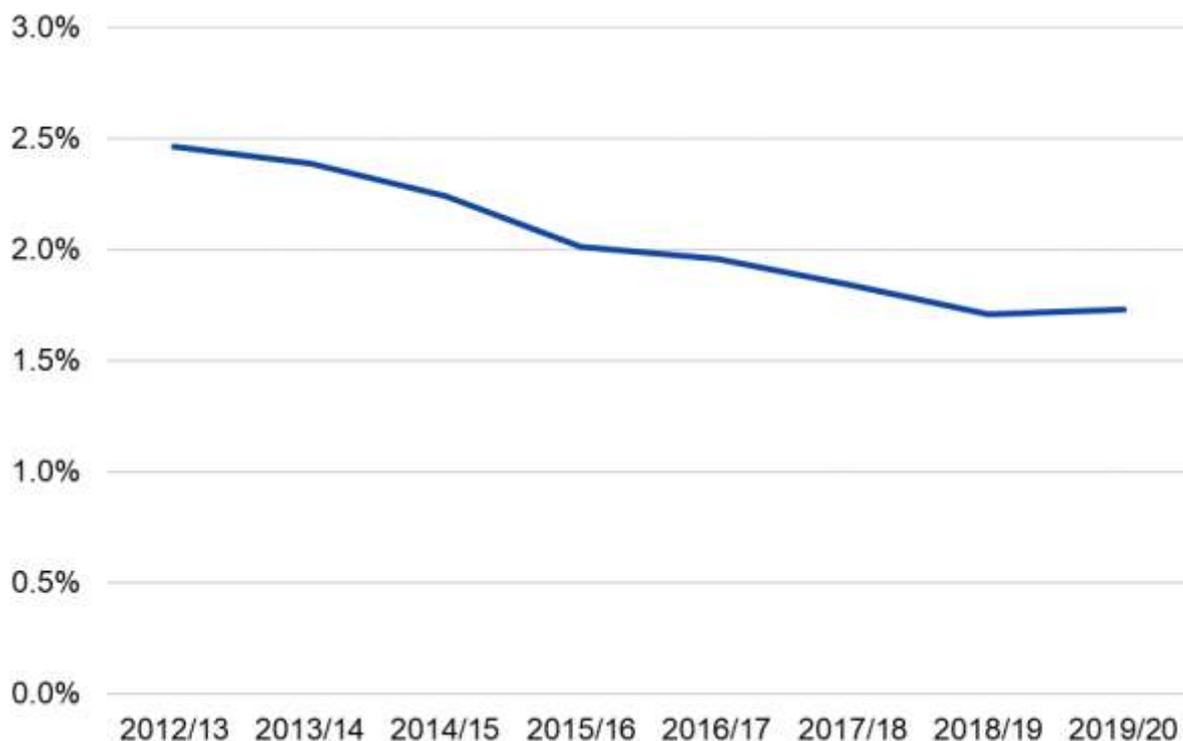
Reduction in capacity and capability

All police forces have had to make difficult decisions as they have implemented reductions in capacity and capability across all areas of activity, and roads policing has been no exception.

Between 2013 and 2019, the total amount of money spent by police forces in England and Wales on all police functions reduced by about 6.1 percent. However, the reduction in expenditure for roads policing has reduced by about 34 percent in real terms (taking inflation into account), which is approximately £120m.

Figure 3 shows how the percentage of overall police spend on roads policing in England and Wales has decreased since 2012/13.

Figure 3: Percentage of National Revenue Expenditure spent on roads policing in England and Wales, 2012/13 to 2019/20



Source: [Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy Police Objective Analysis data](#)

Note: All figures in this graph use Police Objective Analysis estimates data

Capacity

Inevitably, this decrease in expenditure has resulted in a reduction of capacity caused by the cut in the number of specialist roads policing officers and the broadening responsibilities of the remaining officers.

In one force, we were told that the number of full-time constables had been reduced from 90 to 80. However, the force needed a minimum of 70 officers for its shift system to work effectively, and at the time of our inspection it was 20 percent below that minimum level. As a result, roads policing patrols stop at 2am when demand from collisions was identified as being low. But this decision ignored the need for roads policing officers to target drink-driving at a time when officers suspected it was more likely to happen.

In another force we were told that, at times, one officer provided the total roads policing response for an entire county (at such times, response and neighbourhood officers would be expected to help).

Given these examples, it isn't difficult to understand the reduction in road enforcement activity: if officers aren't available, there won't be any activity.

Capability

Often, the reduction in capacity has been achieved by 'natural wastage': as officers retire or transfer to other roles within forces, they are simply not replaced.

While this may have achieved the required financial savings, the lack of succession planning (that is, planning for how to deal with the loss of skills and experience when officers leave) has resulted in a lack of expertise to carry out roads policing functions. One supervisor told us that the average length of service of officers in his roads policing unit was approximately two and a half years, and as a result many weren't experienced or trained in all required skills.

This has obvious practical implications, particularly in areas of roads policing that need specialist knowledge or skills.

Specialist skills gap

Additional qualifications and expertise are often required to deal with commercial vehicles like HGVs or public service vehicles, and with the legislation that governs their use. Examples include: issuing prohibition notices; checking compliance with operating licences; or enforcing driving hours (tachograph) regulations.

Although they account for a relatively small proportion of the volume of traffic on motorways and trunk roads, HGVs are involved in 28 percent of collisions that involve either serious injury or a fatality. This increases to over 30 percent when fatalities alone are considered.⁹ Despite these statistics, we found that in the forces we inspected there was often little focus on HGVs.

In several forces there was no evidence of effective succession planning or training in relation to HGVs. This meant that when experienced officers left, units and forces no longer had the required expertise, and were unable to deal competently with enforcement activity for HGVs. This was illustrated by comments from a group of less experienced officers who joked that they "only stop vehicles we can see over".

⁹ [Reported road casualties on the Strategic Road Network 2017](#), Highways England, 2017.

One force with a substantial port within its area estimated that it had over 6,000 HGVs travelling through it daily. Yet we were told that it wasn't carrying out any focused enforcement activity.

Similarly, some forces reported difficulties in filling the posts of specialist serious collision investigators, who investigate road traffic collisions that result in death or serious injury (see below, 'What training do officers get in roads policing?'). This has resulted in long-term vacancies and increased workloads for staff who deal with the most sensitive enquiries.

Shared responsibilities

During our inspection, we found several examples of dedicated roads policing officers having their responsibilities broadened to include general policing duties. This often resulted in their being regularly deployed to crime initiatives or to support colleagues in dealing with general demand. We were told that roads policing officers in some forces spent only 20 percent of their time on roads policing duties.

In other forces, roads policing is the responsibility of officers who have other competing duties, such as armed response officers. However, the reality is that, armed officers already have responsibilities such as counter-terrorism patrols and need to be available for spontaneous firearms incidents – their core function – which often leaves them unavailable for roads policing.

In several forces that we visited, we were told by senior officers that – to “do more with less” – their force had adopted what they described as a “whole-force” response to roads policing. They explained that all officers were expected to carry out enforcement of road traffic legislation. While this may be one approach to narrowing the gap in resources, we found that this was rarely rooted in reality. Local response officers told us that they were seldom briefed on, or directed towards, roads policing issues. In the most extreme cases, officers felt that they were discouraged from being proactive as this was seen as a distraction from their central role of responding to incidents. We were told that “no-one thanks you for being tied up with a drink-drive prisoner for two hours”.

This culture has a negative effect on officers' development. We were told that it wasn't unusual for student officers to complete their two-year probationary period without having experience of basic roads policing activity, such as making an arrest for drink driving. Given these examples, it isn't difficult to understand why enforcement activity has reduced (see below, 'How effective is enforcement activity?').

The principle of a whole-force approach, if well executed, is a good one. Targeting those who present a risk to communities or the use of unsafe vehicles on the roads is a core function of the police. However, it will only be effective if officers are appropriately tasked, informed and trained.

Understanding demand and effectiveness

Too often we found that organisational structures had been implemented with little understanding of demand, or of the resources needed to meet the requirements of national and force strategies. This was compounded, with some notable exceptions, by forces doing little to understand whether the way they were using their resources was effective.

We found little evidence of forces carrying out any evaluation of their structures or activity. And in most forces, there wasn't any evidence of officers and managers being held to account, or even of confirmation that activity was taking place. One senior officer responsible for roads policing told us that in the previous two years they had never been asked to account for their performance.

There were some exceptions. One force recognised that local officers had become largely de-skilled in roads policing and set about reversing the prior decision to disband their roads policing capability. While the initial increase in staffing has been relatively modest, it has been accompanied by a structure that includes oversight groups and some analytical capability.

The PCC for this force emphasised the importance of analysis: "There is a gap in understanding exactly what will be needed to become effective. Analysis needs to be improved to allow for effective tasking of resources in the future."

