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Oxford
Policing
Policy
Forum

Is roads policing
taken seriously
enough?

Report of the twelfth Oxford Policing Policy Forum
6 December 2012

All Souls College,
Oxford

POLICING POLICY FORUM

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GUEST LIST

6th December 2012

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Mr Tony Armstrong	Chief Executive	Living Streets
Ms Naomi Baster	Policy and Research Officer	PACTS
Mr Mark Bates	Assistant Chief Constable	Lancashire Constabulary
Mr Geoffrey Charles Biddulph	Public Order Unit (Head, Road Crime Section)	Home Office
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Superintendent Chris Brown	Head of Roads Policing	Hampshire Constabulary & Thames Valley Police Joint Operations Unit
Mr Craig Carey-Clinch	Managing Director	Rowan Public Affairs Ltd
Mr Peter Cleary	Safety Manager and the Chief Fire Officers Association's South East lead for Road Safety	Oxfordshire County Council Fire & Rescue Service
Mr Kevin Clinton	Head of Road Safety	ROSPA
Ms Anna Collins	Observer/supportive capacity	Living Streets
Mr Chris Hunt Cooke	Chairman	Magistrates Association Road Traffic Committee
Dr Claire Corbett	Deputy Director Criminal Justice Research Group	Brunel University
Dr Sally Cunningham	Senior Lecturer	University of Leicester
Mr David G Davies	Senior Committee Specialist	House of Commons
Mr Tom Ewing	Assistant Chief Constable	Fife Constabulary
Mr Garry Forsyth	Assistant Chief Constable	West Midlands Police
Superintendent Steve Furnham	Operational Support Division	South Wales Police
Mr Roger Geffen	Campaigns & Policy Director	CTC
Mr Robert Gifford	Executive Director	Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety
Professor Stephen Glaister CBE PhD	Director	RAC Foundation
Mr John Graham	Director	The Police Foundation
Mr Neil Greig	Director of Policy and Research	Institute of Advanced Motoring
Mr Russ Hardy	Chief Superintendent	Lincolnshire Police
Mr Malcolm Heymer	Traffic Management Adviser	Association of British Drivers
Assist. Ch Const. Andy Holt QPM	Lead of Police Pursuits	South Yorkshire Police
Superintendent Jim Holyoak	Head of Operations Department	Leicestershire Police
Mr Andrew Howard	Head of Road Safety	The Automobile Association
Mr Robert Leach	Director, Police	Capita Secure Information Solutions Ltd
Ms Abie Longstaff	Legal and Policy Analyst	The Police Foundation
Superintendent Keith Lumley	Head of Operational Support Services and Chair	South Yorkshire Safer Roads Partnership
Mr Paul Morrison	Chief Superintendent	Sussex Police
Ms Harrie Robertson-Brown	Intern	The Police Foundation
Mr Neal Skelton	Head of Professional Services	ITS (UK)
Dr Helen Wells		Keele University

The Oxford Policing Policy Forum

The Oxford Policing Policy Forum is a joint initiative of the Police Foundation and the Centre for Criminology at the University of Oxford. The Forum provides an opportunity for a wide range of stakeholders interested in policing to discuss fundamental issues under Chatham House rules. The main purpose is to encourage informal debate rather than inviting an audience to listen to formal presentations. Participation is by invitation only (see guest list).

Background

Last year, for the first time in a decade, the number of people who were killed or seriously injured in road accidents in Great Britain increased. Road accidents are now the main cause of accidental death for young people aged 16-24. Yet, despite this, roads policing is arguably under-prioritised and under-resourced; it is not included in the Home Office's Business Plan for 2012 – 2015 and, in the last five years, the number of police officers engaged in traffic policing has fallen by 12% while overall policing numbers have declined by just 2%.

The 12th Oxford Policing Policy Forum met on the 6th December to ask '*Is roads policing taken seriously enough?*' The Forum was chaired by John Graham, Director of the Police Foundation, and an introductory presentation setting out some key issues was given by Robert Gifford, Executive Director of the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety (PACTS).

