

# DÁIL ÉIREANN

---

## AN COMHCHOISTE UM IOMPAR, TURASÓIREACHT AGUS SPÓRT

## JOINT COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT, TOURISM AND SPORT

---

*Dé Céadaoin, 8 Feabhra 2017*

*Wednesday, 8 February 2017*

---

The Joint Committee met at 9 a.m.

---

### MEMBERS PRESENT:

Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick,	Senator Frank Feighan,
Deputy Imelda Munster,	Senator John O'Mahony,
Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe,	Senator Ned O'Sullivan,
Deputy Robert Troy,	Senator Pádraig Ó Céidigh.

In attendance: Deputy Danny Healy-Rae and Senator Lorraine Clifford-Lee.

DEPUTY BRENDAN GRIFFIN IN THE CHAIR.

*The joint committee met in private session until 9.35 a.m.*

### **Road Safety Strategy: Discussion**

**Chairman:** The meeting is now resumed in public session. Before we begin, I remind members, witnesses and anyone in the Visitors Gallery to switch off their mobile phones. We will now consider the issue of road safety.

I draw the attention of witnesses to the fact that by virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the committee. However, if they are directed by the committee to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and they continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to a qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and they are asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person, persons or entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the House or an official either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable. I welcome the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport and his officials to the meeting. I apologise for the delay in getting the public session started. We had some housekeeping to deal with. Before we commence, I express my condolences to anybody who is affected by this subject. I know it is one that has probably knocked on the door of every family in this country and that it is a difficult subject for many people. I invite the Minister to make his opening statement.

**Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport (Deputy Shane Ross):** I share the Chairman's sentiments about condolences. There was another fatal accident yesterday and I express my sympathies to the family, as I did in the Seanad yesterday. I also thank the committee for the invitation to come here today to discuss what may be the most emotional subject in my Department. Saving lives is a very high priority, if not the top priority, and that is what we are here to do today. If any member of the committee wants to make suggestions or talk to any of my officials afterwards about certain situations they think could be remedied in a certain way, they are welcome to do so. I am happy to give a certain amount of time to people to talk in private and public about this issue because it is so important. I hope they will take that in the spirit in which it is meant.

I think we all agree that the increase in road fatalities in 2016 to 188 is deeply disappointing. The number of fatalities as a result of a road traffic collision in 2015 was 162. While this was the second time in the past five years that record low numbers were seen, the reality is that each of those deaths is one too many. Notwithstanding the fact that has also been an upward trend in road fatalities over the past few years in Europe and in the US, we must all work to ensure that the upward trend at home is reversed. I think people should realise that despite the fact that 2015 was a good year, the two preceding years were bad. It is never a good year but 2015 was an improvement while 2016 was a continuation of the upward trend in road fatalities we have seen in the past four years. That is a very serious acknowledgement. My officials, the Road Safety Authority and I are working to tackle the main causes of serious road collisions causing death and major injuries. We have identified the four main causes of death and serious injury on our roads. They are speeding, intoxicated driving, use of mobile phones and non-wearing of

seat belts. Our road safety strategy must place a renewed focus on addressing these four killer behaviours. We are launching a sustained attack on drunk drivers.

To improve road safety, we need to keep up the pressure on all fronts - enforcement, engineering, education and awareness, driver training and vehicle standards. On all these fronts, I am actively considering what measures can be introduced to curb the devastating rise in road deaths last year and to reverse this trend. My Department, local authorities and I continue to push forward with this multi-pronged approach. The Road Safety Authority, the Department of Justice and Equality, An Garda Síochána, local authorities, the Health and Safety Authority, the Office of the Attorney General and I are now meeting quarterly, which is a doubling of meetings in a year, to tackle the upward trend in road deaths. I convened the latest meeting of the ministerial committee on 12 January as a meeting that was not scheduled and have arranged a further meeting that will take place next month as a direct result of the figures that are coming in. The figures for this year have not improved. They are the same today as on this day last year. We are five or six weeks into the new year.

At our last meeting, in January, I very much welcomed the assurance by An Garda Síochána that there will be an increase of 10% in the traffic corps during the course of 2017, resulting in more checkpoints and greater enforcement of traffic law, and that road safety enforcement is a priority in the 2017 Garda policing plan. Resources are somewhat sparse but the Garda has responded to these figures in a way that is meaningful and that I hope will produce results.

The road safety strategy for the period 2013 to 2020, which sets out the Government's plans for road safety and contains 144 separate actions, is currently undergoing a midterm review, and a meeting of stakeholders to facilitate this review was held in Dublin Castle last November. I attended part of it. The Road Safety Authority is currently completing a report on this review, which I understand will be presented to me in the coming weeks. Reports and reviews are no longer enough, and reports about reviews are no longer enough. We are committed to taking action now in a very proactive way, as seen from the programme of legislation and other measures that I will outline.

Regrettably, there is no single action or silver bullet to decrease the number of deaths and serious injuries from collisions on our roads. There are heavy penalties under road traffic legislation to ensure those detected are severely punished. The new Road Traffic Act 2016, just passed, contains further measures to make our roads safer. That Act, which was signed into law on 27 December 2016, includes new road safety measures dealing with drug driving, mutual recognition of driving disqualifications with the United Kingdom and a new optional 20 km/h speed limit in built-up areas. These new provisions will be commenced as soon as humanly possible.

I am extremely concerned over the statistics on intoxicated driving. I am determined to tackle this area, and it is being tackled as a matter of urgency. The RSA's research indicates alcohol was a contributory factor in 38% of collisions in the period 2008 to 2012. These figures may be out of date but they are alarming and the most up to date available. Anecdotal evidence is that alcohol is a contributory factor in an even higher proportion of fatal accidents.

An Garda Síochána's recent drink driving campaign, which ran from 1 December to 8 January, resulted in 961 arrests for drink driving, a 35% increase on the same period last year. Driving under the influence of alcohol therefore continues to be a major problem, and the highest risk group identified comprises young male drivers, as members will know. Drivers under the age of 44 accounted for 70% of the intoxicated drivers in 2015, with 81% of all intoxicated driv-

ers being male. We have not solved that problem. If anyone suggests we did so in earlier times or decades, it is a delusion. More shockingly, the Medical Bureau of Road Safety data for 2015 indicate that 60% of those detected driving while intoxicated were over twice the legal alcohol limit. Some 20% were three times over the legal limit, and 22% were four times over the legal limit. While various hard-hitting measures, such as mandatory alcohol testing, the lowering of the drink driving limit and the introduction of tougher penalties, have had a profound effect on the vast majority of drivers, there are still, on average, 152 drivers arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence every week. Clearly, this is simply not acceptable. With that in mind, I am concerned that in certain cases where people have breached the alcohol limit while driving, the awarding of three penalty points sends out the message that it is not a serious offence. I therefore intend to remove the current penalty and replace it with a disqualification period so all people who are found to be drink driving will receive an automatic disqualification from driving. Amending the law to ensure all those detected engaging in such dangerous behaviour will receive a disqualification will help to send a message that driving under the influence is never acceptable. This is an absolute.

My Department has drafted the heads of a Bill to provide that all drivers who are caught drink driving will receive this mandatory disqualification from driving. This has been circulated to Ministers for comment by 9 February, and I intend to bring it to the Cabinet on 14 February, next week. I am determined that this Bill will be enacted as quickly as possible. I propose to ask both Houses for their co-operation in this matter by not proising amendments on this single issue and to this very focused Bill. We want to get it through quickly because we believe it will actually save lives quickly. One of the legitimate complaints made about road safety legislation is that it has been delayed by various measures that have delayed more immediate measures that are necessary. While we will consider every proposal, we ask members to regard this important legislation as a matter of urgency and not to introduce any amendments that would take a long time to address and delay its passage.

My officials working in the road safety area are also working on four other Bills this year. This is somewhat unprecedented but entirely necessary. The urgency with which we regard this problem is certainly indicated by the amount of legislation to tackle this problem.

The road traffic (prompt decisions) Bill 2017 relates to the exchange of vehicle registration and driver data for the purpose of combating cross-Border crime and terrorism. This Bill will provide the legal basis for one element of the requirements under the legislation, with the legal basis for the exchange of fingerprint and DNA data coming under the remit of my colleague the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality. I intend to bring a memorandum to the Government in that regard as soon as possible.

The Road Safety Authority (amendment) Bill 2017 will provide for other road safety matters, including the provision of a database of disqualified drivers, and strengthen the *vires* of the functions of the Road Safety Authority. The preparation of this Bill is currently under way and I hope to bring the draft heads to the Government later this year.

The road traffic (master licence record) Bill 2017 will provide the necessary *vires* for my Department's national vehicle driver file master licence record project. The master licence record project will, for the first time, link vehicles to drivers and make this information available to other stakeholders, such as An Garda Síochána, which will be of considerable assistance in road safety enforcement.

Work will commence in the coming months on a road traffic (compulsory motor insurance)

Bill to help clarify, simplify and improve existing motor insurance legislation, including an examination of the Motor Insurers' Bureau of Ireland and its role regarding uninsured driving. Possible amendments of legislation arising in the light of recent European Court of Justice decisions will also be included in that Bill.

I am determined that in 2017 we will reverse the trend in road deaths we saw last year in co-operation with An Garda Síochána and the Tánaiste and Minister for Justice and Equality. I am particularly encouraged by the recent assurances I have received from An Garda Síochána and the Tánaiste that there will be an increase of 10% in the traffic corps during the course of 2017, resulting in more check points and greater enforcement of traffic law, and that road safety enforcement is a priority in the 2017 Garda policing plan.

If the message that one will be caught if one drives and drinks is not already loud and clear, we want it to out. If one is caught, one will be disqualified. Ireland is currently ranked fifth best for road safety across the European Union. While I recognise that in light of the recent fatalities trends, maintaining that position will be very challenging, I believe that if we all refocus our efforts we can reverse the upward trend and save more lives.

**Chairman:** The Fine Gael grouping has 15 minutes.

**Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:** It is very disappointing to note the number of road fatalities is on the rise again and that alcohol continues to be a major factor in these deaths. The number of arrests for drink driving is also increasing each year. It is time to consider a zero-tolerance policy and a complete ban on drinking driving. I am a firm believer that if one drinks, one should not drive. In fairness, all the statistics in the Minister's opening statement point towards that. I would be interested in hearing his view on zero-tolerance policy in respect of drinking.

**Chairman:** Excuse me. It is very simple - phones have to be turned off. Surely that is obvious. Can we turn off the phones please? We are here for an hour. The world will not stop turning in that time. I call the Minister.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Does the Chair want me to address that question now?

**Chairman:** Please.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** The Deputy will be aware, as I said in my opening statement, that I am tackling this problem. There was an exemption in the legislation introduced in 2009 or 2010 which allowed people in certain circumstances to pay a charge and, even though they were over the legal limit, not be disqualified. I find that totally unacceptable. The first measure which we are implementing is going to mean that nobody will be eligible for that sort of treatment. Everybody who is found over the limit will be disqualified. People will not have to go to court if they decide not to but they will have to accept the disqualification. Zero tolerance sends out a very straight message, namely, that if one drinks and drive, one is off the road. No exceptions.

**Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:** As a parent, I told my kids numerous times about the limit of in respect of alcohol. The bottom line is that - I can only speak for myself in this regard - when one challenges someone, he or she might claim to have only one or two drinks. It has come to a stage now where we have to have zero tolerance. Such a policy protects parents and everybody else and, most importantly, it prevents deaths.

I agree with the Minister's intention to introduce legislation to publicise the names of all drivers who are convicted of drink driving. Can he provide a timeframe for the introduction of

such legislation?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I addressed that matter earlier. The scheme will come before Cabinet next week. The legislation will be ready very shortly afterwards. It will be a two-page Bill as far as I know. The intention is to get it through the Dáil at a very early stage, hopefully by the end of April.

**Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:** In his opening statement, the Minister asked for suggestions. The introduction of the 20 km/h speed limit in housing estates has received a great deal of attention lately and is broadly welcome. One of the barriers to its introduction, however, is the prohibitive cost of ramps. I met a company recently in my constituency of Louth. It is called Nr Rubber Products Limited and it is based in County Louth. It uses 100% recycled Irish rubber to manufacture ramps. These have been tested to the EU standard and are currently in use across Europe in countries such as Italy, Spain and Portugal. This company is willing to supply its products for a pilot project in Louth to demonstrate the its suitability for Irish conditions. I ask the Minister to take up this company's offer and set up a pilot project in County Louth. I understand from the figures available that cost savings of almost €500,000 will be possible in respect of a national roll-out. When I go to my local authority, I am told week in and week out that the biggest problem it faces relates to the cost of putting ramps into estates. This could save that money. I ask the Minister and officials if they would be willing to have a pilot scheme in County Louth in order to see if this would work.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** It is a matter for the local authority. The Deputy is aware of the 20 km/h speed limit.

**Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:** Yes.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I have set aside €250,000 for a pilot scheme in 2017 and further guidelines will be given to local authorities advising them of lessons learned from the scheme. I take that extremely seriously. I cannot comment on any particular problem in Louth but I guarantee that we will monitor what happens in this pilot scheme and that is why we have given it money.

**Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:** The Minister asked for suggestions and I am giving one. A company is willing to supply ramps made from recycled rubber for a pilot scheme in County Louth. If the scheme were rolled out across the country, there could be an opportunity to save €500,000. We are all pushing in respect of speed limits on estates. Will the Minister give a commitment that he or someone in his Department will talk to this company in County Louth, which is offering to be part of a pilot scheme in order to try to save lives in the county.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Ramp procurement is a matter for the local authority. If the design meets the basic design standards-----

**Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:** They are produced to the EU standard.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Yes, the basic EU design standard. That is absolutely fine. I will certainly convey the Deputy's views to the local authority on that particular issue if that is what he wants. I am quite happy to do that. It is not a matter within my jurisdiction. If, however, the Deputy thinks it would help, I will take it up. It is a sensible suggestion.

**Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:** I thank the Minister.

**Chairman:** I call Senator Feighan.

**Senator Frank Feighan:** It is very disappointing and regrettable that 188 deaths occurred in 2016. That represents an increase of 26 on the number for 2015. Like the Minister, I believe in zero tolerance when it comes to drink-related driving.

I have one or two questions. I am looking at this matter from the perspective of being a Senator - formerly Deputy - from a rural area. People who live in Dublin use public transport. They can use apps such as Hailo and Uber and there are numerous taxis in operation. The Minister represents a Dublin constituency. There is absolutely no reason whatsoever for drink driving in cities. There is also no reason whatsoever for drink driving in rural areas. However, there are exceptional cases in rural areas. People - publicans and others - in the rural area in which I live would say that this has gone too far. I am on the Minister's side but how would he sum it up?

What is being done about drug-driving? I am convinced that drug-driving is a huge issue. I know the Garda is working on this matter. Has there been an increase in drug driving? This is a huge issue and the Minister has the figures relating to it. As a former rural Deputy who is now a Senator, I am aware that people who live in rural areas will say to me that what is proposed is anti-rural in nature. I know it is about saving lives and addressing this matter in a way that means lives will be saved. That to which I refer will be put to the Minister in the coming weeks. Does he have an answer in respect of it?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I thank the Senator.

I will address the rural-urban divide. I fully understand that there is a difference between rural and urban views sometimes, certainly in the interpretation of drinking and driving. The whole culture is somewhat different. I do not think that one can say there is any excuse for driving when over the limit, regardless of where one lives. I know this is harder to take in some places than in others where there is a tradition which exists and where the pub is so important to people's social lives. The Senator said that there are exceptional cases. I do not believe that there are any exceptional cases. I believe this is an absolute rule. If one is over the limit in Dublin, then one is over the limit in rural areas as well, although I sympathise with the difficulties which some people will face in this situation. They must accept that the dangers posed by people getting behind the wheel when over the limit are the same in one place as in another. The dangers of fatalities are the same because the impairment to driving is the same. I appeal to them in these situations to make the necessary arrangements to be able to have a good social life in the local pub but also to be able to get home safely. I presume that would mean sharing cars with a companion who is not drinking. They could hire a bus or perhaps the local publican could arrange for them to get lifts home. Those arrangements will have to be made. It may be inconvenient. However, inconvenience is worth it in the interests of saving innocent lives. It must be said absolutely firmly that there cannot be any exceptions because of where one lives. While we understand, and I understand fully, the difficulties this may cause, it is about life and death.

The primary focus of the 2016 Bill we passed in December, which was signed on 27 December, concerned drug driving. It is an initial step which includes various drugs, but particularly cocaine, cannabis and heroin. It is very novel because, as with alcohol, it sets an absolute level beyond which, if one has the substance in one's blood, it automatically becomes an offence. One does not have to prove anything else except that the motorist has a certain amount of a certain drug in his or her blood. This is revolutionary. The legislation will probably be com-

menced in the next three months. The administration is now being organised to do that. I hope to commence the legislation in the next three months when the Garda and the equipment are ready to do this. I hope it will attack the problem of which the Senator speaks because the anecdotal evidence is that it is a big problem. We reckon it is a big problem and we reckon it causes death, which is why we are acting on it. This measure is not reflected in the latest figures because it has not been enacted or implemented yet, but I very much hope it will come to be reflected in the figures. I presume the committee does not wish to go into the details of the Act now but I can give a fair summary of it if the committee wishes. If the measures are effective when introduced, they will affect the figures. It is quite tough legislation, and deliberately so.

**Senator John O'Mahony:** I thank the Minister for his presentation. I wish to concentrate on one aspect, namely, implementation and enforcement, to which he himself drew attention. In recent weeks there have been some shocking figures to the effect that half of summonses for speeding are not being served. I know this is a matter for the Garda, but 30,600 summonses have been struck out because they were not served. I think the figure for Monaghan is 61% of summonses for speeding not being served, and the figure for Kerry is 59%. I will not go through the statistics for any more counties. Regarding the use of a mobile phone while driving, 71% of those convicted or caught are not prosecuted for some reason. I remember in 2000, when penalty points were first introduced, that one could literally see the slowdown on the roads because everyone presumed they would get their penalty points. However, this quickly dissipated, and when people read these figures, they will tell themselves that even if they are caught, they will get away with it anyway. The fear is that these figures would send out that message. Just as drink-driving has been attacked or dealt with, this needs to be dealt with as well. Judges throwing out Go-Safe van summonses and so on has been a factor in this regard, and the matter has not been addressed.

What is the state of road deaths for January? Does the Minister have those figures yet?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I can give the Senator the up-to-date figures up to today. They are exactly the same as last year. There is absolutely zero difference. At least they are very close to last year's. I monitor them daily. As of today, they are exactly the same as last year's, which is not encouraging and not good. However, none of the measures we have taken, as I said to Deputy Fitzpatrick, has been commenced yet, so they will not even start to have an effect for about six weeks, but what he said is important in this respect. Enforcement is vitally important because it creates the right atmosphere in which people think they will be caught or, if they have already been caught, have to go to court. I do not believe this atmosphere exists yet. I think there is a feeling, especially among young males, that they will not be caught and that, even if they are caught, there is a good chance of getting off for various reasons. The fact the Garda has increased its patrols by 10% - the figure may not be up to 10% yet as it is for the entire year, but the Garda is increasing its patrols - and the fact it did this at Christmas is very encouraging. The figures for Garda activity that came in at Christmas were encouraging, but the figures for the results were quite staggeringly bad. There was a 35% increase in people drink-driving in the six weeks surrounding Christmas, so we have a huge amount of work to do but we are tackling it. The Senator is absolutely right that there is a problem with enforcement. Some of this is simply due to the fact that people feel the measures will not be enforced.

**Senator John O'Mahony:** There seems to be an amazing discrepancy in the serving of the summonses. It would suggest that the addresses are not known or are wrong.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Correct.

**Senator John O'Mahony:** This needs to be addressed.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** The figures for this are quite bad. I will read the Senator a note I have here because it is interesting.

When a fixed charge notice is issued, more than 80% of motorists pay within the 56-day deadline, so the vast majority of drivers accept and pay the fixed charges. Of the remaining 20%, the Garda Síochána can only at best, for a number of reasons, including non-availability of up-to-date addresses and details in some cases, serve approximately 50% of summonses, so the Senator is absolutely right about that. The Garda Síochána is examining ways to increase the rate of summonses served, including examining the possibility of serving them electronically. The note points out that the rate of summonses served for more serious road offences is prioritised over minor offences. The Senator has identified this, and it is absolutely true, but the Garda is on the job in this regard. It is a significant number, but we are well aware of it. Enforcement is to some extent a matter of perception, but not totally. We are tackling this perception. Our Department does not decide what the Garda does but we certainly convey to it what we feel.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** I welcome the Minister and his officials. It is very welcome that there is a renewed focus on road safety. It is regrettable that last year saw an increase in the number of fatalities. Behind every statistic is a devastated family that we must remember. This is one area where we can genuinely work together in a non-partisan way in bringing forward evidence-based policies that will help reduce the number of fatalities on our roads. Every one of us here wants to see a reduction in the number of road deaths. We need to see evidence-based policies.

I share the Minister's concern regarding drink-driving. I do not drive after having any drink but I do feel there is a difference between someone who has a glass of wine with his or her meal and then drives a car and somebody who has a bottle of wine and then drives his or her car. Regarding the 38% of people who lost their lives between 2008 and 2012 and were deemed to have drink in their systems, is that quantifiable in terms of the units of alcohol in their bodies? Were these people who, as I said, had a glass of wine with their meals or were they people who were significantly over the legal limit and driving? It is understandable if the Minister does not have that information to hand today, but we need to see it before he brings forward the legislation he proposes for later this year.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** The answer to the question is that I do not know. The figure of 38% I quoted did not concern the people who lost their lives, rather that 38% of fatal accidents were linked to alcohol. It is a slight difference. The Deputy has sought a perfectly legitimate figure. We know that where persons were arrested for drink driving as much as 60% of them were over twice the legal limit, 20% of them had over three times the legal limit and 22% of drivers were over four times the legal limit. That is not the fatal accident figure. Such figures on drink driving might indicate a hardcore cohort and that there might be a case for punishing them, although I am not saying there is, more severely with longer disqualifications than others. I do not think we have the figures on the number of people who-----

**Deputy Robert Troy:** Perhaps the Minister will be able to ascertain the figures for me.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** If they are available I shall forward them to the Deputy.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** I wish to mention another area that the Minister is responsible for.

Rural Ireland needs some level of public transport.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Yes.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** Perhaps we would have a reduced taxi service or an incentivised scheme that allows publicans buy a people carrier in order to drop people home. There are no public transport supports in rural Ireland. The Minister should consider the matter.

Last year 36% of vulnerable road deaths, or 67 deaths, were either cyclists or pedestrians. There is nothing in the Minister's proposals for this year that stipulate a minimum distance at which it is safe to overtake a cyclist. The Minister's Government colleague has put forward a Bill on the matter. Will the legislation be taken this year? His proposals contain nothing to protect pedestrians. Seven of the 16 people who lost their lives this year were pedestrians. Where is it stated that it is mandatory for pedestrians walking at night to wear high visibility jackets? Last Christmas as I drove home I met a male pedestrian wearing black clothes from head to toe on a corner and nearly knocked him down. There is nothing about pedestrians in the proposals. The Minister should rectify the matter.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I disagree about the proposals being non-partisan. We could be non-partisan about many other things if one wanted but I accept the points made by the Deputy. We are talking here about death, tragedy and nothing else. I appreciate the spirit in which the Deputy has addressed these matters and I hope I will respond in kind to his suggestions.

Deputy Regina Doherty has tabled a Bill on cyclists. The legislation will come forward and be considered. It has not been ruled in or out at this stage. I have spoken to her about the matter. Any Private Members' Bill on this area will be considered purely on its merits. I have no interest in promoting Bills or measures just because they come from one side of the House. I can guarantee Deputy Troy that if he produced a measure I would give it exactly the same consideration as that produced by a Member on the Government side of the House. I make the same sincere offer to all Members. We have spoken to Deputy Doherty about her legislation and we will give it consideration. My officials are considering a measure to create a special offence of dangerously overtaking cyclists. I believe that they need protection.

Deputy Troy's suggestion to make it mandatory for pedestrians to wear high visibility jackets is a good idea. I can think of no immediate objection. Enforcement might be difficult but that does not mean his idea is bad. If one makes people comply one will save their lives and make life much easier for fellow road users.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** My idea could form part of the proposals that the Minister will bring forward later this year.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Yes. The Deputy has made a good suggestion. Initially, I can see no reason against it. A number of pedestrians are killed every year. I do not know how many of them wore high visibility jackets. This could be an education matter. I am beginning to think that the education element has not been as effective as we would like. There are television advertisements all of the time advising people to wear high visibility jackets but the measure does not seem to, necessarily, have worked.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** I wish to make two more points because I am conscious of time restrictions. The Minister has welcomed the 10% increase in Garda numbers.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Yes.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** The increase will still mean the number of gardaí is significantly fewer than the number who served in the Garda traffic corps in 2010. In 2009-10, as many as 1,000 people served in the traffic corps but there is now only 700 serving. A 10% increase will mean an additional 70 gardaí, which means a gap of 220. The lead up to Christmas showed an enhanced presence in terms of the number of checkpoints. Anyone who travelled around their constituencies would have seen a huge, noticeable and visible increase in the Garda presence on roads. The Minister must fight harder with his Cabinet colleague to ensure that we return to the number of personnel who worked in the traffic corps in 2009-10. The level of car usage on our roads has returned to the 2009 level and exceeded same. The 10% increase is welcome but we need a greater traffic corps presence on our roads.

I wish to ask some questions on the Road Safety Authority. How many board vacancies remain? Is there a skills deficit and relevant expertise missing from the board from the point of view of good governance, policy formation and policy implementation?

The level of pedantic correspondence between the Minister and the chair of the RSA was reported in the *Irish Independent*. It was regrettable and took away from the serious policy issue to reduce the number of fatalities. I found it quite alarming that the Minister had time to correct the spellings and grammar in a report. He should have been more concerned with policy. For example, how many of the 144 proposals in the road safety plan have been implemented and have yet to be implemented? Such matters would have been more in line with the correspondence than correcting spelling mistakes.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I shall answer the last question first. The Deputy is quite right that I am very busy. I took the annual report with me on holidays and that was when I made my discoveries. I read the report in my spare time and I had only four days of holidays.

I was somewhat surprised, as I know many people were, to find that a final print of an annual report, not a draft, was presented to me in an unacceptable condition. I got hold of the report to find information on the directors. The RSA is not unique in this but the report only contained photographs of the directors and nothing else. They might as well have been the man on the moon as far as I was concerned. I had on my desk at the same time, and I shall discuss the directors in a minute, a request for the re-appointment of directors when there was absolutely no information about them in the annual report. It was not just the fact that the final print was in such an unacceptable condition. This was printed in technicolor. It was not a draft and was for my final approval. I am sure there are many annual reports that get final approval automatically. I found there were no valuations being done by the directors of each other's performance when I was being asked to appoint and reappoint some directors. I also found that the attendance records of certain directors were not adequate to say the least. They were missing many meetings.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** It is the Minister's prerogative to reappoint or not. My question is how many vacancies remain, is there a skills deficit and a lack of relevant expertise for the Road Safety Authority, RSA, to do its job. To be fair, it has done a remarkably good job since its foundation in respect of policy formation and advocacy work.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I am coming to that but I was trying to explain what happened because the Deputy asked me about the annual report. I sent it back to the RSA in that robust language which maybe was too robust. It is my job to make sure the board is acting properly and to ensure the annual report is in a presentable condition and it was not. That is now behind us and will not happen again.