This is a positive step. However, the fact remains that many forces don't have effective processes to help them understand the level of demand, which would enable them to accurately assess the resources needed for roads policing. Consequently, in some forces the resourcing of roads policing is set based on what funding is available, rather than the actual demand. Therefore, forces can't be confident that local capacity and capability are enough to meet demand, reduce casualties, and be consistent with their strategies and plans.

Analysis and evaluation are equally important when deciding what activities a force's limited resources will be dedicated to. This is particularly relevant to enforcement activity.

How effective is enforcement activity?

We hoped to find that forces had adopted coherent, intelligence-led approaches to the enforcement of road traffic legislation and the targeting of those criminals that use the roads. We expected forces to have made best use of data and intelligence when deciding when, where, and how their resources would be deployed.

We were pleased to find that in some forces this was the case. They were able to demonstrate an excellent understanding of roads policing issues and subsequent planned deployments of officers and had well-established structures for review and oversight.

Unfortunately, in others we found incoherence, with officers deciding their own priorities with little analytical support or direction. In some cases, we found that the rationale for the deployment of camera enforcement technology was open to the suspicion that it supported a self-serving approach to raising revenue.

Analytical capability

It was obvious that a significant factor in these differing approaches was the availability of dedicated analytical resources. Just as analysis of demand is vital when setting levels of capacity and capability, it is also central to ensuring the effective use of those resources.

West Midlands Police made a considerable investment in its analytical resources, to make sure that enough were dedicated to roads policing. Its analysts were clear that their job was to focus on reducing serious collisions and reducing criminal use of the roads. The force provided us with analytical and intelligence products that it used to help understand factors that contributed to this, such as the fatal four and other road safety issues. In doing so, the force used data from partners effectively. Intelligence briefings included details of high-harm offenders, such as disqualified and repeat drink drivers, and the use of the road by organised crime gangs. This force told us about an innovative way they were using the ANPR database. And they described initiatives to target repeat offenders by plotting their regular routes to allow roads policing patrols to intervene. As a result, the force was able to show that it had reduced the number of casualties on its roads and disrupted criminal activity.

Conversely, in other forces we found a lack of effective use of analytical products or targeted enforcement activity to support roads policing. Where data was received from partners, it wasn't used to any consequence. Officers told us that they didn't receive any products that showed whether their enforcement activity had any effect on the number of collisions. The use of ANPR was minimal, with only a small number of vehicles equipped and staff given little direction or support in using it.

In another force, officers described how the intelligence process for roads policing was completely broken. They received so little in the way of intelligence to enable them to target offenders that they had resorted to sharing information among themselves via social media apps. This is unacceptable.

Recommendation 6

With immediate effect, chief constables should make sure:

- their force has enough analytical capability (including that provided by road safety partnerships) to identify risks and threats on the road network within their force area;
- that information shared by partners relating to road safety is used effectively to reduce those risks and threats; and
- there is evaluation of road safety initiatives to establish their effectiveness.

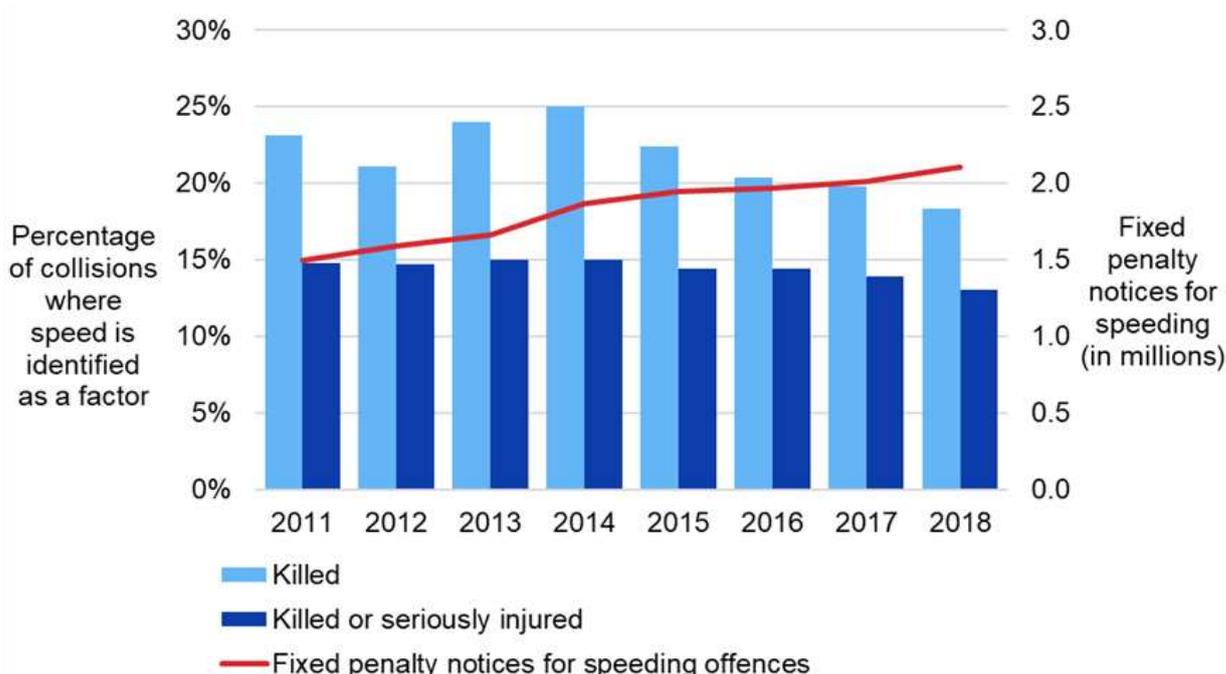
Speed enforcement

When enforcing the law, police forces should be able to demonstrate that their actions are necessary, proportionate and lawful. In simple terms, they need to show that they are treating people fairly. This is particularly important when forces and partners rely on technology to enforce speed limits.

In contrast to the other fatal four offences, the number of fixed penalty tickets issued for excessive speed has risen. Between 2011 and 2018, the number of tickets issued increased by 41 percent to 2,105,409.¹⁰ The majority of this increase is accounted for by the use of speed enforcement cameras. Some question the effectiveness of using such cameras and suspect that they are used as a source of revenue by police.

The reality is that use of cameras is effective in reducing serious collisions.¹¹ Figure 4 illustrates the increase in enforcement since 2014 by the issuing of fixed penalties for speeding offences and a reduction in the proportion of collisions where a person was killed or seriously injured in which speed is identified as a contributory factor.

Figure 4: Percentage of collisions where a person was killed or seriously injured that had speeding as a contributory factor and the number of fixed penalty notices issued for speeding offences in England and Wales, 2011 to 2018



Source: Department for Transport

Note: Speeding as a contributing factor includes ‘exceeding the speed limit’ or ‘travelling too fast for conditions’

In its 2016 report, *Road traffic law enforcement*, the House of Commons Transport Committee commented that “There is also a concern where enforcement is carried out by technology, it is perceived as unfair by the public or as a means to raise revenue rather than to improve road safety. This should never be the case.”

However, police forces and road safety partnerships don’t receive the funds from fines and fixed penalties issued as a result of their use. They are, however, allowed to recover costs for the administration of offences and provision of educational schemes

¹⁰ *Police powers and procedures, England and Wales, year ending 31 March 2019*, Home Office, 2019.

¹¹ *Road safety factsheet*, Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, 2018.

such as speed awareness courses. Crucially, what constitutes recovery of costs is open to interpretation.

Deployment of cameras

The deployment of speed cameras in most force areas isn't actually carried out by the police. Instead, it is carried out by road safety partnerships (or safety camera partnerships) of which forces are members. In some cases, the police involvement in the use of cameras is limited to the administrative resources that support the processing of fixed penalties or the offer of speed awareness courses.

In most of the forces that we visited, the rationale for using camera-based technology for enforcement was clear, and the decisions about where they are placed were supported by a process intended to maintain public confidence in their use.

In addition, forces had also adopted [community speedwatch](#) schemes, which are integrated, to varying degrees, into their approaches to speed enforcement and road safety. These schemes are primarily intended to change drivers' behaviour through education rather than by prosecution.

However, we also found examples where the use of partnership enforcement activity appeared to be in direct conflict with the development of a speedwatch scheme. In one force area, a safety partnership agreement prevented local speedwatch schemes from operating on roads where the safety partnership deployed mobile speed enforcement cameras.

This apparent unwillingness to support education over enforcement had led to suspicion among officers, including some at chief officer level, that the focus of activity was intended to increase revenue for the safety partnership. In support of this, they gave examples of some camera sites that they believed didn't have a history of collisions or other identified vulnerabilities.

Elsewhere, we were told that the reason enforcement took place at certain locations was that they were "good hunting grounds", rather than because they had a history of collisions.

In order to combat perceptions of unfairness, forces and their partners need to make sure that there is transparency over how and where cameras are located. There are already government guidelines on this issue, but we believe that these should be refreshed to include what revenue is raised and how it is spent.

