

Opening Statement by Mr. Sam Waide to the Joint Committee on Transport and Communications Networks, Tuesday 1 March 2022.

Good morning, everyone and thank you Deputy O'Donnell.

I would like to begin by thanking the Committee, through the Chair, for the opportunity to speak to you all this morning to discuss the new government Road Safety Strategy 2021 to 2030 and Speed Limit Reductions in Urban Areas.

Government Road Safety Strategy (2021 to 2030)

'Our Journey Towards Vision Zero', Ireland's fifth Government Road Safety Strategy (2021-2030) was published in December 2021. This transformational strategy was designed in collaboration with key road safety partners, international experts and the public. Over 2,000 submissions were received from the public as part of the consultation process to develop the strategy.

The primary aim of the strategy is to reduce the number of deaths and serious injuries on Irish roads by 50% over the next 10 years. This means reducing deaths on Ireland's roads annually from 144 to 72 or lower and reducing serious injuries from 1,260 to 630 or lower by 2030.

The strategy will be delivered in three phases. Phase 1 which runs from 2021 to 2024, is backed by a projected €3.8bn investment and includes 50 high-impact actions and 136 support actions. Two further phases are planned to take us up to 2030.

The strategy is also the first step towards achieving 'Vision Zero' – the elimination of all road deaths and serious injuries on Irish roads by the year 2050.

These targets are also in line with European Commission and UN global road safety goals.

This strategy is led by a Safe System approach – the seven areas are

1. Safe Speeds
2. Safe and Healthy Modes of Travel
3. Safe Vehicles
4. Safe Roads and Roadsides
5. Safe Road use
6. Safe Work related road use
7. Post Crash Response.

The Safe System approach emphasises the shared responsibility amongst those who design, build, manage and use the roads, including vehicles, to prevent or reduce collision impacts. It also includes those who provide post-crash response to mitigate injury. Ireland's road safety strategy for the next 10 years will be delivered with a heightened focus on the provision of infrastructure and vehicle safety enhancements, improved road user behaviours and enforcement, and post-crash response.

All priority actions for the our strategy sit within the Safe System approach and are included in the briefing document submitted to the Committee.

Speed Limit Reductions in Urban Areas

As the Committee has asked that we address the subject of speed limit reductions in urban areas I will refer to the 'Safe Speeds' element of the strategy. It involves consideration of road and vehicle planning and design, the setting of injury minimising speed limits, as well as public education and awareness, and the enforcement of these limits.

The Phase 1 Action Plan of the strategy includes five high-impact actions under Safe Speeds. They are listed in the Briefing Document.

Excessive speed continues to be a leading contributory factor in fatal and serious injury collisions in Ireland and internationally. It has been estimated that 10–15% of all collisions and 30% of fatal collisions are the result of speeding or inappropriate speed.

Implementing lower speed limits, for example 30 km/h limits in urban areas, will have significant safety benefits, particularly for cyclists and pedestrians. These include reducing the likelihood of collisions occurring and reducing the risk of death or serious injury should one occur.

The World Health Organisation for example has estimated that a 5% reduction in average speed could result in a 30% reduction in fatal collisions.

Safe Speeds can also result in decreases in emissions and noise pollution, and improved traffic flow on our roads.

Evidence shows that many drivers are choosing to speed in our towns and villages however.

The RSA's Free Speed observational study conducted in 2018 found that, over half of cars observed on urban roads were speeding.

Our attitudinal survey conducted last year found that a third of drivers exceed 50km/h limits by more than 10km/h at least sometimes.

To put this in context, if a pedestrian or cyclist is hit by a vehicle at 60km/h - 90% will die.

But if hit at 30km/h - 90% will live.

In addition to this, many drivers are distracted whilst driving which puts cyclists and pedestrians at greater risk.

Our survey found that 19% of drivers use their phone to read messages and emails at least sometimes. 12% admitted to using their phones to check social media whilst driving.

We must reduce the risks posed to pedestrians and cyclists, who face an environment where many drivers are speeding and are dangerously distracted.

Urban speed limits should not serve to benefit drivers but rather benefit active travel and protect pedestrians and cyclists.

30km/h Speed Limits International Trends

Ireland is falling behind the rest of Europe in setting 30km/h speed limits.

There have been several rollouts of 30km/h or 20mph speed limits by municipalities around the world.

- Spain set a national 30km/h limit for all urban roads with a single carriageway in each direction in May 2021.
- Wales has made progress in its plans for a national 20mph default limit for all built-up roads. This is to be implemented in 2023.
- Scandinavian Countries already have 30km/h limit for most urban roads with Oslo and Helsinki recording zero pedestrian deaths last year with 30km/h as a key reason.

There are other examples in the Briefing Document submitted to the Committee.

Conclusion

Our challenge, and yours as legislators is to keep raising the bar and finding new and better ways of making our roads safer, especially for the most vulnerable members of our community.

In Ireland, road deaths have declined by almost 70% since 1998. Reducing road deaths and serious injuries by 50% over the next decade is achievable. Vision Zero by 2050 is achievable.

Given our road safety journey to date, no target is too ambitious for us. The starting point is recognising that road deaths or serious injuries should not be the price to pay for our mobility.