Opening presentation

Robert Gifford opened the Forum by looking first at common attitudes to road use. Driving, he said, represents mobility and autonomy, which often results in a defensive approach to road use, with policing the roads not always seen as a 'proper duty' of the police. This approach can also extend to government ministers, who rarely attempt to restrict road freedom. Lord Montague of Beaulieu, for example, referred in 2007 to the 'fruitless war waged by the State against motorists.'

When looking at the causes of road accidents there is a distinction in people's minds between illegal behaviour and foolish mistakes; between those who should be punished and those who suffer momentary lapses of concentration. Most road users involved in accidents like to think they are in the second category. Yet, according to Robert, everyone who drives is a potential killer. Using James Reason's Swiss cheese model, Robert emphasised that accidents occur 'when the holes line up' - it is simply a question of circumstance and luck. Thus all road drivers should be aware of the risks of driving and be taught to mitigate those risks.

Discussion

Perceptions of road safety

The Forum agreed with Robert's analysis of the public perception of road safety. The public's attitude to driving, viewing it as tantamount to a right, has in many ways undermined the seriousness of road deaths. There are seven deaths on the road every day, but, because these occur so frequently and are viewed as "accidents", the motoring public tends to write them off as an acceptable price to pay for our 'right' to drive.

Just as the public tends to distinguish between road users who commit crimes and those who, through their own misjudgements, make foolish errors, so too do policy makers. The latter tend to support punishment for those drivers seen as 'bad' or criminal and education for those seen as essentially 'good' people who have made an error of judgement. Yet either way, the consequences can be and often are equally serious, with even minor lapses in judgement or concentration having very serious consequences. The same

distinction is often drawn by the criminal justice system, which was also viewed as unhelpful, if only because it serves to reinforce the views of the public. Policy, it was felt, might do better to focus on the act instead of the perpetrator, referring therefore to 'dangerous acts' rather than 'dangerous persons'. The Forum also reinforced the need to maintain public awareness of the risks of driving and to increase/improve driver education (cycle training was given as an example of an effective way of learning better skills, including viewing the road from the perspective of a cyclist).

The role of the police

The Forum discussed whether the police similarly divided offenders into 'criminal' and 'foolish' drivers. Participants felt that there was an element of this kind of distinction in policing, particularly where roads policing was separated out from other types of policing, with minimal communication between officers involved in roads and non-roads policing.

Roads policing should not be viewed in a vacuum: there is evidence of cross over between offending on the roads, and offending off the roads. One participant pointed out that those with a criminal conviction are four times more likely to later kill someone on the road, and those driving without a driving licence or insurance are more likely to crash. There are thus opportunities to predict poor driving behaviour and cases where minor offending could signal more serious driving incidents. Safer Roads Partnerships and Crime Reduction Partnerships need to work together to better identify risky behaviour and prevent accidents and other serious road-related incidents.

The question then turned to whether the police should focus primarily on risk management, on investigation of road accidents, or on prevention. It was accepted that in the current economic climate, the police may not be in a position to focus equally on all of these three roles, but that the first, risk management, was particularly important. Why do people take risks and how can the potential consequences of risk taking be best communicated to people, including from a young age?

Participants nevertheless also stressed the importance of investigation. Collision investigators provide valuable insight and help to allocate resources more efficiently as well as assist in prevention work. Concerns were raised that resource-strapped police forces are not always able to employ forensic collision investigators and that, in many forces, experienced collision investigators are ready for retirement with no plans for their replacement. One participant was concerned that *'expertise on roads policing is walking out the door.'* Although many forces have a Collision Investigation Unit, there is no centralised national unit for collision investigation. A national unit would enable officers to share knowledge and best practice across the service and allow for greater consistency across force Collision Investigation Units.