## ROAD SAFETY STRATEGY: DISCUSSION

It is not specific to the board itself but I did examine the board and its attendance which in some cases was disappointing, some people were not attending. The maximum number on the board is 11. At present it stands at six. I have told the committee before and I do not want to dwell on it but I have serious reservations about the way boards are appointed. The first question is do we need to replace people. Are the boards too big? The RSA board was very big, at 11, which was the same size as the board of AIB. Does it merit that and do all the people on the board have the skills to which the Deputy refers? There are several vacancies and I intend to fill one with a person with experience in the financial world so that the audit committee can have somebody with the necessary skills on it.

I absolutely acknowledge that has to be done and it is being done, under a new system of board appointments. I do not think the Deputy wants to go into but I will go into it if he likes. The new system will mean that I have as little discretion as possible. I am also very keen in this case to have at least one other board member who is not one of the great and good of Irish board memberships, or one coming from the regular political or social partners' pool, or wherever they have come from in the past. I would like to have somebody on the board of the RSA who has been active in road safety activism, in other words someone who has been involved in a personal capacity or who has campaigned for road safety. Quite often in the case of boards of this sort, particularly State agencies or semi-State boards people select people who have great skills in other areas but no experience as consumers in the area we are talking about.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** Luckily for the Minister he has the responsibility and can choose who he best feels fits the board so he should get on and do it.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I am trying to ensure that I do not do it. I will set the criteria but I will not have the responsibility for picking or selecting anybody.

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** In his opening statement the Minister said there is no silver bullet to fix this but there are solutions and options that would help. The RSA said that the construction of new roads and the maintenance of existing roads were contributory factors in casualties and deaths on the roads. I know he secured an extra €25 million in the budget for this year but in the context of the cuts in the past six to eight years that is a drop in the ocean. We can all flag up dangerous roads, bends, junctions, which we still do not have the money for. The money we have is not enough even for maintenance. It is only enough to stave off the further deterioration of our roads.

I know it is not in the Minister's remit to provide Garda resources and it is up to the Minister for Justice and Equality but what lobbying has the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport done or does the Minister for Justice and Equality not take this seriously? Given that road deaths are increasing and we are not having the effect we would like to have, does the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport have to continually lobby the Minister for Justice and Equality for Garda resources? The Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport said we have not yet got the 10% we were promised for this year. The number was almost halved in the past five or six years. The Minister is making a good effort to bring in new laws and penalties in the Road Traffic Bill but without enforcement they are nothing. Any Deputy will tell the Minister that it is common knowledge that people inclined to drink and drive know when they get into the car that there is no chance of being stopped at a checkpoint. When that becomes public knowledge the Minister is fighting an uphill battle.

While the new road safety measures in the Bill are welcome, without enforcement they amount to nothing. Unless the Minister for Justice and Equality and the Government take

resourcing the Garda traffic corps seriously and make a serious effort to recruit and resource it this will continue for the rest of the year and maybe into next year. When the Minister said the figures from January to date are the same as last year, there is his answer. There is nobody to enforce the laws. I know it is not strictly his remit but are the Government and the Minister for Justice and Equality taking it seriously? We may not have that 10% until December if we even have it.

There might be a drink driving campaign at Christmas or Easter with all out media coverage focusing everybody's mind but the statistics show that in January it is as you were, back to normal. That has to be consistent so that everybody who thinks about drinking over the limit and getting into a car needs to know that there is every chance of being caught for breaking the law.

Does the Minister think the amendment about unaccompanied learner drivers will pass into law? I have the impression that the National Transport Authority, NTA, has no interest in bringing in the legislation about the rickshaws because it has had ample time to do that before now. That is the reason I tabled that amendment. The NTA says it is non-motorised transport but quad bikes are covered under the Taxi Regulation Act 2016 and the road traffic legislation. The reason we produced the non-motorised amendment for rickshaws was because it was not covered under anything. Therefore, I do not accept that. As I said, they have had ample time to do it and have not done it. I want clarity on that, because the legal advice that we received was that that amendment was fine and good to go.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** There are a number of issues there. I will take the Garda issue first, if that is all right. One problem I have is that I agree with everything Deputy Munster said. I agree with her sentiments and with what she wants. She asked whether I was lobbying properly with the Tánaiste on this. I speak to her about it every week. We have a ministerial meeting that is called every quarter at which we have the relevant person from An Garda Síochána, the assistant commissioner, the Tánaiste, myself, etc. That issue comes up at that meeting every time. As the Deputy knows, it is a matter of great concern in the Dáil and everywhere else and something of which the Government is aware. I would say that, ideally, 10% is not enough. The problem is absolutely crystal clear from the other side, in that Garda resources are so stretched. There is really serious crime going on in the inner city and in other areas where the Garda is also under-resourced. There are other areas, such as combatting burglaries and patrols in my own constituency, where the Garda is critically under-resourced. Whereas the Tánaiste is certainly irritated, I am sure, by my constantly being at her about the traffic corps, she and her Department also have massive demands on those limited resources. However, I will continue to push for not just the 10%, which I gather is 10% every year over the next three years, but for more than that.

I ask the Deputy not to misunderstand me. This will go on. I am determined to get these figures down. I believe it is as important, if not the most important thing in my entire portfolio because it is a question of human life. When we argue about other things, they are nothing like as simple as this one because of the human tragedy involved. Therefore, we will absolutely strive and push for an acceleration in this. We are only into February now and the numbers in the traffic corps are definitely going up. The number of breathalysers is going up. There was a Christmas campaign that had great intensity and a public relations value. Though I am very cynical of public relations in terms of enforcement, it is very important because it creates that sort of an atmosphere. I will not let up. Deputy Munster can come back at me every time to ask me for figures. If she wants something raised at that ministerial meeting on road safety, I am very happy to do so. That will be with all of the people who are really making the deci-

sions. The issue of the 10% will be raised at every single meeting, as it was at the last one. In fact, I welcomed it the last time in December. We will certainly push for further measures and resources. That is very important. However, I ask the Deputy to remember the competing claims that the Tánaiste has. It can be seen from the crime figures elsewhere how difficult it is.

There is the issue of the unaccompanied learner drivers, on which the Deputy produced a measure in the Dáil. We accepted her amendment. I would be massively disappointed if there was any long delay in that. That provision has gone for legal advice and an interpretation but I see absolutely no reason why it should not be introduced shortly. A large number of the proposed amendments have gone for legal opinion from the Attorney General, not to obstruct them, but in order that they are implemented properly and to make sure that they are robust and cannot be challenged. Every single amendment, particularly in the road safety area where alcohol is involved, is challenged one way or another in the courts. That one is now being considered by the Attorney General as well to make it as robust as possible. The Department will engage and has been engaging with the Attorney General on that. However, we are looking for early commencement.

I have spoken to Deputy Munster several times about the rickshaw legislation. It has a problem with definitions. It is redefining various vehicles to mean one thing in one Act and another thing in another. We are trying to reconcile that. There is an untoward delay in the regulating of rickshaws. I will try to get this pushed along. That particular measure is now difficult to commence. I will read Deputy Munster the departmental note I have which explains what the situation is. Is that all right?

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** Yes.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** During the course of its proceedings, Dáil Éireann voted to include an amendment proposed by Deputy Munster providing for the regulation of rickshaws. The amendment inserts a new power for the NTA. The NTA has since advised the Department that its legal advice suggests that it may not be possible to implement robust and legally defensible regulations covering rickshaws under the new section in the 2016 Act. I believe this is what I argued when we were going through with it. I am not reluctant to put it through and I would be very happy to, but I think it may cause other difficulties. It will be recalled that at the time the amendment was proposed, concern was raised about the amendment, given that it was not drafted by the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel or approved by the Office of the Attorney General for its legal robustness, as would normally be the case. Legal advice is being sought on the implications of the provision. The Department is also waiting for proposals from the NTA on an alternative approach to amending the Taxi Regulation Act to allow for the proper licensing and regulation of rickshaws.

I think the Deputy might have a point there. It looks to me as if we are waiting for the NTA. I will get in touch with it again this week and ask what is happening about rickshaws. Is that all right?

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** Yes, it-----

**Deputy Shane Ross:** That may be reasonable. I know it is very complicated. I have actually been asking questions about this and I know there are legal difficulties with it but that is not a reason for not regulating rickshaws.

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** There is a difference between the Taxi Regulation Act and the

road traffic legislation, which I would have thought covers all motorised vehicles.

**Chairman:** We will move on. I call Deputy O’Keeffe.

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** I welcome the Minister to the committee this morning. The document he has brought before us was expected. I listened to the Minister in a television interview after Christmas following an admittedly tragic period of a major number of road accidents and fatalities. It is like what we had yesterday with regard to the hospitals. Is this throwing good money after bad to fix a problem? Is it a knee-jerk reaction to enforce a total ban on drink driving? Is the Minister going down the right road? It is ironic that he is also the Minister responsible for tourism. One of the flagship advertisements abroad is about the hospitality that people get when they come to this country in local pubs and bars when they can meet the local people. No one condones drinking and driving to the extent that has happened. Of the increasing rate of accidents the Minister mentioned, I do not know what the drink levels in these people were.

Other issues should be looked at. There is no mention in this of whether there is more money going to our roads. There is no mention of the fact that in the last couple of years, there are more people driving on the roads as there are more people back at work, be it in the night time, the morning or whenever. What is the Minister doing with regard to our road infrastructure? It is coming under pressure. I am concerned. No one condones driving over the drink limit and never did. The issue is whether we are taking another shot at rural Ireland. Rural Ireland is coming under pressure.

It is a great document. It hits the nail on the head with regard to how the Minister hopes to resolve and reduce road traffic accidents. However, the big issue is the condition of our roads and usage. How does the Minister respond to that?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I agree with the Deputy that the condition of our roads is a factor. He will be aware that the amount of money we have been able to spend on our roads in recent times has been very limited. We are awaiting the capital review. It will be 2018 or 2019 when things really improve. It is a constant struggle to keep the condition of our roads at a steady state. I have asked my Department to identify specifically dangerous spots - there are some in the Deputy’s area - where there have been a large number of fatalities so that we can regard them as priorities in the fight against road deaths. The condition of our roads is otherwise an issue that we will address in the capital review. The Deputy will be familiar with the trend there. It will be accelerated in 2019 and 2020. It is a difficult battle with the condition of our roads because of the lack of resources. We do not have the money to do exactly what we want. We are doing what we can with the resources available.

The Deputy said it was a kneejerk reaction. Nobody can be forgiven for having a kneejerk reaction to tragedies on the road. Of course there is a kneejerk reaction, but there is also a long-term reaction. They are both fairly similar in the case of most people, which is that it is top of the list in terms of priorities when people get killed.

I do not accept - perhaps the Deputy was not saying this - that tourists should be exempt or that any special arrangements should be made for what tourists do on the roads. Obviously, as Minister with responsibility for tourism, I am perfectly happy that the hospitality should be as generous as possible, but it should not in any way affect the rules of the road or the alcohol limits. If I am misunderstanding the Deputy, I apologise. This is not related to tourism, nor will it damage tourism in any way. In response to any suggestion that there should be any different

rules for tourist, no, we will not do that.

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** I am talking about the image being portrayed of the few locals in the pub and the people who come back from America. They love to meet these people and have a drink with them and talk with them. These people will not be there anymore; there will be no one in the pub. These people will just come in for the one pint or two pints and we are driving them out of existence.

It has been mentioned as an area with a high suicide rate. People living at home on their own who used to come for the one or two pints down the byroads, the quiet roads in rural areas, will not be able to do this anymore. A couple of years ago I came across a GP, who loves his walking and walks a regular route going past a certain house. When the drink driving came in, he noticed the back yard filling up with empty bottles and it was filling up quicker than what it would if the man were drinking in the local pub.

No one is advocating drink driving. I am just saying that all we need to do is enforce the existing limits. That is all down to having more gardaí, particularly community gardaí who know the lie of the land. I do not know the statistics for the collisions and crashes. Are they particularly high or particularly low in certain areas of the country or do these crashes occur throughout the country? We need a greater Garda presence on the ground.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I absolutely agree with the Deputy on that. Of course, we should have more gardaí on the ground. That is what we want; that is what we would like certainly. We do not have them at the moment. It is certainly not optimal. We have got to improve them. We do not have the resources.

**Chairman:** As a number of members have indicated, we will group the last few questions. I call Deputy Fitzpatrick, followed by Deputy Troy and Senator Feighan.

**Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:** We spoke this morning about zero tolerance. We also spoke about banning drink drivers. We spoke about publishing the names of people who have been banned from driving. We also spoke about ramps in housing estates and speed limits. Let us talk about the speeding issue. Legislation was passed about drivers from my side of the jurisdiction in the Republic of Ireland. Are we implementing the legislation we passed? For example, I live in Dundalk and travel to Dublin three or four times a week. A number of cars fly by me when I am cruising on the motorway at 120 km/h, which is the speed limit. What is the position with Northern Ireland drivers at the moment? I am not trying to victimise. I know that if I drove in Northern Ireland and broke the speed limit, I would be pulled in, summonsed, have to pay a fine and everything else. We passed legislation about Northern Ireland drivers. In my own town of Dundalk I hear of Northern Ireland drivers bragging that because they live in the North they can go any speed they want in the Republic of Ireland with no prosecutions. They can also come down and park in our towns and cities, and do not have to pay for any parking. What is the position with Northern Ireland drivers speeding and with their parking fines?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** They are subject to our laws as we are to theirs. There is absolutely no doubt about that. They will get a fixed-charge notice. They will still be detected in exactly the same way as we are. They are subject to all that. There is the application of penalty points. I will tell the Deputy what my brief states on this because I specifically asked for this before coming here today.

