

The Rt Hon Grant Shapps, MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for Transport  
Great Minster House  
33 Horseferry Road  
London  
SW1P 4DR

14 October 2021

Dear Secretary of State,

**Re: Department for Transport (DfT) Road Safety Statement**

The Association of Consumer Support Organisations (ACSO) represents the interests of consumers in the civil justice system, with a membership including a number of road-safety groups and other bodies who act on behalf of vulnerable road users (VRUs) such as cyclists, motorcyclists, horse riders and pedestrians.

The upcoming Department for Transport (DfT) Road Safety Statement is therefore of direct relevance to our work helping to ensure the UK's roads are safe for all who use them, but especially VRUs, who are disproportionately represented in statistics on road-traffic casualties.

Though road safety has improved, with more than 6,000 road deaths in 1979 and fewer than 2,000 in 2020, there is still a long way to go to ensure VRUs are safe on our roads.<sup>1</sup> As Barry Sheerman MP, Chair of The Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety (PACTS) notes, "some take [this reduction] as 'job done'", however this level of death is "still an unacceptable toll for using the road".<sup>2</sup> In fact, in 2020 almost one in four (23 per cent) deaths were pedestrians and of all the reported road casualties, more than one in three (38 per cent) were VRUs.<sup>3</sup>

The pandemic brought about significant transportation modal shifts, with 2020 seeing a 46 per cent annual increase in the number of cyclists as well as the greatest percentage decrease in their casualty rates (34 per cent) compared to all other road users.<sup>4</sup>

However, personal car use is recovering fast. A recent McKinsey & Company survey indicated that one in three consumers now value access to a car more than they did before the pandemic, not least as they are less likely to contract Covid-19 compared to traveling on public transport.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, as the government continues to encourage healthier modes of

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<sup>1</sup> PACTS, '[What Kills Most On The Roads?](#)', December 2020, p.5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.5.

<sup>3</sup> Department for Transport, '[Reported road casualties Great Britain, annual report: 2020](#)', 30 September 2021, p.1

<sup>4</sup> Department for Transport, '[Reported road casualties in Great Britain: Provisional results 2020](#)', 24 June 2021, p.1.

<sup>5</sup> McKinsey & Company, '[Car buying is on again, and mobility is picking up](#)', 27 August 2021, p.1

travelling, namely walking and cycling, there is a risk of an increase in the numbers of VRU casualties. To avoid such an outcome, long-term infrastructure changes and investment will be needed to ensure improved bike lanes, new footpaths, and more pedestrian crossings.

Alongside this, to ensure the safety of all road users, including those in motor vehicles, more action is required to protect the most vulnerable. This includes improved crash investigation, effective road policing, penalties and sentencing that might be regarded as commensurate with the offences. In addition, for the most dangerous drivers on the roads who are caught repeatedly offending and causing significant injury and harm, a system that seeks to remove them by way of a lifetime ban should be considered.

It is also imperative that the recent changes to the Highway Code are followed by a public-education campaign. Without increased awareness, the many welcome changes are likely to go unnoticed. IAM RoadSmart has warned of possible confusion to road users and said that everyone needs to be aware that the rules will apply for the foreseeable future.<sup>6</sup> As Rebecca Ashton, Head of Policy at IAM RoadSmart, further notes, “without a well-funded education programme, we have concerns that the changes could increase conflict and potentially reduce the safety of the VRUs the rule changes are intended to protect”.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the DfT needs to be realistic about the impact of changing a seldom-read document and the effect it will have on the behaviour and safety of road users.

While we welcome the [‘Safe Roads for All’](#) report, we believe further calls for action could be made. Despite admirable aims, its methods for achieving these are unclear. For example, the report advocates the monitoring of driver drowsiness yet gives no explanation of how this should be done. Alongside this, it recommends an ambitious target of reducing the number of UK deaths and serious injuries by 50 per cent between 2020 and 2030. While once again welcome, the backdrop to this is that deaths and casualties in the past decade have remained largely stagnant and so more detail on how such ambitions could be achieved would be beneficial. More generally, the report does not focus on VRUs as much as many will have hoped and we hope this is not reflected in the upcoming road safety statement.<sup>8</sup>

The DfT’s 2019 Road Safety Statement outlined its two-year plan to improve the safety of Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) and to reduce the number of HGV collisions with VRUs, predominantly cyclists and pedestrians.<sup>9</sup> However, data from The Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety (PACTS) published this year reveals that HGVs are the second-most dangerous vehicle type for other road users per mile travelled and were involved in the second-highest number of collisions in which pedestrians were killed.<sup>10</sup>

The 2019 Road Safety Statement also outlined the DfT’s intention to work with the motorcycle industry to explore how to encourage the use of protective clothing and furthermore explore the scope for new protective equipment for VRUs that can reduce post-crash collision

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<sup>6</sup> Fleet World, [‘Highway Code changes to create new ‘hierarchy of road users’](#), August 2021, p.1

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*, p.1.

<sup>8</sup> Safe Roads for All, [‘Safe Roads for All’](#), August 2021.

<sup>9</sup> Department for Transport, [‘Road Safety Statement 2019’](#), July 2019, p.36.

<sup>10</sup> PACTS, [‘What Kills Most On The Roads?’](#), December 2020, p.14.

severity.<sup>11</sup> However, this fails to recognise that motorcyclists are predominantly killed by those in cars. Indeed, more cars are involved in collisions in which motorcyclists are killed than any other single vehicle type.<sup>12</sup>

Within the 2019 Road Safety Statement, there were a total of 74 ‘actions’, with only two directly referring to VRUs.<sup>13</sup> With the increase in cycling, the continuing public health and climate campaigns urging healthier forms of transport and a return to overall levels of road traffic since the height of the pandemic, we would urge you to use this year’s Road Safety Statement to place much more of an emphasis on VRUs.

With thanks.

Yours sincerely,

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<sup>11</sup> Department for Transport, [‘Road Safety Statement 2019’](#), July 2019, p. 67.

<sup>12</sup> PACTS, [‘What Kills Most On The Roads?’](#), December 2020, p.18.

<sup>13</sup> Department for Transport, [‘Road Safety Statement 2019’](#), July 2019, p. 67.