Circular 1/2007

In 2007, the Department for Transport issued [Circular 1/2007](#). The circular provides guidance and best practice advice on deploying speed enforcement cameras. The circular is advisory only – the Department for Transport doesn't have the statutory powers to force local authorities to take a particular action. Recommendations in the circular are wide-ranging and include advice on: the period that analysis of collision data should relate to; confirmation that the speed limit at camera sites is correct; and continued collection of data relating to public opinion. We found that the degree to which the circular's advice was followed was more apparent in some areas than others.

As a result of long-standing rules, money raised from court fines and fixed penalties must be passed to the [Consolidated Fund of the Exchequer](#). This means that police forces don't benefit directly from the issuing of fixed penalties for road traffic offences. However, police forces do recover costs from the provision of speed awareness courses.

Speed awareness courses

[UKROEd](#) is a subsidiary body of the [Road Safety Trust](#).¹² UKROEd's main objectives are to operate, manage, administer and develop the [National Driver Offender Retraining Scheme](#) (NDORS) on behalf of the police service.

The fee charged to those attending the courses varies from force area to force area. We understand that it ranges from £80 to £100. However, UKROEd sets the amount that forces can claim back from that fee as cost recovery. At the time of our inspection this was set at £45. This sum is intended to replace the original police budget earmarked for course provision.

However, dependent upon police costs and the number attending speed awareness courses, there is the potential in some cases for revenue to be generated. This was identified at the time NDORS was established, when it was agreed by the Association of Chief Police Officers that any such surplus could be used by police forces for the purpose of "policing the road". Unfortunately, beyond that, there aren't any further guidelines for forces or safety camera partnerships to follow when deciding how revenue from speed awareness courses should be spent.

Transparency

The level of interpretation, and misinterpretation, that the current advice is open to isn't helpful in ensuring that the public perception is one of fairness. We believe that clarity is required regarding what constitutes reasonable costs and what, if any, revenue partnerships and forces gain from the provision of speed awareness courses and other driver education initiatives.

As we have identified, [Circular 1/2007](#) provides guidance and best practice advice on the deployment of speed enforcement cameras. However, it doesn't make any reference to how forces and road safety partnerships deal with revenue raised from speed awareness courses. We believe that this would be a useful addition to the guidance, which should be renewed and recirculated to forces and local authorities.

In doing so, it should also include a requirement that forces, or local safety partnerships, publish on an annual basis, details of any revenue received as a result of the provision of driver offending related training and on what that revenue was spent.

Elsewhere in this report we have encouraged the Department for Transport to work more closely with the Home Office to develop a national roads policing strategy (see above, 'Role of government'). We believe that working in the same spirit of

¹² The Road Safety Trust was awarded charitable status in March 2014. It is also a company limited by guarantee. As a company, its members are 44 police forces in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

co-operation, and the issuing of a joint circular between the two departments, would bring similar benefits to the development of road safety in England and Wales.

Recommendation 7

By 1 August 2021, the Department for Transport, in consultation with the Home Office and the Welsh government should review and refresh Department for Transport Circular 1/2007. The Circular should include a requirement that forces, or local road safety partnerships should publish the annual revenue received as a result of the provision of driver offending-related training and how that revenue has been spent.

Recommendation 8

With immediate effect, chief constables should make sure that their force (or where applicable road safety partnerships of which their force is a member), comply with (the current version of) Department for Transport Circular 1/2007 in relation to the use of speed and red-light cameras.

Other enforcement activity

Enforcement of other road traffic offences, including the other three of the fatal four, still relies heavily in most cases on an interaction between an offender and a police officer. (In some cases, seat belt offences and the use of mobile phones can be identified by camera.) Given the issues of reduced capability and capacity within forces, it is unsurprising that there has been a sustained reduction in most areas of enforcement.

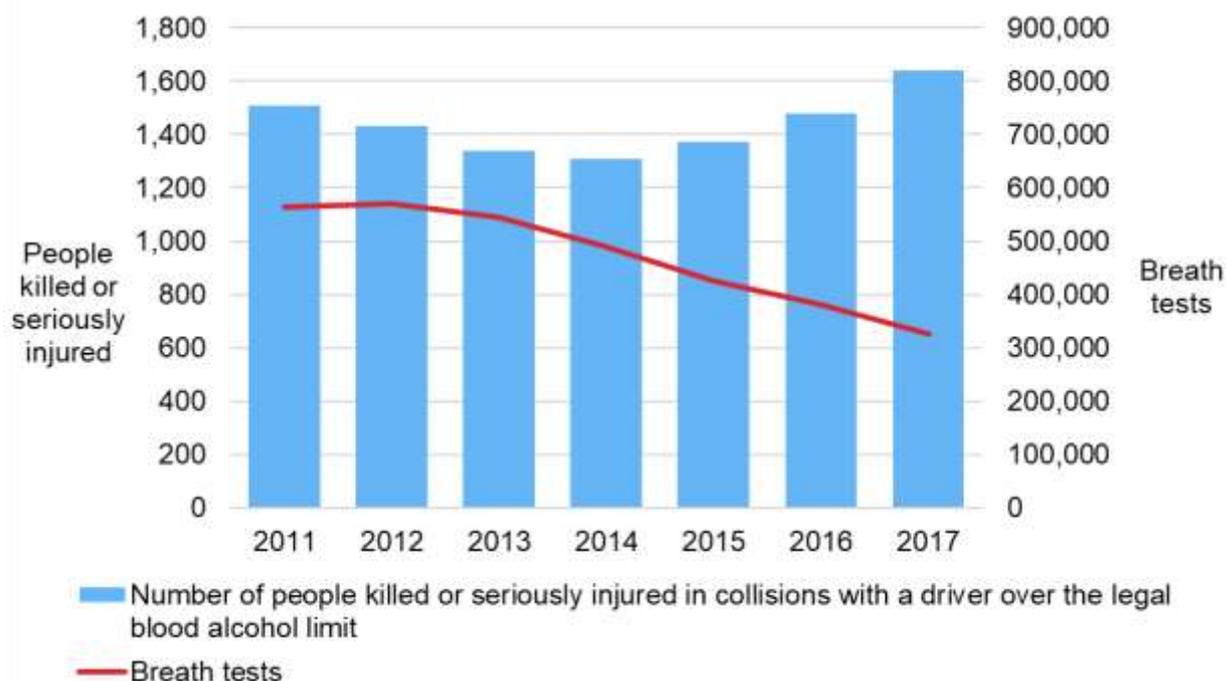
Furthermore, while we can't attribute causation, it is notable that, over a similar period, there has been an increase in the number of collisions that involve fatalities or serious injuries.

Drink driving

Between 2015 and 2018, the number of breathalyser tests carried out in England and Wales dropped by 25 percent, from 425,325 to 320,988.¹³ Again, since 2014 there has been a corresponding rise in the number of people killed or seriously injured in road traffic collisions where the driver is over the legal blood alcohol limit.

¹³ [*Police powers and procedures, England and Wales year ending 31 March 2019*](#), Home Office, 2019.

Figure 5: Number of people killed or seriously injured in collisions with a driver over the legal blood alcohol limit, and the number of breath tests conducted in England and Wales, 2011 to 2017



Source: Department for Transport

Although the number of breath tests carried out by the police has dropped, the proportion of them that proved to be positive, or were failed or refused has increased from 11.9 percent in 2015, to 15.2 percent in 2018. This suggests that underlying offending behaviours may have increased.

The House of Commons Transport Committee made a similar point in its 2016 report, [Road traffic law enforcement. Causing death by careless driving when under influence of drink or drugs](#) is one of a group of offences known as ‘causing death’ offences. (Other causing death offences are: causing death by dangerous driving; causing death by careless or inconsiderate driving; and causing death by driving while unlicensed, disqualified or uninsured.)