Discussions began in 2012 between officials, North and South, regarding the possible es-

establishment of mutual recognition of penalty points between the two jurisdictions. There is no agreed international framework for such mutual recognition and no successful known precedent is in place elsewhere between two or more jurisdictions. It is an extremely difficult project to deliver on, particularly because no precedent exists elsewhere that might assist. This is to do with the penalty points harmonisation.

Since late 2013 the main identified obstacle, but not the only obstacle, to North-South mutual recognition of penalty points is service of summonses to an address outside the respective jurisdictions. The serving of summonses and evidence of such service when the case arrives at a court hearing is central to the success of the project. This is a difficulty as the Deputy can understand and I am sure he comes across it in his area close the Border.

In Ireland, the Department of Justice and Equality and the Garda Síochána have met representatives from the Office of the Attorney General on a number of occasions this year to discuss the difficulties encountered by the Garda Síochána concerning the serving of summonses on individuals residing in Northern Ireland over road-traffic offences which occurred in Ireland and regarding ensuring the attendance of defendants residing in Northern Ireland at court proceedings in Ireland. This is work which is ongoing. In other words they do not turn up, obviously, much of the time. It will be necessary to successfully resolve the issues and challenges in this area before other legislative changes to enable mutual recognition of penalty points could be considered further. are not attending court. It is an issue that is being addressed and we are conscious of it. There is no precedent for being able to do it, but we are trying to tackle it.

The Deputy put his finger on something. People are obviously getting away with it. They are getting detected and getting the penalty points but

**Deputy Robert Troy:** The Minister acknowledged that two key vacancies on the board of RSA remain unfilled. When will they be filled?

I would appreciate if the Minister could come back to me with the details I have requested about the number of fatalities linked to alcohol in the system and the level of alcohol was in the system. I accept that he cannot furnish that today. My colleague, Senator O'Mahony, talked about summonses going out. I think that when a fixed penalty notice is issued it should be done by registered post. In that way there could be no ambiguity over whether it arrived. When it is issued by registered post someone has to sign for it. There is a traceability factor through the post office to ensure that someone has signed for it, so they cannot turn up to court and say: "I didn't get it. It was never delivered." An Post has a 93% success rate in turning mail around, but post sometimes goes missing given the volumes involved. However, registered post is one way of ensuring that people would receive their fixed penalty notices.

The publication of disqualified drivers is welcome. I understand that the RSA requested it last year. I submitted an amendment to the Road Traffic Bill which would have given effect to that, but it was not accepted. I am glad that is coming down the track now.

Drink driving legislation comes under the Minister's aegis and something needs to be done to support public transport in rural Ireland. I know that buses will not be going through every rural town or village at night time or at weekends, but we need to be innovative in how we approach this matter. A person in receipt of social welfare might retain that payment if they provided a transport service for a certain number of nights during the week, if there was an incentive through the local enterprise office to help with public liability insurance. The Minister is right to say that we need to take this issue seriously, but we also need to put in other supports.

My colleague, Deputy O’Keeffe, mentioned isolation, mental health and loneliness which cannot be ignored.

Has the Department undertaken any research on what level of support could be provided to help people who historically may have come out in the evening to have a couple of drinks? We realise that is no longer acceptable, but what is being done to support such people?

**Senator Frank Feighan:** We had a love affair with alcohol, but over the past 30 years we have done a lot to stop drink driving. I was always amused to hear that many people did not drink and drive, not because they could have killed themselves or somebody else, but because they could have lost their driving licence and be put off the road. Penalties, including fines, have made a huge difference in making people aware of the importance of bringing down the road-death toll.

The Garda Síochána can sometimes be used as a political football, for example, plans to increase the traffic corps by 10%. I was involved in a push to save Garda stations - and I would have left gardaí to do their own job - but rural stations closed. Gardaí know how to target the issues through criminal profiling which reduced crime. Garda stations do not effectively stop crime, but it can be reduced through the way in which Garda resources are utilised.

I like to see Garda checkpoints. When there was a threat to this State 25 years ago, I was delighted anytime that gardaí operated checkpoints because it was effective law enforcement. I am a little concerned, however, that we are increasing the traffic corps by 10% to stop people drink driving, when there should be a lot more undercover work and criminal profiling. I am concerned that we are doing this just to look good. We may be using modern technology for speeding, but is the Department aware of alternative technology? We need to examine a system whereby if a person has taken two or three drinks they simply cannot drive their car as modern technology will detect the alcohol and shut down the engine. In that case, instead of tying up garda resources on the road, we could deploy them on undercover work to deal with criminal gangs.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Let me deal with Deputy Troy’s issues first. I will try to get him those figures on road fatalities linked to alcohol. I am not sure they are available, but I will see if I can get them.

The system of sending summonses by registered post was tried but did not work. That was because people simply knew what was in the registered letter and did not accept delivery of it. Registered post is a mixed blessing. When the guy rings the bell and says it is registered post, one does not know whether one wants it or not. When one is expecting something like a summons, one probably does not take the registered post. The system was tried a couple of years ago but it did not work.

Part 3 of the 2010 Act has provisions to deal with proof of postage, which should close this loophole. That will be commenced on 1 June this year.

The Road Safety Authority made welcome suggestions about naming and shaming, in late October or November last year, but did not produce a Bill. We are committed to doing the general scheme for that this year. It will certainly help in outing disqualified drivers and keeping them off the road. As the Deputy knows, many of these people are still driving and are even employed as drivers.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** Many of them are.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Yes, so employers will hopefully know it as a result of that.

I take the Deputy's point about rural Ireland. I would be more inclined to suggest that those affected should initially take the measures themselves. I am not unsympathetic to it, but the State is certainly providing a lot of services at the moment which it is stretched on. Presumably, there are ways and means by which publicans could provide transport, including having one person driving who is not drinking. Initially they should do it themselves, but if there is a crying need or an obvious gap which the State should fulfil I am not unsympathetic to that.

The timeline for the RSA board is either in train or will start immediately. The new system we are using is in train and they will be one of the first to have those appointments made. It will be a couple of months before that it done, but it will be done and the commitment is there.

As regards Deputy Feighan-----

**Senator Frank Feighan:** I thank the Minister for his invitation, but I am happy to stay in the Upper House.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** It is very sub-permanent. One never knows.

I do not think the Garda Síochána is a political football. This issue is too serious; that is why everybody is saying that we need more gardaí on this and we are all united about it and we have difficulties. It is harder to say it in government, because one actually has to do it. The Senator has identified something there. The Senator is absolutely right in that there is a bit of public relations involved and they do want to look good. It is part of sending out the message.

I am sure the Senator saw that powerful message on television around Christmas. The Garda Síochána quite obviously - I may be wrong, but I do not think so - notified RTE and said "Hey, we're going to be on this road doing these patrols at such and such a time. Come out and take photographs of us." RTE obliged and I have no problem with that. That is public relations at its best because it is doing a great public service. It is sending out the message to the people who are thinking of drinking and driving that we are out there and we will catch them. That is welcome.

The Chairman is on to something with technology. There are all sorts of quite sophisticated devices still at the cutting edge stage. Hopefully, in future we will have a situation where people will not be able to get into a car if they have a couple of pints on them because the car will be immobilised. That is the sort of technological revolution we would like to see. I encourage anyone in my Department to get involved and find out about those particular devices. That would be wonderful. It would be fantastic if one has two pints and decides to drive but the car will not start because one has too much alcohol in one's system.

**Chairman:** We are almost out of time. If I can get a few minutes of the Minister's time, I have a few issues I want to raise. I thank the Minister for the briefing documentation he has provided to committee members. It was extensive and interesting reading and I thank him for the effort that was made. On the issue of speed, HGVs have limiters of 100 km/h and so do certain large vehicles such as buses. Our motorway speed limit is 120 km/h. We have the technology. Why is every vehicle, apart from emergency service vehicles, not fitted with a limiter of 120 km/h if that is the fastest one is legally permitted to drive on an Irish road? Why do we not do that as a start? I know it will not stop someone on a small local back road, where the speed limit is far under 120 km/h, doing an inappropriate speed. Why do we not implement that now? Why do we have cars on our roads that can do over 200 km/h when our very highest

limit is 120 km/h? Surely we could implement that technology very quickly? Is it something the Minister will consider?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Yes. Apparently, speed limiters would have to be agreed as an EU standard if that was to be the case.

**Chairman:** Why is that? Why can we not lead the way in Europe in doing that? Too often, Europe is put forward as an obstacle. Is it something the Minister will look into again?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Yes.

**Chairman:** I do not buy the European excuse that is often given out by so many Departments. This would be a very progressive measure as a cog in the wheel. It alone will not stop everything. When we met in July, I raised the use of GPS. For example, if a person does 80 km/h on an 80 km/h road or 50 km/h on a 50 km/h road, he or she will be okay but if someone does 80 km/h on a 50 km/h road, the GPS will register it. Perhaps we should also provide incentives for drivers to use that system. It is something we need to look at. We should embrace the technology because it is there and is something that would help enforcement.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** We will look at that as well. We will look at both of those issues.

**Chairman:** Local authority speed limit reviews are taking far too long and costing far too much. Can we look at streamlining the legislation? We have many local authorities all over the country. I am speaking about my local authority in Kerry with which I have been raising concerns about this since 2009. It is now in the middle of a two-year speed limit review which we might not see implemented until 2018-19. What is the position on that?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I am completely sympathetic. A two-year speed limit review is absolutely ridiculous. The Deputy is talking about Kerry.

**Chairman:** It is being done on a county-wide basis. We are told that because of the need for economies of scale and public consultation, the council is only doing it on a county-wide basis yet there are glaringly obvious instances of roads in some parts of the county with a limit of 100 km/h which needs to be 60 km/h. It has to be lumped in with everything else and it is ridiculously slow. Is Kerry County Council at fault or is there something prohibiting it from acting more quickly?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** There is nothing in my Department that I can do about it if Kerry County Council is doing it. Delivery of the outcomes is a matter for each local authority. I do not see any role I can play in that. If it is doing that review of the speed limits and speed limits are a matter of jurisdiction, there is nothing I can do to speed up its reviews. If I can, I certainly will.

**Chairman:** Will the Minister refer back to the committee with information on that if any impediment we should be aware of that needs to be addressed for local authorities? The two-year review being carried out by Kerry County Council is far too long. The notion that it has to be on a county-wide basis or nothing is an impediment to addressing dangerous locations. The Minister might give us clarification from the Department on that matter.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** If the council is addressing an issue like a dangerous area, which is a matter we should be addressing, I can certainly intervene but I do not see an opening for me to come in when it is carrying out a review and tell it to hurry up. The council would regard that

as a gross interference. If it is involved in a dangerous spot or a black spot which TII is also looking into, I will intervene. I can refer back to the Chairman on that.

**Chairman:** On the issue of drink driving, Senator Feighan referred to the use of technology. I have raised the issue of alco-locks previously with the Minister. It is an area we are told has to be part of a European movement. Can we not lead the way as a country on that? The vast majority of people will comply with the law but there will always be people who will not. Can we not implement that as leaders in Europe as distinct from following? The technology is there.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I encourage the use of any technology. I have a note here on alco-locks. My officials are currently examining this equipment for use by repeat offenders.

**Chairman:** We need to look at a cultural shift in which it is done for every vehicle. Things that were seen as socially unacceptable in the 1970s in terms of road safety are now seen as absolutely normal. At that time, there were more than 600 people dying on our roads every year. We need to be ahead of the population on road safety measures. It is something I encourage.

The Minister might look into the issue of drink driving in the context of rural isolation. I spent an awful lot of time last autumn trying to set up a scheme in my rural community, which is an isolated rural community in the Dingle Peninsula. It was called the “cars for bars” scheme and had 20 volunteers, who I had lined up. Everyone was willing to go Monday to Thursday when a hackney was difficult to get in the area. They were on a roster in the local pubs and were available to pick people up, free of charge, and drop them home between the hours of 6 p.m. and midnight. They were all insured drivers. The impediment came at the very end when the insurance company said drivers were not covered if they were on a roster. As the Minister’s Department is liaising with insurance companies, will he try to circumvent that? It is a road safety measure and an anti-rural isolation one. It is shameful that it is the impediment to a very progressive policy in terms of road safety and addressing rural isolation. It would also support small pubs which are a key part of our tourism infrastructure as well as our social infrastructure. Will the Minister’s Department examine it with the insurance companies and come back to us?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** We will do that and report back to the committee.

**Chairman:** It could be a really good news story for rural communities.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Certainly. Will the Chairman send the Department a memo on that?

**Chairman:** Yes.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** We will respond accordingly.

**Chairman:** I had no shortage of volunteers. People were very happy to do it. Many older people, in particular, would have benefitted from this.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** It is a very good suggestion.

**Chairman:** On the drink issue, the 50 mg to 80 mg blood alcohol concentration is a question in the proposed legislation. What evidence is there to suggest that that particular cohort is the cause of increased road fatalities or accidents?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Is the cause of what?

**Chairman:** What evidence is there that it is the cause of increased road fatalities or serious

accidents? Are we making these changes based on evidence?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Above 50 mg is the limit anyway, which we are not going to change at all.

**Chairman:** There is a derogation at present. It applies to people who are found to have a blood alcohol concentration in that range. A penalty points option applies as distinct from a court appearance. What evidence is there to suggest that the cohort of people with a BAC in this range are the cause of accidents or are responsible for an increase in road fatalities?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** There is no greater evidence of that now than there has ever been. There is the same evidence there has always been. They are over the limit. All we are doing is applying the same level and punishment of disqualification to them as to everyone else. It is simply a question of creating a level playing field.