Many participants also favoured a greater focus on prevention. It was felt that the police could further improve roads policing by promoting more partnership based prevention rather than focusing solely on forensic investigation. The Forum recognised that the cost of road casualties is significantly higher than the cost of prevention: every £1 spent on road safety returns 10/20 times over, so money spent on lowering traffic speeds, pedestrian friendly areas and educating aberrant road users (including cyclists and pedestrians) can achieve considerable savings in the longer term.

Resources

Concerns were expressed that the cuts in policing might disproportionately affect roads policing; the number of roads policing officers has fallen by 29% in the last ten years (12% in the last 5 years). In some ways roads policing could be a victim of its own success, given the steady decline in the number of road accidents over the last few years, and concerns were raised that Police and Crime Commissioners (PCCs) may not see this as a one of their key priorities.

One participant queried whether it might be a good idea to outsource areas of roads policing to reduce costs. There could be a role for the private sector in terms of enforcement as well as education. But others were concerned about the notion of policing by consent, and whether this could potentially be undermined by the use of privately paid enforcement personnel. It was pointed out that as roads police officers were in a highly visible role, constantly in communication with members of the public, they became in effect ambassadors for the police. This distinguishes them from Highways Agency officers, the introduction of whom caused outrage at the time. Today, most police forces would admit that they couldn't do without their help.

The Forum recognised that in the coming years the temptation to issue tickets to people rather than educate them is likely to increase as this raises revenue. PCCs should take care to maintain a focus on education and prevention. As one participant pointed out, an offender is 13 times more likely to reoffend if given a fixed penalty as opposed to being sent on a driving improvement or speeding awareness course.

Police and Crime Commissioners

The Forum speculated on whether the election of PCCs would result in more or less support for roads policing. Road safety was not felt to be sufficiently high on their agenda, with little mention of roads policing in their manifestos and no PCC campaigning on speed enforcement. It was agreed that action needed to be taken to address this issue quickly as PCCs are already beginning to make far reaching decisions on resourcing and partnership working.

Some felt PCCs might provide an opportunity for forces to work better together, sharing services as well as information between forces, and collaborating on initiatives. PCCs might also be a way to bring together the Home Office and the Department for Transport. Many participants felt these two Ministries did not consult sufficiently with one another and each would benefit from more joined-up working.

The role of the government

The Forum identified a number of important gaps in government policy. The Strategic Policing Requirement, which sets out key priorities for national policing, does not feature roads policing. Similarly, educating children about the risks and dangers of driving is not part of the school curriculum. While Crime and Disorder Partnerships are statutory, Road Safety Partnerships are not. Previous crime surveys asked about speeding and road safety, but the Crime Survey for England and Wales no longer does so.

Participants urged the government to consider the message they were sending out to the public by continuing to allow these gaps in policy. The Forum felt there was a key role for the government to play in the field of roads policing, which cuts across many areas of government work including health, education and housing as well as other areas of transport and policing policy. Many held the view that more joined-up working between government departments would aid data analysis, encourage the public to take a more risk-based approach to driving and greatly reduce accidents on the roads. The Home Office and the Department for Transport in particular were urged to work more closely together, although the Home Office representative argued that they already do work closely with one another on roads policy. The suggestion was made that perhaps there were good links between officials but less so between ministers. The question of whether roads policing needed to be in the Strategic Policing Requirement was discussed at a meeting of both Departments, but it was decided that, as roads policing was seen as a local rather than a national issue, it was not appropriate to include it. Some participants objected to this, stating that although roads policing is local, its impact is national.

One area where the government might be of greater assistance is in the development and publicising of public campaigns. Participants wanted to see an increase in public information campaigns, focusing on the

dangers of speeding and those of texting while driving. There is clear evidence that media campaigns work; drink driving for example has now become socially unacceptable, and the 'clunk click' campaign resulted in a significant increase in people wearing seatbelts. There is a need to make speeding and texting while driving similarly socially unacceptable.