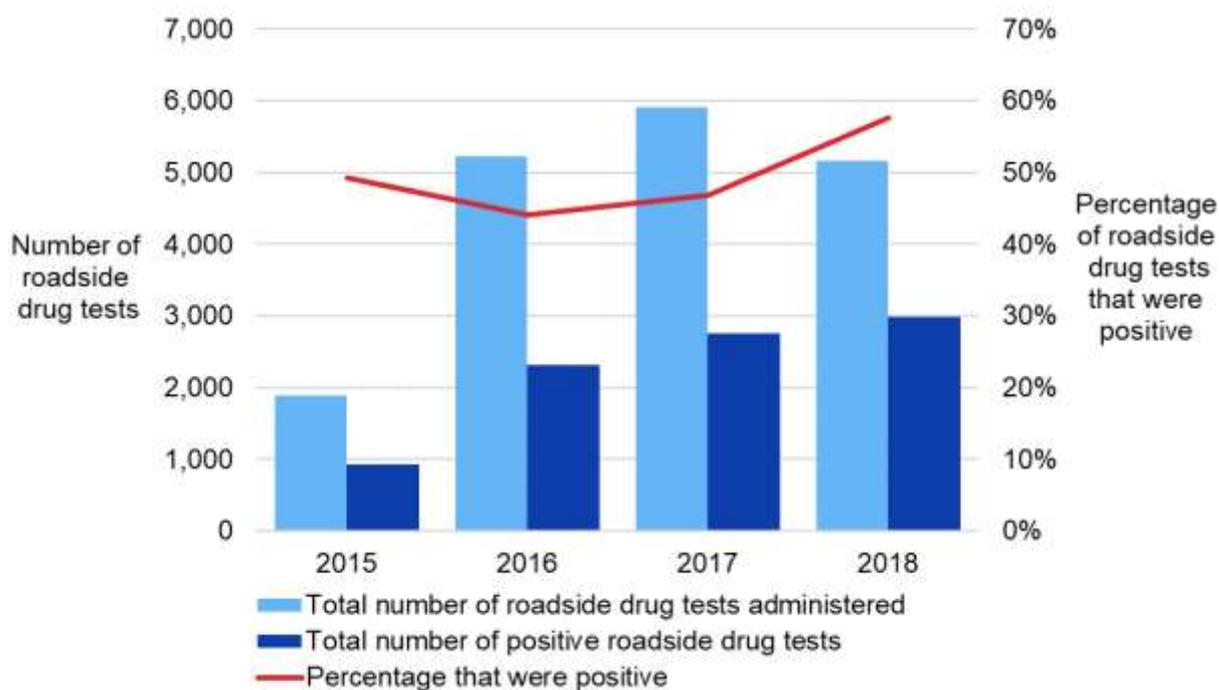
The Committee noted that the number of road traffic offences had fallen but: “the number of ‘causing death’ offences, which will always be recorded where they occur, hasn’t fallen. This is significant as it suggests that the reduction in overall offences that are recorded doesn’t represent a reduction in offences actually being committed.”

Drug driving

In 2015 the law changed making it easier for the police to deal with drivers suspected of [driving under the influence of drugs](#). Roadside screening tests for cannabis and cocaine were introduced, as well as police station-based tests for other controlled drugs such as heroin and LSD. In addition, it became illegal to drive after taking certain prescribed drugs that impair driving if they are taken other than as prescribed.

Data provided by NRPOI illustrates that the number of roadside drug tests carried out as part of national campaigns has fallen. But, like breathalyser test data, the percentage of those that fail the test has increased since 2016. Once again, this may suggest that offending behaviour has also increased.

Figure 6: The number of roadside drug tests and the percentage of positive tests in England and Wales, 2015 to 2018



Source: National Roads Policing Operations and Intelligence

The evidence that we have gathered during this inspection points to the reduction in the number of breathalyser tests being the result of a reduction in capacity among forces. There has been a reduction in the number of dedicated roads policing officers, and, as discussed above, response officers often feel discouraged from being proactive. However, in the case of roadside drug testing, we believe that there are further reasons for the reduction: the capacity of forensic service providers, and the cost.

Throughout the inspection, we were told by officers and supervisors that the ability to conduct roadside drug screening was a powerful tool that they were keen to use. However, they expressed frustration that the screening, and the subsequent forensic analysis of blood samples, was effectively rationed to manage available budgets and the capacity of forensic service providers to deal with demand.

Following the changes in legislation, there was an unsurprising increase in drug driving enforcement as officers took advantage of the new equipment. But within two years the volume of blood samples taken following positive roadside tests exceeded the capacity of forensic service providers. This resulted in backlogs and the time limit for prosecutions being missed. In addition, the cost of analysis rose from around £220 to approximately £280 per test.

Faced with limited forensic budgets and increased costs, forces have told officers to restrict the use of screening tests and limit the number of blood samples submitted for analysis. In one force, we were told that – although the cost of analysis was a factor – the main restriction was the limited capacity of the forensic service provider. This resulted in the whole force being restricted to nine submissions per month, and so officers were discouraged from being proactive.

The inescapable conclusion is that offenders who are suspected of driving while under the influence of drugs are being tolerated and allowed to present a continuing threat to communities. We don't believe that this is acceptable.

In her 2020 Annual Report, the [Forensic Science Regulator](#) raised the issue of the lack of toxicology capability within the forensic science service providers that the police rely on. The regulator commented on the need to: “ensure that a longer-term strategy for sustainable provision of high-quality forensic science is developed as a matter of urgency”. We are in complete agreement.

Mobile phones

Between 2011 and 2017 the number of fixed penalty notices issued for using a handheld mobile phone while driving dropped by just over 76 percent, from around 162,400 tickets to around 38,600. During the same period the number of mobile phone-related collisions remained broadly stable.

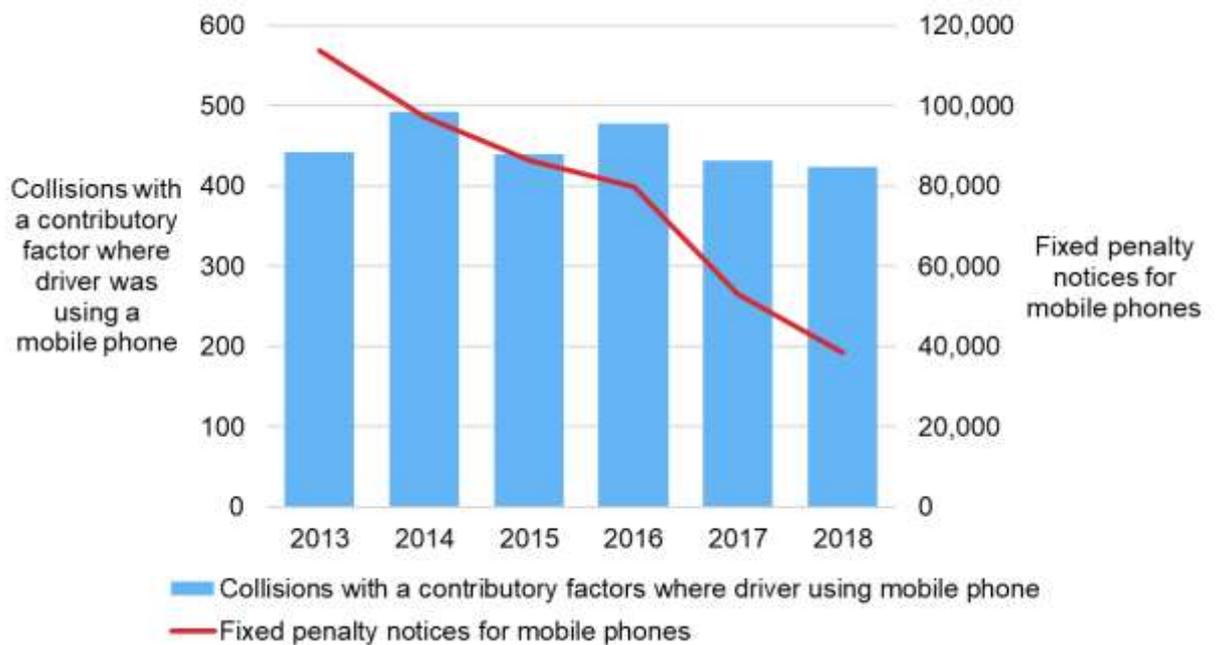
However, as contributory factors are assessed by the officer at the scene of the collision, it isn't always easy to know whether a mobile phone was a likely or possible factor in that collision, unless the collision is observed by the officer, or there is evidence from witnesses, CCTV etc, or the driver admits to it.

As such, it is hard to know how prevalent this actually is. But there is evidence from other sources that this remains a problem. The [RAC Report on Motoring 2019](#) said:

Almost a quarter of all drivers – the equivalent of just under 10 million motorists (23%) – confess that they make or receive calls on a handheld phone while they are driving at least occasionally. Among drivers aged between 17 and 24, this rate is 51%.

Meanwhile, 17% of all drivers – and a shocking 35% of under-25s – say they check texts, email or social media while driving, despite the heightened level of risk involved in looking away from the road for seconds at a time.