**Chairman:** If that is the case, why is there any limit? Why does it apply to those with a BAC of between 50 mg and 80 mg? Why target that bracket?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** We are targeting concentrations above 50 mg. We are not targeting those in the bracket from 50 mg to 80 mg at all. We are simply removing the exemption in place. That is all we are doing.

**Chairman:** What evidence is there to suggest a need for that?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** The evidence is that with a concentration above 50 mg, there is the problem. That is all.

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** Do we have facts on that?

**Chairman:** Everyone accepts that people are less able to drive a vehicle when they have alcohol in their system. We had a BAC limit of 80 mg and it is now 50 mg, but there has been a derogation for concentrations between 50 mg and 80 mg. Is there evidence to suggest that the derogation is the cause of increased accidents and fatalities?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I will have to send you a breakdown of this, because there seems to be a misunderstanding here.

**Chairman:** There is not. The point is that there is a derogation for concentrations between 50 mg and 80 mg at present.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Yes, there is a difference in the penalty.

**Chairman:** Is there evidence to suggest that the people who have a concentration between 50 mg and 80 mg are the cause of more accidents?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** There is evidence to suggest that the ability to drive is impaired in anyone with a blood alcohol concentration over 50 mg.

**Chairman:** Why target that cohort? Why is this measure in place? There are many other causes of accidents on the roads. Why prioritise this measure? Can you tell us whether there is evidence that the derogation for those with a concentration between 50 mg and 80 mg is causing the problem?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** No. What I am saying is that the message has to go out to the effect

that anyone over the legal limit is disqualified. That is the message. It is simple and there will be no exceptions.

**Chairman:** The punishment is disqualification as distinct from penalty points. What supports the increase in the punishment for those with a concentration of between 50 mg and 80 mg?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** The anomaly in this case is that there was ever an exemption. That is the problem.

**Chairman:** Is there any hard evidence to suggest that this measure will prevent more accidents?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** The whole basis of the laws we are introducing is that a blood alcohol concentration over a certain level is dangerous and causes death. That is the whole basis for it and we are not going to provide any exemptions for anyone.

**Chairman:** If we make the change in the punishment for those with a concentration of between 50 mg and 80 mg now, is there evidence to suggest that the figures will come down? Is there evidence that accidents would not have taken place had this measure been in place previously?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I think taking people off the road who have been driving while over the limit is certainly likely to save lives.

**Chairman:** I have a question on the use of telephones. In Japan, people have developed an app to enable people not to use telephones in the car. The Japanese have implemented this. Could something like that be considered? In the UK six points is the punishment for the use of a telephone. Is that being considered by the Department?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** The six points measure is definitely being monitored at the moment. It is being looked at to see how it works in the UK, with a view to possibly changing. The Department is certainly aware of it. You asked about the Japanese app. All technology is being looked at.

**Chairman:** My next question is on seat belt use. Seat belts are a factor in a certain percentage of fatal in-car situations. Approximately one fifth of people are not wearing seat belts. Can anything be done? I know many cars have alarm bells and so on. Can anything be done apart from the enforcement side of things and greater visibility of gardai? Can anything more be done on that front?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** We have to educate people on the dangers that exist to themselves. I suppose there is a limit to enforcement on seat belts. However, attitudes have changed and people are wearing them. They realise the benefits themselves. We have to continue that work.

**Chairman:** There is another issue that needs to be clamped down further. This relates to the number of children unrestrained in cars. They are standing up between seats and so on. The numbers are shocking. We have had instances of child fatalities at low speeds. Again, this is something we need to address through education.

Another issue relates to learners and the culpability of car owners where a learner is found to be driving unaccompanied. Will provision be made in this area? For example, we are trying to encourage more apprentices and so on. In rural areas where there is no public transport option,

can there not be a fast-track testing system for learners who need vehicles for work? Is that something the Department will facilitate? This will cause a great deal of difficulty for people who have no alternative transport. Is that something the Department could try to facilitate for people?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Do you want me to answer those questions together?

**Chairman:** Can you address the learner situation?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** We have no plans with regard to the learner situation. This is the first I have heard of a fast-track option. We will think about it, certainly. We will put it on the radar. I had not heard of it. We are determined to get provisions relating to the issue of learners driving with the permission of the owners into law. We want to implement and commence the provisions as soon as possible.

**Chairman:** Let us suppose someone needs the car for work and that the person is in a rural area. It would make sense.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I think a test is available within a short period now. We have key performance indicators for the RSA and driver testing centres. I think the turnaround figure is within ten weeks.

**Chairman:** I have a final question on safety efforts, educational efforts and awareness. An idea occurred to me relating to a safety first campaign. There are two Garda days each year, there is a UN day, safety week and the EU day without a fatality. In total, this comes to seven or eight days throughout the year. A number of areas need to be highlighted at the start of every month. We need awareness. The RSA could give the figures for the previous month.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Are you referring to the casualty figures?

**Chairman:** Yes, this is about the casualty figures. Since it is newsworthy, we could work with the media to generate awareness and have a theme for each month. This would enable us to highlight the areas we need to address like seat-belt wearing and speed issues. They could get extra coverage, not only on the designated days of the year but at the start of every month.

We run the risk of losing impact if we over-repeat a message. Let us suppose something was done on the first day of every month. We could call it the safety first campaign. The figures for the previous month could be released and the theme for the forthcoming month could be released. The emphasis would be put on these things. We need to get the message into the public psyche. Is that something on which the Department might liaise with the RSA?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Yes, that is perfectly reasonable. RSA representatives are coming in now. You could suggest it to them. If you want to suggest it to them, we would support it.

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** I will follow up on the questions about the alcohol limit, being disqualified with a blood alcohol concentration of between 50 mg and 80 mg and breathalyser testing. Is the Minister not aware of the impact the morning afterwards? Many law abiding citizens go home at night on time in the hope that they are okay for driving the following morning. Often, they can get caught out. This is going to create a fierce hindrance to their driving.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** I wish to ask the Minister a question on behalf of the road hauliers. They maintain they are being over-regulated and that they are being driven down to the ground by so many different road authorities and the associated enforcement. The Garda

and roadworthiness certificates are examples. Lorries have to be tested every eight weeks as well. Then the RSA comes along, even where the lorry is new, and pulls the driver aside for four hours to go through the lorry again. Is the Minister aware that there is over-regulation, particularly by the RSA? RSA also has responsibility for the roads. Our local authority has made it aware of many dangerous bends and junctions and it has not responded at all, but it is nailing the drivers of commercial vehicles out on the roads. I am being told that the RSA is overdoing it. Has the Minister been asked about this before?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I have not. Will I answer the Deputy's question or does he want to continue?

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** That is what I am being told. There are approximately five strands of regulation for commercial vehicles.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Okay.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** If the Chairman will allow me to discuss the matter raised by Deputy O'Keeffe, is the Minister aware that, in rural Ireland, many farmers and smaller operators have vans? Since these are deemed to be commercial, they have to obey the lower limit of 20 mg even when they are just using it to go home in the evening after work or so on. They only have one vehicle but they are being treated the same as the person who drives a 55-seat coach on the motorway at the maximum speed limit. This law was wrong when it was introduced in 2010. These people have to be under the 20 mg limit even though it is their only vehicle. Some might only have a small tractor to get to the shop, but they are treated just like the driver of an articulated truck. Surely they should not be hit any further.

The ridiculous thing about it is that, if gardaí stop them and see that they have been driving their vans for personal use, they will look at their tax discs and see that they have not paid private tax. On the other hand, if they are stopped after taking a couple of drinks, they are treated as commercial drivers even though they are driving the vans for their personal use and they have to obey the 20 mg rule. That is very unfair. I am asking the Minister not to hurt these people in rural Ireland any further.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Does the Chairman want me to answer just those questions?

**Chairman:** And Deputy O'Keeffe's.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Deputy O'Keeffe stated that the matter of the morning after was unfair.

**Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe:** Yes. We are disqualifying people. The Minister is saying that the three-point penalty has not been effective enough. What about people who travel to work the morning after a night out, when they went home early and did not drive to do so, and feel that they are now good enough to drive?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I understand this point. I have often heard it being made. I understand from experts in this area that such people are still impaired. Their blood alcohol levels are too high. Their driving is still impaired even if they do not feel that it is. I see no good reason for lifting the measure just because it is the morning after. I see no reason for changing it around.

**Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe:** This relates to the Chairman's question.

**Chairman:** What evidence is there regarding the 50 mg to 80 mg difference? How many

accidents have been caused by people in the 50 mg to 80 mg range? Has the Minister evidence of how many accidents have been caused by people in the 20 mg and 50 mg range? If we are to pass legislation, surely it should be evidence based. Can the Minister provide us the evidence?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** It is just inserting a fair and level playing field. It is just saying that everyone over the 50 mg limit should be subject to the same disqualification.

**Chairman:** But the 50 mg limit-----

**Deputy Shane Ross:** I see no reason for allowing them to be treated differently.

**Chairman:** That means that the limit should be 20 mg across the board, seeing as how that is the commercial drivers' limit.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** It does not mean that. It means that there should be a level playing field for everyone-----

**Chairman:** Were we to have the same for everyone,-----

**Deputy Shane Ross:** May I finish, Chairman? For everyone in certain classifications. If the Chairman is questioning the whole basis of alcohol impairing people, that is obviously not the-----

**Chairman:** I am not. I am asking what evidence there is to suggest that there would be merit in changing the penalty for people who show a reading of between 50 mg and 80 mg. What is the evidence?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** The evidence that a reading of over 50 mg is dangerous is incontrovertible.

**Chairman:** What evidence is there that accidents have been caused by people reading between 50 mg and 80 mg as distinct from those with 80 mg plus? That is what I want to know. In terms of having an informed debate, it would be in the public interest for us to have that information. I am saying what critics of this change would argue. Where is the evidence of specific cases of readings between 50 mg and 80 mg?

**Deputy Shane Ross:** A reading between 50 mg and 80 mg is an offence anyway.

**Chairman:** Yes.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** What we are debating is whether the punishment is suitable and someone should be disqualified.

**Chairman:** Precisely.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** There is no question that everyone regards this as an offence, even those who say that the punishment should not be disqualification, drivers should be able to pay money and so forth. What I am saying is that the offence remains but the punishment is uniform across the board.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** What does the Minister think of my story about the man with the van using it to get home from work? He has to abide by the 20 mg rule like the driver of an articulated lorry or coach. That is very unfair on the types of people in rural Ireland I am talking about.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** Yes. Deputy Healy-Rae has a point, although it is not exclusive to rural Ireland. It affects everyone in that situation.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** Yes.

**Deputy Shane Ross:** It happens more in rural Ireland. I will examine the legislation on that matter.

**Deputy Danny Healy-Rae:** I thank the Minister.

**Chairman:** That concludes this session. I thank the Minister and his officials for supplying comprehensive information. Since we have run over time, I appreciate their attendance. It is obvious that a great deal of work on road safety measures is being done in the Department.

*Sitting suspended at 11.28 a.m. and resumed at 11.45 a.m.*

**Chairman:** I welcome the witnesses from the Road Safety Authority to the meeting. By virtue of section 17(2)(l) of the Defamation Act 2009, witnesses are protected by absolute privilege in respect of their evidence to the joint committee. However, if they are directed by it to cease giving evidence on a particular matter and continue to do so, they are entitled thereafter only to qualified privilege in respect of their evidence. They are directed that only evidence connected with the subject matter of these proceedings is to be given and asked to respect the parliamentary practice to the effect that, where possible, they should not criticise or make charges against any person or an entity by name or in such a way as to make him, her or it identifiable.

Members are reminded of the long-standing parliamentary practice to the effect that they should not comment on, criticise or make charges against a person outside the Houses or an official, either by name or in such a way as to make him or her identifiable.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** I am pleased to attend today's committee meeting on road safety. It is a good opportunity for me to do so in the early part of the year following a disappointing year in 2016, given the significant increase in the number of people who lost their lives compared to the previous year. As of today, 8 February, a total of 18 people have been killed on the roads in 16 fatal crashes, which is the same number as last year. The fatalities consist of seven pedestrians, eight drivers and three passengers. While we are still monitoring the data with An Garda Síochána it is too early to draw any conclusions. In reviewing the figures for 2016, overall there were 188 deaths of which 74% were males. Driver and passenger deaths made up 64% of those deaths and, in fact, they account for approximately 85% of the increase in 2016 compared to 2015. It is very much a car occupancy increase. While there was a marginal change upwards in vulnerable road users, the real area of concern is car occupants. We have included a chart in our submission to show the breakdown compared to 2015 in the different categories of road users. July has traditionally been a more dangerous month of the year not just in 2015 and 2016 but also in previous years. It is attributable to a number of factors such as fine weather, people on holidays letting their guard down, tourist involvement and many more vulnerable road users using roads for pleasure and health purposes. People are probably more relaxed and probably more alcohol is consumed during holiday periods as well, so people take chances. Those are the areas of focus for 2017 with An Garda Síochána, as well as other factors such as the time of the day and the day of the week. In 2016, the weekends - Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays - were the most dangerous period. The majority of the crashes that occurred in 2016 were of a social nature. Evening and afternoon on Sundays still remain a very high risk period for motor-

cyclists. The period of 5 p.m. on Friday to 5 a.m. on Monday is a particularly dangerous time. That reflects the relationship between alcohol and serious fatal crashes in this country.

Over half of the crashes resulting in death for vulnerable road users occurred during hours of visibility and daylight, but preliminary figures show that of the vulnerable road users, only two of the 35 pedestrians killed in 2016 were confirmed as wearing high visibility clothing. That speaks for itself. We heard previous speakers mention driving along roads where people are wearing dark clothing and cannot be seen. The lack of high visibility clothing is very much a factor for vulnerable road users. Dublin and Cork were the counties with the two highest figures, with 21 in each. The difference was that Cork had more vehicle and car occupants whereas almost all of Dublin's figure were vulnerable road users. Again, it is a location with much higher density of vulnerable road users. Donegal, as we have learned, is still a county that has issues with road safety and dangerous driving behaviour. It featured again in 2016.