Another area where participants felt the government could do more was in the creation of a Road Accident Investigation Branch, similar to the Railway Accident Investigation Branch and the Marine Accident Investigation Branch. Both of these are part of the Department for Transport but are functionally and operationally independent. They investigate accidents and incidents with the aim of improving safety and preventing future accidents. Not enough is known about why road accidents happen and the conditions which result in serious rather than minor injuries. A greater emphasis on collision investigation would also allow resources to be allocated more efficiently.

The public

The Forum felt there was a gap in knowledge in relation to risk taking. Why do people take risks? Does the public understand the risks but choose to ignore them, or are people simply unaware of the dangers of driving? As most collisions are caused by people taking risks or making mistakes rather than by intentional criminal behaviour, further research is needed to help the police better understand risk taking and to rid the public of the notion that there is an acceptable level of casualties on the roads.

Research would also help inform the government of ways to engage young people from an early age in good driving behaviour and make them aware of the potentially serious risks and consequences of driving. This could be invaluable in focusing public campaigns. By making texting while driving and speeding as socially unacceptable as drink driving, the public would 'self-police' more than they do currently, which would save money as well as lives and increase consent-based policing (as the police would have greater support for roads policing).

There is some evidence of the public beginning to self-police. Video camera software has improved and some drivers (and cyclists) now use cameras on their dashboards (helmets) to record infractions by other drivers.

Technology

The Forum debated whether technological advances were more likely to help or hinder roads policing. There are a number of pieces of new technology which are aimed at rewarding good behaviour and making drivers safer. These include 'alcohol-locks', which force the driver to blow into a tube to ensure s/he is not driving over the alcohol limit, and 'black box' technology which records the time the car is driven (and therefore prevents drivers, particularly long distance lorry drivers, from driving for too long without a rest). Technology that monitors driving late at night is also being used by the insurance industry to secure lower premiums for young drivers.

Although the use of technology to increase driver safety is a positive step, the technology very much depends on how it is used and whether the driver tries to get round the restrictions imposed. Two tragic examples were given: in the UK a young driver's insurance policy forbade him from driving after 11pm, so the driver sped home quickly to try to arrive before this time and was killed in a road accident. In Sweden a driver over the drink driving limit persuaded his daughter to blow into the alcohol-lock to release the car, but both father and daughter subsequently died in an accident.

Other technological advances are less about driver safety and more about driver convenience. Participants pointed to more sophisticated 'Sat Navs' or inbuilt dashboard i-pads which have the potential to distract

drivers and contribute to accidents. There is clear corporate interest in attracting customers by marketing them to drivers and there are questions to be asked over the power of the motor (and possibly insurance) industries in this respect.

Technology could be made to work better for roads policing. Investigations and data gathering could be greatly enhanced by developing black box technology to inform research on accidents, which would enable the police to learn more about risk taking and poor driving behaviour.

However, people are often sceptical about technology which records their behaviour; they can feel spied on or over-regulated or be simply cynical that a profit is being made at their expense. Speed cameras are a good example of this. The cameras are in place to deter speeding and to catch culprits, but some members of the public believe they are there to generate income for the police or the local council. It might help if people understood better how finances raised by cameras were used. A police officer explained that in his area money raised was spent on speed awareness and safety courses as well as on education for children. Initiatives such as these need to be more widely publicised.

Conclusion

The Forum agreed that more research needs to be done to better understand the causes of road accidents and to improve driver education. Compliance with the rules and regulations of road use could be increased by using better engagement methods, promoting responsible driving and self-policing.

The impression the government conveys to the public in terms of the importance of roads policing is significant. The government needs to be clear that road deaths are not acceptable and should work better across a number of Departments to commit to reducing accidents on our roads.

Participants were almost unanimous in their call for a Roads Accident Investigation Branch. Advances in technology could be better exploited to help to gather valuable data to inform its work. It was felt this would also take some of the politics out of roads policing. And finally there was also wide support for communicating the importance of roads policing to all the newly elected PCCs to ensure it remains one of their key priorities.

Abie Longstaff