Figure 7: Number of collisions with a contributory factor where driver was using a mobile phone, and the number of fixed penalty notices issued for mobile phone use in England and Wales, 2013 to 2018



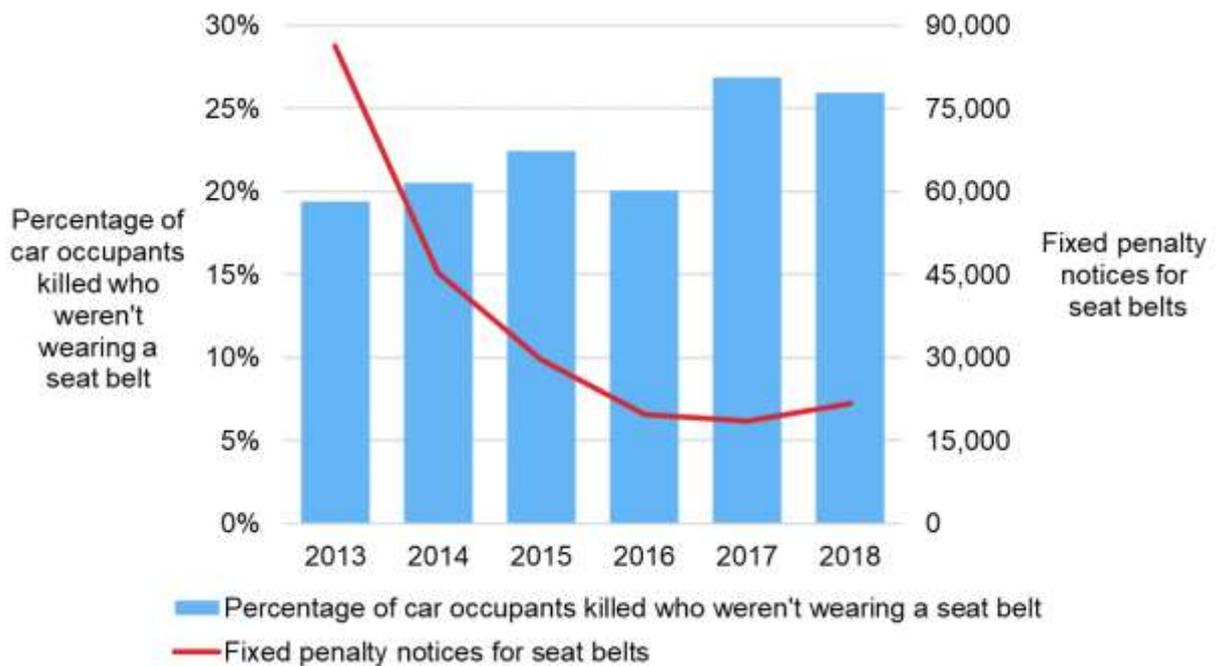
Source: Department for Transport

Seat belts

There is an upward trend in car occupants killed who aren't wearing a seat belt. In 2013, just under 20 percent of car occupants killed in collisions were found to have not been wearing a seat belt at the time of the collision.¹⁴ By 2018, this figure had risen to just under 26 percent. Over the same period, the number of fixed penalty notices issued for not wearing a seat belt reduced by 75 percent, from approximately 86,300 to about 21,600.

¹⁴ [Road accidents and safety statistics](#), Department for Transport, 2020.

Figure 8: Percentage of car occupants killed who weren't wearing a seat belt, and the number of fixed penalty notices issued for seat belts in England and Wales, 2013 to 2018



Source: Department for Transport

Relationship between enforcement and road death

Many who we spoke with believed that the marked reduction in enforcement activity had a practical effect on the behaviour of drivers. They told us that as the visibility of road traffic police had reduced, so had the “fear of being caught”, and this in turn had led to an increase in offending.

This was further illustrated by the [RAC Report on Motoring 2018](#). The Foundation reported that 68 percent of people who took part in its survey believed there were “not enough police on the road to enforce driving laws”, and 28 percent believed that it “was not very likely that they would get caught if they broke most motoring laws.

A year later, in its [2019 report](#), the Foundation identified that one in five drivers thought that they had driven while over the alcohol limit in the previous 12 months.

These are not positive illustrations of an effective approach to enforcement.

Operation Snap

One cost-effective way in which forces can engage with the public and deal with road traffic offences is the use of video footage recorded on dashcams and helmet cameras. Operation Snap was initially developed by forces in Wales and the approach has now been adopted by many English forces. It enables the public to upload footage of road traffic offences that may provide evidence for prosecutions or lead to other police action.

The project has been recognised by the Department for Transport as best practice, and we agree. If implemented well, the scheme has the potential to significantly reduce the bureaucracy associated with the file preparation process for the police, as well as building good relationships with the public.

However, once again, we found examples of forces that had adopted the scheme without enough consideration of potential demand and the resources needed to meet it. In some forces, support functions were overwhelmed by the number of submissions. This resulted in some being unable to meet the legal requirement to notify registered keepers of vehicles of potential prosecutions (usually, if they aren't notified within 14 days, they can't be convicted of the offence). In others, the process for submitting footage was difficult and there was little or no contact with the people who had been motivated enough to provide it.

There are obvious benefits to the scheme, but it must be properly resourced and there should be clarity on how and when submitted footage will be used.

Recommendation 9

With immediate effect, in forces where Operation Snap (the provision of digital video footage by the public) has been adopted, chief constables should make sure that it has enough resources and process to support its efficient and effective use.

How are motorways policed?

In England and Wales, the strategic road network is made up of motorways and the most significant trunk or 'A' roads. They are administered by highways agencies – [Highways England](#), [North and Mid Wales Trunk Road Agent](#), and [South Wales Trunk Road Agent](#). These are responsible for operating, maintaining and improving the network. Policing the network remains the responsibility of the local force that a stretch of road or motorway runs through.

We found that the police presence on the strategic road network, and in particular on motorways, varies considerably. In some forces there is an evident commitment to what was clearly viewed as a central role for the police. However, other forces relied almost entirely on patrols provided by the highways agencies to offer any visible presence. To make matters worse, the engagement and support given by those forces to agency patrols can only be described as poor.

Highways agency traffic officers

Each highways agency is also responsible for providing highways agency traffic officers. Highways traffic officers play a significant role in ensuring that traffic on the strategic road network flows efficiently and that road users are safe. They have some statutory powers such as the ability to stop and direct traffic; to close lanes and carriageways; and to provide mobile and temporary road closures. However, these powers aren't comparable to the wide-ranging ones of police officers. For example, highways traffic officers aren't empowered to stop vehicles for road traffic offences or to conduct searches of people or vehicles.

When they were first introduced, highways traffic officers often worked alongside police officers taking on tasks that didn't require the full range of police powers. They were also able to provide additional visibility and reassurance on the road network. And, in some force areas, this remains the case.

Central Motorway Police Group

The [Central Motorway Police Group](#) is made up of officers and staff from West Midlands Police and Staffordshire Police. It is a significant commitment, but one that is obviously supported by strategic leaders. One chief officer was clear that the policing of the motorways was “a core function of the police not only in terms of reducing casualties and improving driving standards but also the ability to target serious organised crime”.

We spoke to officers and staff from the group, as well as those from Highways England. We found them to be enthusiastic about their role. Importantly, they clearly understand the roles and responsibilities of each agency and how they can support each other.

Conversely, in another force a decision had been taken some years ago that the police would no longer routinely patrol the section of motorway that ran through its force area. As a result, police presence is restricted to attending incidents. Communication between the force and the relevant highways agency is limited to attendance at meetings by senior representatives, and there is little interaction at the operational level. For example, officers from both agencies attending the same incident on the motorway were unable to communicate with each other using the radio equipment they had been issued. Instead, they had to rely on sharing mobile telephone numbers.

Intelligence sharing

In all the forces we visited, we found that the sharing of intelligence between the police and highways agencies could be improved. In some, good working relationships meant that some limited tasking took place. In others, there was no recognition that agencies and forces were able to help each other. For example, in one force area, footage from the front and rear dashcams in highways agency vehicles was rarely, if ever, requested by the police.

Furthermore, there was little appetite among senior police officers in any force we spoke to for engaging in a formal information sharing agreement, even with appropriate safeguards. In our view this is a missed opportunity.

Denying criminals the use of the road

The NPCC strategy [Policing our Roads Together](#) is clear about the need to detect and disrupt criminals who use the road. In doing so it is supportive of other government and police strategies such as the [Serious and Organised Crime Strategy](#). For example, effective policing of the motorways would complement the [county lines](#) operations, which target organised drug trafficking from cities to new rural markets.

It is clear to us that targeting criminals as they use the road network and disrupting their activity is an effective problem-solving approach. Often these are the individuals

who drive dangerously without regard to the risk and harm that they cause other road users.

It is equally apparent that a visible police presence – or lack of it, on some parts of the motorway network – won't be lost on those engaged in serious criminal activities. An unintended (or accepted) consequence of police forces withdrawing from the motorway network is that criminals haven't been denied the use of those particular roads.

Recommendation 10

With immediate effect, chief constables should satisfy themselves that the resources allocated to policing the strategic road network within their force areas are sufficient. As part of that process they should make sure that their force has effective partnership arrangements including appropriate intelligence sharing agreements with relevant highways agencies.

How well are investigations into fatal and serious injury collisions resourced?

Any incident that results in loss of life or serious injury presents many difficulties and demands for those who are responsible for its investigation. These include initial scene preservation and the gathering of evidence in all its forms, file preparation, and engagement with the criminal justice system. At the same time, the many and varied needs and expectations of victims and their families need to be met in a timely and sensitive manner.

In most instances of homicide, these difficulties are the responsibility of major incident teams, comprised predominantly of detective officers and staff. The size and workload of these teams will, understandably, vary dependent upon the force and individual cases. However, homicide investigations should be conducted to a [nationally agreed standard](#) which has clearly identified roles such as: exhibit officer; disclosure officer; family liaison officer; and investigating officer. We found that the arrangements for investigating road deaths are strikingly different, even when the death was the result of a driving offence.