A significant proportion of the fatalities occurred in rural areas, at more than 70% compared to urban areas, even though population densities are very different in this country. The rural areas of Ireland are still suffering road deaths at a disproportional rate. There has been a significant increase in the number of fatalities that have occurred in the 50 km/h zones. It is an increase of 15 deaths in 2016. We often hear criticism of the Gatso or Go-Safe vans placed in these zones as being money earners, but they are placed there for a reason. These are the vulnerable areas where the pedestrians are being killed. Of the 16, almost half of all of the pedestrians were killed in those zones.

In terms of age profile, we see the younger age profile again, predominantly male, making up the deaths in 2016. The second highest was in the over 66 age group. These are more frail physically and if involved in a crash, even if it is a minor collision, it can have devastating consequences compared to those for somebody much younger and fitter. This group features as one of the significant age groups in terms of deaths.

I will refer to our historical performance. While 2016 was a very disappointing year, it is important to look back and not lose hope. The 2013 to 2020 road safety strategy set a target to reduce deaths to 124 per annum, which is 25 deaths per 1 million. We also have a target for reducing serious injuries to less than 330. We are still aiming for those targets and the long-term trend overall shows that we are making progress. Ten years ago, in 2007, there were 350 people killed on the roads. While last year was not a good year, we are still making progress. In 2006, 365 people were killed, which was one person a day. In 2015, we had probably the lowest number of deaths on our roads. We believe that when we can resource it and tackle the killer behaviours we will achieve the target by 2020.

There are factors that influenced the increase in 2016. They are affecting much of Irish life and society. One is the fact that the economy is recovering and, as a consequence, there are far more vehicles on the roads, more people at work and more younger people at work. The latter still constitute the higher risk group. More kilometres are being travelled as a result of accessibility to accommodation and employment. People have to make a longer journey now. The recession had an impact on resources and our ability to implement the full road safety strategy. We heard from members today about issues with the road network, the continuation of new roads, the maintenance of existing roads, road improvements and re-engineering. An Garda Síochána is probably one of the most important elements in the success of the strategy but it has been hit severely with the reduction of numbers in the traffic corps. As with many public services, it suffered from a reduction in the number assigned to road safety duties. It is now called the national roads policing division and the Garda is addressing that issue, but it has af-

affected the number of deaths on our roads. That pattern is common to many European countries. The European Transport Safety Council, which represents the 28 EU countries involved in the road safety strategy, has acknowledged that it is happening in many jurisdictions. With border security and other terrorism demands, resources are being spread very thinly and, unfortunately, road safety has been affected by that.

We can take heart from the recent campaign in December and early January. The Gillian Treacy for Ciarán road safety campaign in conjunction with the Road Safety Authority and in collaboration with An Garda Síochána saw a significant increase in the number of mandatory alcohol testing, MAT, checkpoints. The message that Gillian Treacy and her family conveyed reached every home in Ireland and affected many people. We believe that saved lives. We have statistics to suggest that there was a significant reduction, compared to 2015, in the number of people killed on the roads during the six-week Christmas campaign. There was a far more visible Garda presence and wall-to-wall coverage of the Gillian Treacy campaign. We can take heart from the fact that when we have the resources and put them into effective campaigns it makes a difference and lives are saved. There was a 27% decline in the number of deaths compared to 2014 and a 34% reduction compared to the safest year on record, which was 2015. Everybody would acknowledge that the message got through to everyone in Ireland and people made better choices. In addition, I do not doubt that many people who took chances were caught and will suffer the consequences in the near future from engaging in killer behaviour such as drink driving and drug driving.

In terms of Ireland's performance in an EU context, we are punching above our weight. We are fifth in the performance table. Ireland is recognised as a country that has made significant progress in improving safety on the roads over the past ten years. We have a very robust road safety strategy. It is respected, replicated and copied in many other jurisdictions. The recent mid-term review, which was finalised in November, looked at the areas we need to prioritise if we are to bring the trend back in line with where we want to be. A number of other countries have seen a slight improvement. These are early days - we are only in February - but we are getting feedback from many countries, especially in the top tier of the performance table, that are also seeing increases. Sweden, which has traditionally been at the top of the European table for road safety and road safety improvements, has seen an increase. We are watching and looking to see what is happening elsewhere.

The economic analysis conducted by the Road Safety Authority has revealed parallels with other improved economic climates. As unemployment levels go down, there are increased numbers of people on our roads. Economic downturns are traditionally associated with reductions in traffic volumes and disproportionate reductions among high-risk groups. Many young people have emigrated to other countries. We hear about those people being involved in road crashes in other jurisdictions, which shows that this problem can travel. It is in the nature of young male individuals in all jurisdictions that they are more prone to taking risks. A downturn in the economy also sees a reduction in disposable income. When young people are less likely to have their own cars to drive at the weekend, they might borrow cars from their parents or other people and it is likely that they will be more careful with those vehicles. When the economy picks up, many new vehicles come on the roads and used vehicles come in from the UK at a very attractive price. This makes driving much more accessible to young people.

We saw in 2013 and 2014 that the same factors were involved in serious and fatal crashes, with alcohol playing a significant part. Alcohol was a factor in 38% of fatal crashes between 2008 and 2012. That broke down into 29% drivers and 9% pedestrians. We have an issue in

this country with alcohol and pedestrians. Speed is also a prevailing issue. There is a combination of factors in many instances. When alcohol is on the scene, speeding and risk-taking behaviour is more likely to be a factor and seat belt use is less likely. Unfortunately, the whole issue with alcohol almost predetermines other outcomes as well. When a person who has been drinking gets into a car, he or she is more likely to forget to put on a seat belt, to speed and to lose all consciousness of the risks he or she is taking. People in such circumstances seem to think they are invulnerable. It is important to note that people who engage in one element of bad or risky behaviour generally have other elements of bad behaviour as well. Almost a third of those who drive after consuming alcohol have no insurance. Approximately 15% of drink-drivers are on learner driver permits, which indicates that this is a higher risk group. Some 7% are disqualified at the time when they are caught drinking and driving. This is one of the reasons we are pursuing the publication of the names of disqualified drivers. We feel the deterrent that is present at the moment is insufficient in addressing this issue. We have also seen from the statistics that disqualified drivers are involved in a completely disproportionate number of serious and fatal crashes.

Research we have carried out in conjunction with the Health Research Board points to other key contributors, such as driver actions like the non-wearing of seat belts and vehicle defects. All of our interventions are based on empirical evidence from our research and the investigation files we receive from An Garda Síochána. It is clear that we need to do something that will make a difference. There is no point in spending money on the wrong areas of road safety. As a result of our research, and having worked very closely with An Garda Síochána, we have committed in 2017 to highlighting the role alcohol consumption by drivers, motorcyclists, pedestrians and tractor drivers continues to play in serious and fatal crashes. Some Deputies have mentioned tractor drivers. Our research shows that 25% of such drivers who are involved in crashes have consumed alcohol.

We intend to work with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport to make progress with our proposal to organise a rehabilitation programme as a means of raising driver awareness. This will involve requiring first-time offenders, including drink-drivers, to do a course. We will promote the wearing of high-visibility gear. We need to do more with the public, the vintners' associations and the pubs to try to spread the message that one can get high-visibility gear from the Road Safety Authority at any point. We want to promote that as much as possible. We will continue to work with cyclists and drivers on cyclist safety. It is a shared environment. We want to promote safe behaviour by younger and older drivers. We want to reinforce the message about the importance of seat belts as lifesavers. We want to try to eliminate the issue of people driving while disqualified, primarily by transmitting the message that one should not engage in behaviour like drink-driving or dangerous driving in the first place. The primary objective of the proposed Bill is to warn people that they will end up on a public database if they engage in such behaviour. The secondary objective is to ensure people will be aware that their employers, their communities and their families will know that they have chosen to engage in this behaviour and, as a result, they will experience peer pressure and community pressure when they are not allowed into their cars until they have served the duration of the disqualification. We will also be working with the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport to promote the further roll-out of 30 km/h zones.

We took emergency measures in late 2016 as a result of the level of alcohol involved in crashes. There has been a change in this regard. Some young people who are new to driving are not aware of the message that has gone out for many years about the anti-social and negative connotations of drink-driving. We have to go back to basics here, starting at the theory test. We

have introduced a new module of questions for theory test candidates. We have just awarded the contract for the theory test to a new supplier. There will be a full revision of all the questions in the theory test as part of that process. The questions about alcohol will be more robust and will relate to matters such as the consequences of engaging in drink-driving, including its impact on future employability. I have mentioned the publication of the names of disqualified drivers. We are working on the privacy impact assessment at the moment. We will be bringing out a code of conduct. We have prepared draft heads of a Bill. All of those matters will dovetail. We hope to have this in the pipeline in the first half of the year. We are working with and taking guidance from the Data Protection Commissioner on how to observe all the protocols around personal data to ensure what we do is appropriate, saves lives and benefits society.

In conjunction with the Garda national roads policing bureau, we will engage in a series of education and awareness activities this year to finalise the joint education and enforcement plan for 2017. Members of our research and media team are at the Garda College in Templemore today to make presentations and provide research on road safety data. That is something we will be doing throughout 2017. Personnel from supervisory and management levels of An Garda Síochána will be briefed on these issues at today's meeting in Templemore. We think there is a role for the Road Safety Authority in giving the whole Garda corps the same research information and updates on legislation as we give the public. That is very much welcomed by the Garda Commissioner and the assistant commissioner for roads policing.

We have agreed that the focus this year will be on the main killer behaviours, including alcohol-impaired driving, speeding, failing to wear seat belts and using mobile phones. We will support this by rolling out a number of campaigns that we started in 2016 on foot of the pre-crash reports. This will support the actual activity of An Garda Síochána. There will be targeted enforcement and messaging. We will support the introduction of chemical roadside testing, also provided for in a Bill that was signed into law in December 2016. We will liaise with the Medical Bureau of Road Safety, MBRS, on that. We will also raise awareness of the danger of the misuse of seat belts through an online campaign. That will be very much targeted at young women as well as young men because there is a prevalence among young people of wearing their seat belts under their arms or across their laps, which can have devastating consequences in terms of injuries. We will also address the findings we have pulled from the report on motorcyclists, which have found that speed and alcohol played a very significant part in those deaths.

Yesterday we commenced a new campaign with An Garda Síochána and the Health and Safety Authority that is targeting employers. If a person drives for one's work, be it on a professional basis or if one drives a company car, a truck or bus, that person is 40% more likely to be involved in a serious crash than a motorist who does not. There is a need for employers to get involved and to take responsibility to ensure that they have proper measures in place, that their employees take proper rests, that they are properly inducted into whatever vehicle they drive and that they are very responsible in terms of the number of hours they drive and how they use the vehicle.

The Chairman referred to the introduction of a potential app. We are working with Toyota Ireland to roll out an app that will promote safer driving. It would be completely autonomous for all vehicles. It would not be specific to a Toyota vehicle and could operate in all vehicles. There would be benefit in that. Such an app was very successfully implemented in Japan. It would be an awards-based scheme for people who would download it and operate on a safe driving profile. That would help improve behaviour.

We have a number of key dates in 2017, including a number of Garda Síochána "Slow Down

## ROAD SAFETY STRATEGY: DISCUSSION

Days”, the UN global road safety week and the European Traffic Police Network, TISPOL, and Garda Síochána “European Day Without A Road Death”. We will also host two major conferences, the focus of one will be on alcohol and road safety and the second one will deal with the 30 km/h zones. If we see a need for a specific theme to be addressed as the year progresses, we will address it.

**Chairman:** I thank Ms Murdock for her comprehensive opening statement. I was anxious to allow her extra time because there is nothing in her statement that is not relevant. I would have liked to have given her more time to elaborate but unfortunately-----

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** I hope I have not rushed through it.

**Chairman:** Not at all. For the benefit of members, I take it the witnesses heard everything that was discussed at the earlier part of the meeting.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** We did.

**Chairman:** Therefore, anything that was said to the Minister in the members’ questions was all taken on board.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** There were some questions on which clarification was needed and I would be happy to provide that.

**Chairman:** I will open the discussion to the members. The Fine Gael grouping has 15 minutes.

**Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:** I commend Ms Murdock on the authority’s report, which was excellent. She stated that safety on our roads is the priority, with which I fully agree. She stated there are approximately 8,000 disqualified drivers on our roads. Have those drivers been involved in many motor accidents? Have they been the cause of any deaths on our roads? That number of disqualified drivers should not be driving on our roads.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** At any moment in time there are approximately 22,000 disqualifications in the system that people will have received on an annual basis. The national driver licensing file issues 22,000 disqualifications but we see multiples of that and, as the Deputy said, the number could be as high as 8,000. We see a proportion of disqualified drivers involved in fatal crashes. In our research, which we carried out with An Garda Síochána and where we went through almost 1,000 fatal crashes over a five-year period, we established that at least 7% of those were caused by motorists who were driving while disqualified. That equates to quite a number of people per annum. Unfortunately, it is a fact that disqualified drivers are driving. They are risky and dangerous drivers and they go on to have crashes and to be involved in subsequent crashes after they have been disqualified. At least 7% of fatal crashes involved disqualified drivers.

**Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:** Ms Murdock also stated there are approximately 150,000 uninsured drivers on our roads and that the incidence of that jumped from 4.3% in 2013 to 7.4% in 2016. With respect to those 150,000 uninsured drivers, I would ask her the same question that I asked about the disqualified drivers.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** Was that in my submission or was in-----

**Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:** Those are figures from the Motor Insurance Bureau of Ireland.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** What was the Deputy's question?

**Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:** There are 150,000 uninsured drivers on our roads and there has been a massive jump in those numbers in the recent years, for which motor insurance costs are being blamed. Are many uninsured drivers involved in road accidents?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** Yes. Approximately 15% of crashes in that five-year period involved uninsured drivers. Some people would cite motor insurance costs as an issue, but we have found there is always a multiple of road traffic offences involved. The drivers are uninsured, they do not have an NCT, they may be disqualified and they may already have motor offences on their record. It is a combination of people who genuinely cannot afford motor insurance or people who have already had multiple crashes previously and they cannot get insurance so they continue to drive uninsured.

**Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:** Ms Murdock gave a comprehensive report on alcohol being a factor in road fatalities. She stated that 38% of road fatalities were alcohol related. If I had my way, I would say that if one drinks, one should not drive. I would like to see a zero-tolerance attitude applied but, as the Chairman said earlier, what constitutes zero tolerance? It was stated that it is a 50 mg level for drivers of private vehicles and a 20 mg level for those who drive lorries and other such vehicles.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** Yes, 0.02%.

**Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:** What would Ms Murdock's view be on adopting a zero-tolerance policy?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** We considered the research and I believe this question was asked by the Chairman.

**Chairman:** I want to have clarity on the figures, on the 50 mg to 80 mg levels.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** We examined 1,000 files from that five-year period and approximately 330 of them involved alcohol in some shape or form and 30% of that 330, almost 100 of them, were killed and the toxicology report showed the level of alcohol to be below the legal limit. Our message would be that any alcohol impairs driving. A significant proportion of the people killed on our roads were people who were not above the legal limit. We would say one drink starts to impair one's driving. That is the reality of it. European standards and medical research show that zero tolerance would be at 0.02% or 20 mg level. That is what is considered to be zero tolerance because of medical and other residual factors in the blood stream. If one has a blood alcohol level of 0.05%, or 50 mg, one's driving is definitely impaired.

**Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:** I was very surprised to learn that more than 10% of imported cars from the UK were written off. It is clear that the system that we have is not working. What would Ms Murdock advise in this respect?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** The new legislation that has been put in place will address some of the issue about written-off vehicles. We have now got a basis for insurance companies to advise the national driving licence file service that a vehicle has been a category A or a category B write-off, which means that it is either completely written off and cannot be used for any purposes or it is category B write-off and can be used for parts. Some 95% of the imports last year came from the UK. While the legislation does not fully address those imports, there are still very robust measures in place with the UK car information suppliers such as the cartels where

one can establish the history of a vehicle. Until we get the proper legislation in place, we would recommend that customers address that fully using the information that is currently available for the UK imports. It is very robust and one will be able to establish the history of a vehicle being imported from the UK with very reasonable confidence. We have the starting position on the write-offs with the insurance companies in this country for Irish vehicles, but we will look towards developing that further for imports into the country.

**Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:** Ms Murdock stated that 35 pedestrians were killed on the roads in 2016 and seven pedestrians have been killed so far this year. I come from Dundalk and I have got a great education travelling to Dublin on a regular basis even with respect to cyclists. What can we do to improve road safety. Those figures are very high; 35 people left their home during the day or at night hoping to return home.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** We have a number of education campaigns and we target from a very early age young people at pre-school, primary school and secondary school on the importance of high visibility gear. In the coming weeks, we will have our annual campaign involving the Seatbelt Sheriff and Hi Glo Silver which starts at the most impressionable age for young people about the importance of wearing hi-viz gear. Last year, we gave away over 1 million pieces of high visibility clothing. Anyone can go onto the website. We get a very positive response to the gear we give out there. Anyone can see the multiple “Operation Transformation” people out there doing the group community walks, all of whom are in their RSA hi-viz gear. We are open to working with community groups. We have our road safety officers going around the country to schools, community groups and GAA clubs and we are very open to engaging with interest groups on that to help promote the importance of the high visibility gear. In 2017, the pubs definitely have a role to play because many of those killed were probably coming home from the pub. They made the choice not to drive but to walk and tragically-----

**Deputy Peter Fitzpatrick:** The last thing I want to ask Ms Murdock is to do with speeding. I have already asked the Minister about it and the recently passed legislation. It is on non-residents, for example from Northern Ireland, and the amount of speeding and parking offences they commit. We are not doing enough. Coming from Dundalk and the Border area, I hear a lot of people coming from Northern Ireland say they can go any speed they want in the South because nothing will happen to them. How do we stop that?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** I come from the North myself. Many of these people are very well behaved north of the Border when they drive in their own jurisdiction. We have to acknowledge that enforcement is a key success factor in this and whether they think they will be detected. Our information is that many people from other jurisdictions, in particular the North, pay their fines and move on. However, the fear of getting caught would be the biggest deterrent. As such, we welcome the 10% increase in the number of gardaí in the traffic corps. We need to see that come year on year.

**Senator John O’Mahony:** I thank Ms Murdock for her comprehensive presentation and her ongoing efforts to bring down the number of road deaths. What the RSA is trying to do is very visible. I wish it every good wish in that regard. Its work is in all our interests. There were a couple of interesting facts in the presentation. Anecdotally one hears that the slowest speed limits are the safest zones but what Ms Murdock said was interesting. Visibility and the jackets are important. Street lighting and all of that is important as well. Ms Murdock also mentioned that the most dangerous time was between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. and then that drink driving was a big issue. Surely, drink driving should not be an issue between 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. I know there are people coming from work and so on, but what is Ms Murdock’s analysis of why that is the

most dangerous time?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** Without going into every single factor, it can be the result of afternoon fatigue after having a couple of drinks at lunch, which people should not have, or that people were up late the night before and had a heavy night. Everybody knows about the 3 p.m. wall. We really have to get that message across to drivers that if they are fatigued, they are responsible for stopping. It is just as dangerous as drinking and driving. Our research shows that if one is awake continuously for 17 hours and then drives, one has the equivalent impairment as in the case of having 0.5 mg of alcohol in one's system. It is just as dangerous to continue to push through that tiredness.

**Senator John O'Mahony:** I would have thought that working lunches with drinks were a thing of the past, but perhaps I am mistaken.

**Mr. Michael Rowland:** It is also 8 a.m. to 12 noon so a lot of it is to do with commuting times. There are a lot more cars on the road and a lot more exposure and risk. As such, one has it in the mornings and in the evenings. That time changes over the weekends. The Senator will see the different times there. However, a great deal of it is to do with the fact that there are more vehicles on the roads at commuting times.

**Senator John O'Mahony:** I raised the issue of enforcement with the Minister including the implementation of fines and the delivery of summonses. In case anyone thinks I am blaming gardaí, who will presumably be in with us on this, that is not the case. Is there something in our legislation that makes it difficult? The figures are phenomenal. In 71% of cases where people are caught using mobile phones, there is no conviction whether as a result of the failure to deliver summonses or because people claim they did not get them. Would a legislative change help? In relation to speeding, Deputy Fitzpatrick said there was a perception among Northern Ireland drivers that they would get away with it down here. The message these figures send out is that even if one is caught with a mobile phone or speeding, one might not end up being fined or having penalty points. It is also the case in relation to the GoSafe vans that certain judges have thrown out multiple cases. Is there a need for new legislation to get rid of that for once and for all? It would be a major plus if that happened. If people think they will be caught or not caught, they will act accordingly. Road signs with a picture of a speed camera on them should also include the speed limit at that point. Often times one wonders when one sees it if it is 80 km/h, 100 km/h or 120 km/h. That is an important point.

**Chairman:** A vote has been called in the Seanad.

**Senator John O'Mahony:** I might not be able to wait for the reply.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** I cannot comment on the actual numbers because I have not seen them but I am aware of the issue of people appearing in front of a judge to say they did not get the summons. However, new legislation is coming in June to introduce a third payment option. Up to now, there were two points of payment and then there was an automatic court appearance where payment was not made. People were then saying they never received the fixed charge penalty notice. If they are appearing in court to tell the judge that they never got the ticket, it means they got something. Now, they will have a third payment option of settling the penalty notice up to seven days before the court appearance. That will address a significant number of issues and improve efficiencies through the court. The new MLR project to link the master licence file with the vehicle will create a much better hit rate in terms of linking who was driving the vehicle with the person who says he or she got the ticket but that "It wasn't me, your

Honour”. We still have a propensity to chance our arm in court and tell the judge “It wasn’t me” or “I didn’t get it”. That is a cultural issue and there is copycat behaviour there. There is plenty of legislation but electronic summonses would certainly assist in success rates there. It is a cultural issue as much as anything else and people will chance their arms.

**Chairman:** If any point was not addressed, it can be addressed to the committee later for Senator O’Mahony. That brings us to the Fianna Fáil grouping, which has 15 minutes.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** I thank the CEO and her board members for coming in today. I compliment the Road Safety Authority on the good work it has done for many years in the areas of policy formation and advocacy and on playing a leading role on road safety. While last year was not the most successful year in the area of road safety, the trajectory over many years has been downward, which is very welcome. As I have to leave the meeting shortly, I ask the witnesses to respond first to my questions to allow me to leave.

I raised with the Minister the composition of the board of the Road Safety Authority on which there are a number of vacancies. He conceded that at least two vacancies should be filled, one to provide accountancy expertise and a second to provide advocacy expertise. The Irish Road Victims Association, which has done great advocacy work on road safety, is one possibility. Would the filling of these vacancies be sufficient to ensure the board is able to do its work to its full potential? Are any of the vacancies impeding its work?

Ms Murdock alluded to pedestrians and cyclists. I raised the issue of pedestrians with the Minister because seven or 40% of the 16 deaths on the roads so far this year have been pedestrians. This is a very high figure. While advocacy is fine, rules and regulations are required to ensure people take necessary precautions. Anyone who walks along a roadside at night wearing dark clothing is behaving just as dangerously as someone who chooses not to wear a seat belt or to break another rule of the road. What should be done in this area? Should legislation be introduced to make high visibility clothing mandatory? Should mandatory distances be introduced for different speed zones in respect of drivers overtaking cyclists?

The Road Safety Authority is responsible for the inspection of commercial vehicles. I understand it has introduced a new system using red, amber and green coding. Under this new system, RSA inspectors will be alerted to persons with poor road traffic records by a code red and they will then carry out on-the-spot checks. Code amber is obviously not as bad as red and code green will appear where the driver has a good record. I am informed that the RSA does not publicise the criteria by which the different codes are applied. While someone in code green will be fine as he or she does not need to make improvements, someone with an amber code will find it difficult to find out which changes are needed to change his or her code to green. I ask Ms Murdock to elaborate on this system.

The Chairman and Minister discussed the issue of a driver app in the previous session and Ms Murdock also referred to the issue. I am aware that the RSA is working with Toyota on this issue, albeit not exclusively for Toyota vehicles. Many other businesses have developed apps and they are willing to work with the Road Safety Authority on a pilot basis to identify how their apps could be of assistance. An app would be beneficial from the point of view of tracking driver patterns and enabling this information to be collated for future policy formation. People with a good track record would then be offered support, perhaps through reduced insurance premiums. How far advanced is the RSA in terms of piloting such an app? Is it ready to go out to tender or seek expressions of interest and tangible proposals from various parties? How long will it take to reach this point?

On drink driving, I asked the Minister how often alcohol was found in the system of those killed in road traffic accidents. As the RSA collates this information, it is probably more appropriate to put the question to it. Can we quantify the level of alcohol involved? As I stated, there is a significant difference between someone having a glass of wine with dinner at 7 p.m. and driving to pay someone a visit at 9 p.m. or 10 p.m. and someone who drinks a bottle of wine before driving. Does the RSA have data showing how often alcohol has been determined to be the cause in fatal road traffic accidents?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** I will start with the Deputy's question on the Road Safety Authority board. Board appointments are the sole responsibility of the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport. Earlier in 2016, our chairperson raised with the Department and Minister the fact that, owing to a number of retirements from the previous board arising from the expiration of natural terms, the board would benefit from having expertise in finance, procurement and legal skills. Those are the three primary areas on which the RSA will focus. Since the departure of our financial accountant subsequent to that discussion, we also have a need for a financial expert on the board. Discussions in that regard are continuing between the Minister and the RSA chairperson.

The idea of having a road safety advocate on board is a very good one as such an advocate would bring a great deal to any road safety agency in terms of sharing experience.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** Is the lack of legal and financial expertise impeding the work of the board in any way?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** It would be for the chairperson to comment on that matter. All I can say is that the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform introduced guidelines in September 2016 requiring that all State boards follow certain procedures and raise any issues they have in terms of skill sets. They also require that boards be diverse and have the requisite fiduciary skills for carrying out financial oversight as well as the normal governance duties of a board. This issue is the subject of ongoing discussion between the Minister and the RSA chairperson and I understand the Minister is of a mind to address it now.

On high visibility clothing for pedestrians and the potential to make it mandatory, we are reluctant to move in that direction. This is not a police state. Guidance is provided for people's benefit and we will certainly provide high visibility clothing to social outlets and community centres to encourage people to use them. It is not viable to make high visibility clothing mandatory, however. We take feedback from members of the public on the issue, on which Mr. Rowland has done some research.

**Mr. Michael Rowland:** We have done significant education on high visibility and vulnerability. We have also done observational studies on the number of people wearing high visibility items. These have found that in excess of 50% of people are wearing high visibility clothing. We want to continue our work on education and promotion in this area.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** On commercial testing and the red, amber and green system we operate, this approach is very much welcomed by operators. We are also strongly encouraging providers of public services such as transport to adopt a threshold before tenders can be made for these services. Under this approach, only those who can demonstrate compliance with the Road Safety Authority (Commercial Vehicle Roadworthiness) Act, operate safe systems and have all of their vehicles declared on the Road Safety Authority system would be eligible. Mr. Liam Duggan, our director of enforcement and legal, may be able to elaborate a little on the

availability of the information.