Despite many forces establishing serious collision investigation teams, many fatal road traffic collision investigations are often carried out by one officer, rather than a team of officers. Consequently, we found that many such officers are working at capacity.

Serious collision investigators

The College of Policing's [Authorised Professional Practice \(APP\) document for road policing](#) categorises types of fatal road collisions, to help identify the level of resources that may be required for a particular investigation. There are five categories:

- **Category A+** – assessed as likely homicide investigation or where the complexity requires the deployment of a nationally registered senior investigating officer.

- **Category A** – confirmed fatality – one or more vehicles failed to stop and/or drivers decamped or other factors are present that significantly increase the complexity of the investigation.
- **Category B** – confirmed fatality – all drivers/riders are known or can be immediately identified.
- **Category C** – confirmed fatality – driver/rider only killed, no third-party involvement; inquest only.
- **Category D** – confirmed fatality – driver/rider only killed, death due to natural causes, may involve a third party; no inquest necessary.

While each case should be treated on its own merits, it is worth noting that only in cases that are considered a possible homicide is there a requirement to deploy a nationally registered senior investigating officer. Most fatal collision investigations will be carried out by individual serious collision investigators, and they must do this to a high standard.

The Professionalising Investigation Programme

The [Professionalising Investigation Programme](#) (PIP) was introduced in 2003. It is intended to provide “a structured and consistent development and maintenance programme for investigative skills ... at all levels in the police service and in other sectors of law enforcement.”¹⁵

The purpose of the programme is to provide a national standard of accreditation for investigators. It does this through a programme of examination, training, and workplace assessment.

The PIP levels are:

- PIP 1 – priority and volume crime investigations;
- PIP 2 – serious and complex investigations;
- PIP 3 – major investigations; and
- PIP 4 – strategic management of highly complex investigations.

The programme policy correctly identifies that “failure to comply with this policy could affect the perception and ability of law enforcement to carry out its function professionally, ethically and effectively in respect of priority and volume, serious and complex, and major crime investigations”. The document also identifies adoption of the policy as “best practice across law enforcement”.

In setting out the categories of investigation at each level of accreditation, the policy recognises that there “is no available definition of what constitutes a serious or complex investigation”. We have no doubt that the investigation of fatal collisions falls into that category. Some forces recognise this; they require their serious collision investigators to be accredited to the PIP 2 level. But this isn’t universal, and we think it should be.

¹⁵ [Professionalising Investigations Programme: Programme policy 2017](#), College of Policing, 2017, p3.

Until 2018, PIP 2 reflected the broad range of skills that investigators need in order to be recognised as detectives. While many of these skills were also required by collision investigators, some – such as the investigation of sexual offences – were not. As a result, most PIP 2 investigators are detective officers.

Previously, investigators who wished to complete the PIP 2 process had to sit an examination as well as completing a minimum six-month work place assessment carried out by an identified tutor. For a roads policing officer, this would normally have meant carrying out a period of attachment with their force's criminal investigation department.

Some forces decided that this wasn't an economical use of resources and simply decided that collision investigators wouldn't be required to attain the PIP 2 standard. Investigators told us that the lack of accreditation undermined their credibility in the eyes of some bereaved families and, importantly, when giving evidence in court. Other forces, having recognised the importance of investigator accreditation, chose to staff their serious collision investigation units exclusively with detective officers who had previously attained PIP 2 accreditation. Generally, this worked well in terms of leading to higher quality collision investigations. But its consequence was that experienced roads policing officers were often prevented from developing their investigation skills and careers. Interviewees also pointed out that, while detectives may be experienced investigators, they sometimes have little knowledge of roads policing legislation.

Unfortunately, in all the forces that we inspected managers and staff – including those in training roles – were unaware of the changes that had been made to PIP that make it more accessible for all investigators.

In October 2018, the College of Policing launched revised training programmes for PIP 1 and PIP 2 investigators. We were told that these new programmes are focused on “core investigative skills”. PIP 2 became a shorter programme with the intention of developing the skills that are needed by those carrying out serious and complex investigations. Many of the elements of the previous programme, which were focussed on investigating specific types of crime have been removed.

This development has gone part way to addressing a recommendation from an earlier inspection. In 2015, HMIC (now HMICFRS) and HMCPSI published a report on a [joint inspection of the investigation and prosecution of fatal road traffic incidents](#). That report contained recommendations that the College of Policing should include “road death” within PIP and “make the training programme accessible and relevant to all road death investigators”. The College was also asked to:

develop and promote:

- an accreditation process for all road death investigators; and
- national training standards for all road death investigation personnel.

We recognise that the College has made progress in making the PIP 2 programme accessible and relevant to all investigators. However, it needs to go further in ensuring that appropriate training is available for serious collision investigators.

The way that the programme is now structured allows for the development of additional modules that allow for the teaching of specialist knowledge for specific investigation types. Completion of PIP 2 is a prerequisite for access to these modules. However, at the time of our inspection, the additional module for collision investigators wasn't in place. As a result, the training provision for serious collision investigators still doesn't adequately reflect the skills and responsibilities that are required for this role. We understand that the College is working to address this.

In addition, the College should also make sure that the national training standards and certification that were called for in 2015 are put in place.

Recommendation 11

By 1 August 2021, the College of Policing should include a serious collision investigation module for completion along with the Professionalising Investigation Programme. This should include:

- minimum national training standards; and
- certification for all serious collision investigators.

Chief constables should make sure that all serious collision investigators in their force are then trained to those standards.

Area for improvement

The awareness and understanding of the changes in the Professionalising Investigation Programme within police forces is an area for improvement.

Family liaison officers

The primary purpose of a family liaison officer (FLO) is to gather evidence and information from the victim's family. They are a vital part of an investigative team. The FLO also provides support and information, in a sensitive and compassionate manner, securing the confidence and trust of families and ensuring that they are given timely information in accordance with the needs of the investigation.

The role can be extremely taxing. It is important that officers' welfare, including their workload, is continually monitored. Unfortunately, once again, we found that the approach some forces took to this important aspect of road death investigation fell short of what should be expected.

In homicide teams, FLO is a standalone role. However, we found several examples of serious collision investigators 'double hatting' and carrying out the family liaison role. We were pleased to find in one force that a specific roads policing FLO team had been created, clearly separating the role of investigator from that of the FLO. Officers were highly supportive of the arrangement.

The deployment of FLOs in any force is managed by family liaison co-ordinators. It is their job to make sure that FLOs aren't repeatedly deployed or carry an excessive

number of cases, which may have a detrimental effect on both their health and the service they provide to families.

In most forces that we visited, the number of roads policing FLOs wasn't enough to meet the demand. This meant that they were responsible for far more cases than the FLOs in homicide investigation teams. One officer told us that when they volunteered for the role, they were told that they shouldn't be expected to deal with more than three cases simultaneously, but in fact it wasn't unusual for them to be dealing with as many as eight families at any one time.

In other forces, an FLO told us that supervisors still expected them to carry out a certain level of enforcement activity while dealing with bereaved families.

In most forces, there was a good level of welfare support given to FLOs and other roads policing officers exposed to traumatic incidents. This included with mandatory requirements that officers attend counselling sessions to make sure that they receive appropriate support. Disappointingly, we also found examples where officers complained of not receiving any support or, in the case of one officer, simply completing an annual self-assessment declaring themselves fit to continue in the role.

Once again, we find ourselves returning to a subject that was identified in the [2015 joint inspection](#). That report identified themes that are depressingly familiar: the lack of recognition of the pressures of FLO deployments and insufficient welfare support.

Recommendation 12

With immediate effect, chief constables should make sure that appropriate welfare support is provided to specialist investigators and family liaison officers involved in the investigation of fatal road traffic collisions.

Engagement with road safety partners and the public

In this section we assess:

- How well do the police work with road safety partners?
- How effectively do police forces work with other agencies?
- How well do the police engage with the public?
- Do forces adequately identify those at increased risk?

Main finding: A lack of co-ordination hinders effective engagement with partners and the public

Police and partner agencies don't have a shared understanding of road safety issues. This inhibits effective operational activity both nationally and locally. There was also a lack of evaluation of what road safety activities work. This can prevent meaningful engagement taking place with identified vulnerable groups, such as young drivers. More effective road safety partnerships use analysis and shared information to make roads safer.

Road safety partnerships

The police work with partner agencies in road safety partnerships. These are intended to co-ordinate the work and bring together resources to make roads safer and reduce the number of people who are killed or seriously injured.

Partner agencies include local authorities, highways agencies and mayoral authorities. There is no set membership of road safety partnerships, and these will vary across the country as areas have different issues to address. For example, some areas may not have a motorway running through, so wouldn't include a highways agency in their partnership. Some road safety partnerships are led by the police while others are led by other agencies. Also, the names of partnerships vary to reflect the specific function that a partnership carries out in an area.

Whatever a partnership is called, and whichever organisation is leading it, we would expect to see the partnership operate with a shared strategy and objectives. This should lead to focussed activity to make roads safer.

How well do the police work with road safety partners?

We found that the roles and responsibilities for road safety weren't always clear across forces and partners. In some areas, partners told us that they were unaware of what police roles and objectives were. In others, meetings with partners at a senior level didn't result in anything meaningful. One chief officer told us that "there is no lack of discourse but this did not lead to focused activity".

We found better communication and co-ordination in those areas where forces and partners had a shared road safety strategy. In our view, this led to a better understanding of the capability and capacity of the different agencies and provided a more focussed approach to reducing road casualties. We have previously identified the close working relationship between the MPS and TfL (see above, 'Strategic partnerships'). The force provided us with numerous examples of how it worked closely with TfL in support of its [Vision Zero](#) strategy. Once again, we recognise that the relationship with TfL is, in many ways, unique, but we also found a similar approach to partnership working in a smaller force. In this case, the force and the local authority had an agreed local transport plan that included a target to reduce road casualties with both organisations working closely to achieve it.

Sharing information with partners

The data sharing arrangements with partners were found to vary across forces. In some forces we found effective working relationships for sharing information. In other areas, we were told by partners that they provide information and data to the police, but this isn't reciprocated.

There is also a perception that a large amount of data is provided to the police, with little, if any, use made of it by the force. This again supports our view that some forces don't have structured and effective capability to collect, analyse and disseminate the information they possess for roads policing (see above, 'Strategic partnerships').

Consequently, there are intelligence gaps and a lack of understanding of what the data means. Partnership activity is therefore not as effective as it could be if data was shared and analysed in such a way that informed how best to work to reduce road deaths and injuries.

Engineering to reduce road deaths

The identification of collision hotspots and the appropriate engineering responses, such as new road layouts, lighting, or signage is an important part of improving road safety.

Highways agencies and local authorities are responsible for designing new road layouts or altering existing ones. However, the police can contribute to the safety of these road environments by sharing collision data and professional opinion. In all the forces that we visited, we found that the police contribution to a shared problem-solving approach was greatly appreciated by partners from all agencies.

However, concern was raised that, in some cases, forces have withdrawn from long-standing data sharing arrangements. As a result, local authorities didn't know

about emerging patterns of non-injury accidents that could have been used to predict the potential for more serious collisions.

Earlier in this report, we highlighted the importance of forces ensuring that they have enough analytical capability to identify risks and threats on the road network within their force areas and to determine appropriate tactics to reduce them (see above, 'Analysis, evaluation and sharing best practice'). It is equally important that, having identified those risks and threats, they share them efficiently with partners.

Area for improvement

The efficient and effective exchange of all collision data with other relevant bodies is an area for improvement.

How effectively do police forces work with other agencies?

What multi-agency enforcement operations take place?

In addition to working with local partners, the police work with other agencies that have enforcement powers. Organisations such as the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency and Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs both have powers to examine vehicles and prosecute drivers and owners.

Co-ordinated operations are an effective way to target those who present a risk to road safety, particularly those vehicles that are being used in a dangerous condition. By working together, agencies can maximise opportunities for improving road safety. Focusing on enforcement against offenders who present a high risk is an effective problem-solving technique.

We found several positive examples of the police working well with other agencies. In one force, there were 33 such operations in a three-month period. In a single operation 40 vehicles were stopped: 36 had serious defects, and 6 were seized.

However, it was disappointing that this type of activity wasn't as evident in all the forces that we visited. And, where it was, we were told that joint operations are getting smaller and less frequent due to a lack of police resources. And we were also told of operations being cancelled at short notice due to officers being withdrawn or diverted elsewhere. An assistant chief constable told us: "there isn't the scope to release them from other work to multi-agency operations". Unsurprisingly, this led to frustration on the part of partners who had already committed their own staff.

Engagement with the public

Police publicity and enforcement campaigns are an important way of engaging with road users. They help the police and partners educate the public about the behaviours that cause road collisions, especially the fatal four, and the potential consequences should they be caught breaking the law. We hoped to find forces using campaigns effectively to enable the public to make better decisions when they use the road.

National campaigns

As we have set out (see above, 'National campaigns and sharing of best practice'), the NRPOI team is responsible for co-ordinating the NPCC roads policing campaigns calendar. And as we have also set out previously, the level of participation in these campaigns varies from force to force.

In 2019, the NPCC carried out a strategic review of roads policing in England and Wales. The review, which is unpublished, concluded that participants were suffering from what it described as "campaign fatigue". It identified that police and other agency road safety campaigns are often out of step with each other, with unconnected campaigns running at the same time or campaigns with the same theme being carried out at different times of the year. This lack of co-ordination results in a lack of participation by forces, and ineffective engagement with the public.

We had practical experience of this. Our inspection of one force coincided with a national road safety campaign carried out by a national organisation. We asked officers and staff, including specialist roads policing staff, if they were aware of the campaign. The majority were completely unaware, and the force had no planned activity to support it.

The NPCC review recognised these issues and included among its recommendations an undertaking that "NPCC Roads Policing should explore opportunities for greater strategic collaboration with other key stakeholders on 'fatal 4' campaigns".¹⁶ We agree.

Local engagement

In several forces, we were pleased to find good engagement initiatives that were supported by clear communication plans. The majority of these were schemes or projects that had been identified locally, recognised as being good practice and then supported by the force.

Often, these schemes used a variety of methods to engage with the public including social media, roadside signage, newsletters, and local volunteers. In one force junior officers had secured funding for the refurbishment of a double-decker bus that could be used at public events. We commend all these initiatives.

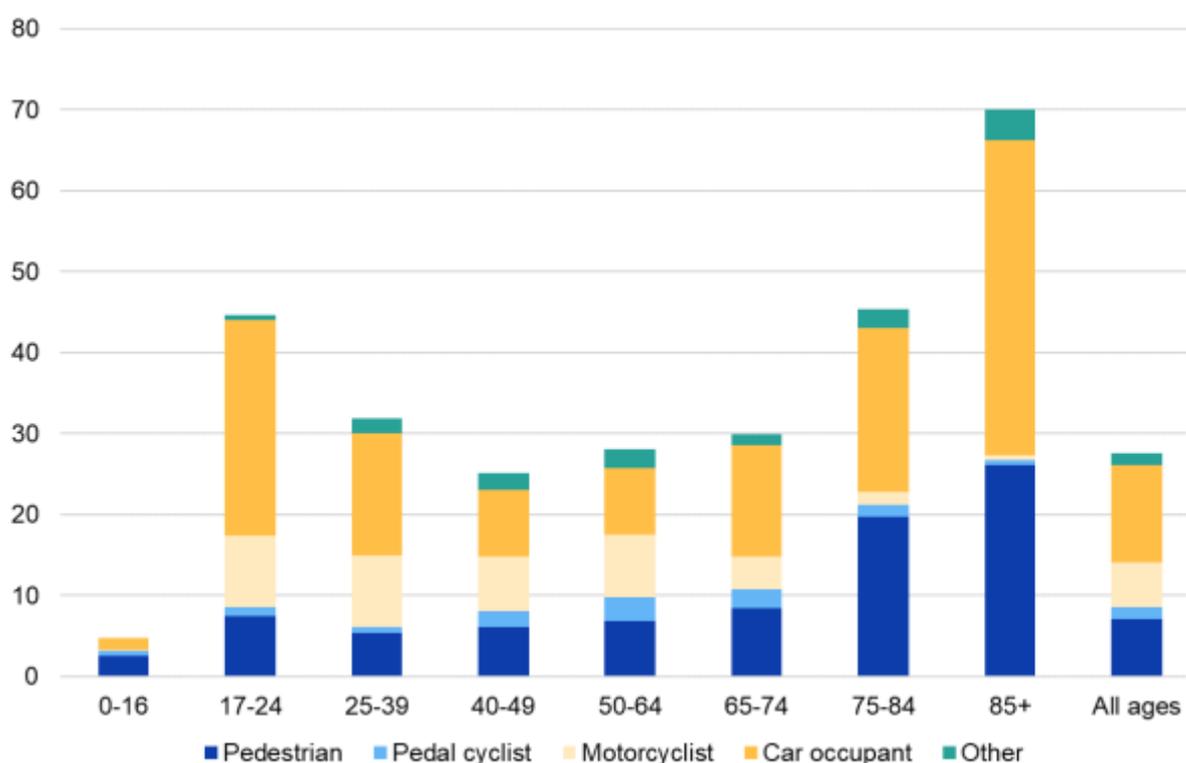
In all the forces we inspected we found examples of [community speedwatch](#) schemes. These are a good way for forces to engage with local communities. However, the degree to which they were supported once again varied between forces. In one force, there were over 100 local volunteers who helped with the scheme. However, another force had little involvement in the scheme that ran in their area as it was managed by the fire service. The same force didn't have any communication plans to inform how it intended to engage with the public in relation to road safety. Any campaigns were described as "ad hoc" with no evaluation as to their effectiveness.

¹⁶ *NPCC Roads Policing Strategic Review*, National Police Chiefs' Council, 2019, unpublished.

Engaging with those most at risk

The obvious groups of road users that police and partners should be engaging with are those that are statistically at the highest risk of being involved in collisions. Figure 9 shows the fatality rate among different age groups, split by road user type. It illustrates that people over the age of 85 have the highest fatality rate of all age groups and are more likely to be killed on the roads as a pedestrian. Those in the 17 to 24-year-old age group are more likely to be killed as a car occupant. Data from the Department for Transport also shows that motorcycle users account for just 0.8 percent of vehicular traffic, but make up 26 percent of all those killed or seriously injured.

Figure 9: Fatality rate per one million population, by age band and road user, in Great Britain – 2018



Source: Department for Transport

Some forces have recognised these high-risk groups and ensured that they have targeted them with specific initiatives aimed at positively affecting driving behaviours. These initiatives include:

- [Close Pass](#) and [Exchanging Places](#) – two projects aimed at improving the safety of cyclists;
- [Operation Tramlane](#) – a partnership initiative with Highways England using HGV tractor units to help improve driver behaviour on the strategic road network; and
- several forces have used virtual-reality headsets to educate young drivers in the realities of traffic collisions.

In those forces with a more effective approach to roads policing this kind of activity formed part of the force's strategy and tactical plans. Unfortunately, in some forces, notably those without clear road safety strategies, the promotion of schemes like these was left to enthusiastic individual officers. We concluded that – without the commitment of these individual officers – it was unlikely that activity would take place.

Training

In this section we assess:

- What training do officers get in roads policing?
- How well are newly appointed roads policing officers trained?
- How effectively are specialist roads policing officers supported?

Main finding: Roads policing training should be standardised and accredited

There is no accredited national training programme for roads policing officers. The College of Policing has a range of modules, but they aren't mandatory, and forces have developed their own approaches. As a result, there is inconsistency in how, when, and to what level officers are trained. The continued professional development of officers is inconsistent and insufficient. This has led to skills gaps in some forces such as the inability to routinely deal with HGVs, or to manage incidents on the strategic road network. Welfare support for roads policing officers is also inconsistent.

The College of Policing

The [College of Policing](#) is the professional body for everyone who works for the police service in England and Wales. One of the functions of the College is to “set educational requirements to assure the public of the quality and consistency of policing skills”.

The College owns and maintains the [National Policing Curriculum](#). The curriculum comprises the national learning standards for learning and development within the police service.

In addition, the College is responsible for [APP](#), which is described by the College as “the official source of professional practice on policing”. Police officers and staff are expected to have regard to APP in discharging their responsibilities.

As part of the National Policing Curriculum, the College sets out the recommended content for student officer roads policing training under nine headings:

- introduction to policing the roads;
- policing the roads in the community;
- disrupting criminality and countering terrorism;
- vehicles and related offences;
- driver responsibilities and related offences;

- dealing with roads-related incidents and minor collisions;
- roads-related offences and methods of disposal;
- recognising and responding to a critical incident; and
- drink and drug driving.

What training do officers get in roads policing?

Student officers

We have previously highlighted what some senior officers described as a “whole-force” approach to roads policing (see above, ‘Shared responsibilities’). For this to happen, all officers, including those embarking on their police careers, need to be confident in their knowledge of road traffic legislation. However, throughout our inspection we were repeatedly told that the training in roads policing that student officers receive is extremely limited.

At the time of our inspection, student officers received 18 weeks of classroom-based training as part of the [Initial Police Learning and Development Programme](#). Although the College sets ‘learning outcomes’ under the nine headings, it can’t instruct forces to follow its guidance or set the amount of time allocated for each subject. This is the responsibility of individual forces. We were told that in most forces, roads policing training is limited to just one week. In some forces it could be even less.

In our opinion, it is very unlikely that, in such a short time, forces can provide recruits with the level of learning that the College has deemed necessary. In addition, in some of the forces that we inspected, we found that there was no opportunity for student officers to carry out attachments to roads policing units. All of this undermines the importance of roads policing in the mindset of officers and leaves many of them unprepared for their responsibilities once qualified.

Roads policing officers

The transition from a general policing role to a specialist one requires an increase in relevant skills and knowledge. When officers become – for example – detectives, firearms officers or dog handlers, they undergo extensive training and assessment to acquire formal qualifications and their competency is assessed. These qualifications are often set down in APP and have strict assessment criteria such as the [PIP](#) (see above, ‘How well are investigations into fatal and serious injury collisions resourced?’).

We believe that it would be reasonable to expect similar requirements for officers who specialise in roads policing, who require extensive training in road traffic legislation, collision investigation, and advanced driving.

However, in the absence of a national standard for the skills and qualifications required for roads policing officers, forces are establishing their own. And these can vary considerably.

For example, in one force newly appointed roads policing officers were required to attend a three-week course. In addition to road traffic legislation the course also included inputs on: health and safety issues such as ‘fast road’ training (that is, the ability to operate safely on motorways and other trunk roads); and the use of

technical equipment. Another force had implemented development portfolios for new roads policing officers to complete.

However, in another force, there had been no specific roads policing training for six years. The force had recognised this and had developed its own non-accredited training programme. In forces like this we found an over-reliance on what was described as 'on the job training' in place of formal courses or learning provision. This means officers learning from colleagues in the workplace, often while attending real-life incidents. This assumes that those imparting the experience are themselves suitably skilled in the subject matter and can provide effective training in a structured manner. Unfortunately, this isn't always the case. The situation is unacceptable and has the potential to leave both officers and forces vulnerable to criticism.

Recommendation 13

By 1 April 2021, the College of Policing and the National Police Chiefs' Council should establish role profiles for defined functions within roads policing and identify the required skills and capabilities.

Conclusion

In 2018, 1,624 people were killed and a further 23,931 suffered serious – often life-changing – injuries as a result of road traffic collisions in England and Wales. The number of those killed on the roads had been in steady decline for over 30 years. But in 2013, that trend changed, and began to show a gradual increase.

This change coincided with a cut of around 34 percent (or £120m) in the annual amount that police forces spent on roads policing. This has resulted in a drop in the number of dedicated roads policing officers. These reductions are reflected in the substantial decrease in police enforcement activity. In particular, the targeting of those offences that are known to cause road deaths such as the fatal four: drink and drug driving; the non-wearing of seat belts; excess speed and driving whilst distracted, for example, mobile phones.

Roads policing and the contribution that it makes to overall road safety is a central function of the police. However, we found that its importance has diminished – fewer than half of police and crime plans listed roads policing or road safety as a priority. There is an absence of effective strategies, both nationally and locally, resulting in an approach that is inconsistent and, in some forces, inadequate.

In addition, to the tragic loss of lives, the financial cost of all road traffic collisions (including those that go unreported) is estimated to be around £36 billion per year. In one year alone, the estimated cost of motorway closures was £1 billion. But some forces are failing to recognise their part in making the road network safe and efficient; and how best to work with partner agencies that have a shared responsibility for road safety.

We identified some good initiatives, but too often the effect of these was unclear due to a lack of analysis and evaluation. And when it was identified, good practice wasn't shared across forces in an effective manner. Similarly, the support provided to national road safety campaigns wasn't consistent, which adversely affected their effectiveness. Too often we found officers that hadn't been given the appropriate training and support to allow them to carry out a critical role.

There is a clear, and pressing, need for government, police and crime commissioners, chief officers, and the College of Policing to recognise the importance of roads policing in reducing death on the roads. To enable this, we urge the government to include roads policing within the Strategic Policing Requirement.

We make 13 recommendations to improve the effectiveness of roads policing in England and Wales. In doing so, we are clear, roads policing is not optional.

Annex A: Terms of reference

Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) will undertake an inspection of the effectiveness and efficiency of the police service's ability to provide roads policing capability. HMICFRS will inspect one example of a collaboration between forces as well as a further five individual force areas. The inspection will focus on five areas: strategy; structure; partnerships; enforcement; and prevention. It will seek to identify how police forces, with partner agencies, reduce harm to road users across the road network in England and Wales.

This inspection will consider:

- How well understood and applied are national and local police strategies for roads policing?
- To what degree do police forces have a co-ordinated, and well-resourced structure for policing the road network? This will include the ability to allocate appropriate investigative and enforcement resources at a national, regional and local level.
- How well understood are the roles and responsibilities of police forces and partner agencies? This will include how effective police forces are at engaging with the public, and partners, to reduce casualties on the road network.
- How, and to what degree, do police forces develop and disseminate learning products to enable effective first response as well as specialist capabilities?

This inspection will be conducted by HMICFRS in accordance with the Police Act 1996, Schedule 4A, paragraph 6.

Annex B: Forces inspected

Devon and Cornwall Police

Dorset Police

Humberside Police

The Metropolitan Police Service

Staffordshire Police

South Wales Police

West Midlands Police

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