**Mr. Liam Duggan:** I thank the Deputy. The risk system we are putting in place is a requirement under EU law and the intention, essentially, is that those operators with the highest risk profile on road safety will be targeted at the roadside and with premises inspections. That is informed by the outcome of the annual test, the performance of a roadside check to see if an operator is compliant with the drivers' hours rules, the tachograph rules, the drivers' certificate of professional competence and also with regard to the systems the operator has for maintaining their vehicles. We will see if they have a basic system and if the drivers do walk-around checks. If these factors are in the negative, it will obviously affect the operator's risk profile. A huge element of our enforcement strategy is education awareness. The Deputy said that operators will not know, but they are told in fair detail where they are being non-compliant. We use a stepped approach to enforcement. For a first time offence, we will try to guide the person the right way. Most operators do respond very positively to that approach but on occasion it is necessary to take the next step, which is a possible direction or prosecution. That is also open to us. Operators-----

**Deputy Robert Troy:** I was not clear. Obviously, if someone has failed and gone into the red zone, there will be a list of issues they need to address. Is there a chart to show how an operator can hit the green zone if they meet particular targets?

**Mr. Liam Duggan:** Yes.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** Does the chart show how they could find themselves in a subsequent or lower threshold if they do not meet certain marks, so that they do not have to fail it and they could aspire to the very highest levels?

**Mr. Liam Duggan:** It is the responsibility of the operators to comply. If, as I said, operators are non-compliant, it will have an adverse effect on their rating. That information would be communicated to them at the time, for example around the roadside check. They would be able to see the rating because they have access to a portal in which they can see where they stand and whether they are in red, amber or green. They will see the reasons that caused them to be red, amber or green. We are not asking the world of them. We are asking for some very basic systems to comply with the basic requirements, to maintain their vehicles safely, to comply with the drivers' hours rules and ensure the vehicles are roadworthy. It is fairly basic stuff and we are very pleased that the majority of operators are in good shape, but there is a minority who we must target.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** If I could add to that. I believe that I know from where some of the Deputy's inquiries may be coming. In the past, there was a tendency for people to put their vehicles through the test to generate a list of fail items, as opposed to bringing roadworthy vehicles to pass the test. It was used as a diagnostic tool for the operator to then fix the bare minimum. If they do that now, they will appear as "red" operators because they will have failed the test and their vehicles could have dangerous defects. We are trying to encourage proactive and preventative maintenance on an ongoing basis that is not just on the day of the test. It is to ensure they will have roadworthy vehicles and if they are stopped after the test, even if it is only two days later, and there is something that has arisen they will be advised. We would reassure operators that if there is a once-off serious defect, such as when something breaks in transit, although it is dangerous we would fully appreciate that they have good systems in place. That would not result in them being marked down as a red operator and requiring a start from scratch. It is a very well-thought-out and fair system.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** I do not want to labour the point - I am conscious that my colleague must come in also - but is there minimum criteria for the six and what an operator needs to achieve to get into the green zone? I am not talking about somebody using the test to diagnose what is wrong. Is there a list of what they need to achieve to be in green and for the person who wants to act according to the law? I am told that there is no list currently.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** There is a list. We have a book to guide operators and owners of vehicles and we would be happy to provide the Deputy with a copy. It is very clear. It is a combination of drivers' hours and so on.

**Deputy Robert Troy:** A list to provide to people?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** Absolutely. We have given away some 10,000 of those and we would be happy to provide one to anybody who is unclear of his or her obligations in this regard.

**Chairman:** I am aware that Deputy Munster wishes to ask some questions.

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** I am under pressure time-wise so is it possible?

**Chairman:** Yes, the Deputy is scheduled now.

**Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe:** The Deputy will do her best.

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** The road safety television advertisement over the Christmas period was remarkably effective. The witness made reference to it earlier when he said that it is effective when one has the combined traffic corps resources behind the campaign. We know that drink driving is a major factor in road accidents and fatalities, but one wonders if the message has gotten through. That particular campaign was very effective, but the figures for this year, January to now, are exactly the same as last year. It must be very frustrating for the Road Safety Authority to come up with the highlighting and awareness campaigns and to not have the resources to enforce it. Therein lays the proof that for the five weeks of this year we are exactly the same as we were last year. Perhaps the witnesses could offer their opinion on the lack of enforcement procedures, and the common knowledge out there that there is no enforcement, which means that no matter what the campaign is the likelihood of being stopped are next to none.

One of the most dangerous two hour periods is 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. With regard to the Road Safety Authority's ongoing education programme in getting the message through to primary schools, second level school and colleges, does the RSA especially target colleges? School-going children, particularly teenagers, are the least likely to don high-visibility vests - for obvious reasons - so would the RSA consider introducing a high-visibility strip for school bags to primary and second level students so they could be seen while walking? The students would be ten times more likely to put the strip onto their schoolbags than put on a high-visibility vest. The RSA could also liaise with the schools to try enforcing this to ensure that every child has a high-visibility strip on his or her schoolbag. We are trying to-----

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** Raise awareness.

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** -----get the message to them from a young age. When we look at the statistics for speeding and drink driving, the age group is those who have just completed second level or college. The message is not getting through, no matter what. If there is something on their schoolbags literally from primary school age, then awareness is created even if it

is subconscious in nature. Schools would have to help with the enforcement of it. Perhaps the RSA would consider this as a viable option and campaign.

I will now turn to the driver testing value-for-money review. Is this a proposal to privatise testing? New legislation, hopefully, is coming through about unaccompanied drivers. In Dublin, there is an 18-month waiting list for driving tests because of the lack of test centres. In the context of Drogheda, there is only one test centre in County Louth. The system is all the time on the back foot. If a person is waiting 12 to 18 months for their driving test the temptation is there to drive unaccompanied. We need to have all our ducks in a row. If the services are not there and the waiting lists are allowed to grow due to insufficient numbers of driving test centres, then it backfires on the RSA's campaigns and it certainly does nothing to discourage people from chancing their arm. Is much of the authority's work outsourced? Could we get a copy of the driving test value for money review? Finally, the witnesses spoke about an increase in fatalities in the 50 km/h speed limit areas. What is causing that? Has the authority conducted any research into that? Is enforcement of the speed limits the main issue? Is it due to a combination of speeding and a lack of enforcement?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** I will start with the driving test because I know it is of particular interest. We are undertaking a value for money review at the moment. A full review of the driving test system and the service provided by the RSA was previously carried out, as I understand it, in 2012. That review found that it was a value for money service. However, a commitment was made at that time to carry out a further review in a number of years. The review was due to be done again in 2016 and it is being completed as we speak. The review was not done with a view to outsourcing anything. We have approximately 110 driving testers in-house, carrying out approximately 1,800 driving tests per annum. The number of tests that they have delivered increased by two per week following the Haddington Road agreement. We are providing a very efficient service. We were subject to the recruitment embargo, like every other public service in recent years and that resulted in a diminishing number of driving testers being available. We have just recruited and fully trained up an additional ten driving testers. We got sanction for a further seven driving testers and they are undergoing training, which takes approximately ten weeks. We hope to have them in place in the coming weeks.

The majority of test centres are still delivering a test waiting time of between ten and 13 weeks. In some of the smaller centres the waiting time has extended out to 15 to 17 weeks but it is nowhere near 18 months. Some of the smaller centres might have reached an 18 week waiting time but we are confident that with the additional testers that have been recruited and with the provision of additional overtime at weekends over the past few months, we will address that problem. Anybody who needs a driving test quickly can be accommodated on a short-term waiting list. Unfortunately, quite a significant number of people cancel their tests. Approximately 17% of people who book tests do not show up, which means that we have the capacity to take people in at short notice if they are available. While some of the centres have increased waiting times, we fully anticipate bringing them back into line now that we have been given sanction to recruit additional testers.

We fully appreciate that it is very important that young people reach the basic standard of driving competency. It is not a matter of fast-tracking them through the system. They need to do the six-month period of mandatory driving, plus the 12 essential driving lessons. Then they are ready to go for their test. Some people need longer than that and some of those waiting times are as a result of people choosing to wait longer. We are happy with the situation at the moment. In Finglas, Dublin, which is one of our biggest centres, the waiting time is ten weeks.

The centre in Tallaght is recording a waiting time of ten to 11 weeks. The average waiting time in Dundalk is 12 weeks. We are just finalising the calculation of the latest figures but, overall, the national average waiting time is 13 weeks for a driving test.

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** My apologies, I actually said months instead of weeks. Even at that, though, it is discouraging. A lot of the problem arises from a lack of local test centres.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** As part of our capital investment plan for the next four years, we are investing in the driving test estate. We have a number of priority areas, such as Dundalk, on which we will be spending a couple of million euro to address the shortcomings there. The centres in Galway and Athlone are also a priority. We have a plan to look at other locations into the future. In 2017, we will be doing a demand management exercise on all of the services provided by the RSA; not just the driving test. We will be looking at the commercial vehicle testing service, the NCT, the theory test and so on. We will be looking ahead for the next four years to determine what demand will be, based on population growth, demographics and so on so that we can plan for the future. Drogheda is -----

**Chairman:** I am anxious to move on. I ask Ms Murdock to answer the other questions posed by Deputy Munster because there are others waiting to contribute.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** Certainly. We will follow up with Deputy Munster on some of the issues she raised.

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** Just on the issue of Drogheda -----

**Chairman:** I am sorry to interrupt but Deputy Munster asked a number of other questions and I am anxious that the witnesses are given a chance to answer them. To be fair to everyone, we need to move on.

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** Okay.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** I would be happy to speak to Deputy Munster after the meeting.

**Chairman:** I ask the witnesses to respond briefly to Deputy Munster's other questions.

**Mr. Michael Rowland:** Deputy Munster asked a question about pedestrians being killed in the 50 km/h zones. We do observational studies each year and there is a problem with speed in urban areas. Our most recent observational study indicated that over half of car drivers, 57%, had exceeded the posted speed limit on urban roads, that is, roads with a speed limit of 60 km/h. Where we have speed and vulnerable road users, we will have fatalities.

Part of our work is to educate road users but we are also supporting the introduction of 30 km/h zones because there is international evidence to show that the introduction of such zones saves lives. A pedestrian hit by a car travelling at 30 km/h has a 90% chance of survival. We have been very much engaging on that. We have organised a conference already and will have another one later this year. We have also made numerous submissions to local authorities in support of the introduction of 30 km/h zones.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** We will come back to Deputy Munster on the high visibility strip.

**Deputy Imelda Munster:** Okay.

**Chairman:** Deputy O'Keeffe is next.

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** I welcome the witnesses and hope that they have a good working relationship with the Minister for Transport, Tourism and Sport, Deputy Shane Ross. The Minister and Ms Murdock have both given the committee substantial documents which are full of statistics. I want to raise the issue of the condition of our roads because there is no mention of it in the aforementioned documents. I have received texts from people who have been watching today’s proceedings asking if the witnesses know that bad roads cause accidents. Ms Murdock’s document makes reference to speeds signs and control. Would she acknowledge that our road infrastructure is well behind that of other countries? While there was an increase in fatalities last year, there was also a substantial increase in the number of vehicles on the road. There are more vehicles on the road now and there is far more congestion. I see that when I am travelling up and down to Dublin. Every week when I am travelling home the N8 is blocked up because of crashes at the Naas interchange due to excessive traffic volumes. It is fine to talk about road safety and putting measures in place to improve our safety record but if we are to reach our targets in that regard we need a proper road network.

Driver education is not going far enough. There there have been a number of fatalities on the M8 caused by vehicles accessing the motorway from the wrong direction. How do we eliminate those kinds of problems? This might seem like a stupid question but it must be posed in order to clarify the situation for people. The witnesses made reference to drink-related crashes. Let us take the example of a car that is parked on the side of the road, the driver of which has alcohol taken. Let us say that he or she has an alcohol level of 40 mg or 50 mg per 100 ml blood. If the parked car is hit by a sober driver, that is a Garda incident but is it a drink-driving incident?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** Does the Deputy want me to answer those questions now?

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** Yes, please.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** I will start in reverse. Our statistics show that 38% of fatalities involved alcohol in some shape or form. In 30% of those deaths, the alcohol level was below the prevailing limit at the time, but we deem any amount of alcohol to be impairing. Out of that 38%-----

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** What defines a drink related incident? I give the example of a vehicle parked on the side of the road that is rear-ended by a sober driver but the occupant of the parked vehicle could have had a few drinks. Is that a drink related incident?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** The culpable person there is not the driver.

**Chairman:** Where alcohol is involved, is it still featured as a contributing factor in the RSA’s statistics?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** It is. It is very much called out. A total of 9% of the deaths were pedestrians, and out of that 9%, a significant number of those pedestrians were significantly over the limit, so they were involved in 38% of the crashes but it was not the driver who was culpable. It was the pedestrian who contributed to their own-----

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** If a person sitting in a stationary car-----

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** And the other fellow had drunk.

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** No, the other person had not drunk.

**Chairman:** Therefore, the accident is recorded as saying it involved alcohol but it was not a contributing factor.

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** That is what I am trying to get at.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** It must be a contributory factor to be included in those statistics.

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** That is what I am getting at. The statistics are not transparent enough.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** A correlation to that would be vehicle factors, in that a vehicle could have been defective but it was not a contributory factor because it was stationary, whereas the driver was drunk and that was the contributory factor. The investigating gardaí log all of the factors and then identify which ones were contributory.

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** What about the roads?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** We fully acknowledge that investment and upkeep of the roads are very much part of the drive to make roads safer. Transport Infrastructure Ireland, TII, is a key stakeholder in our road safety strategy. It has identified a shortage of funding for the remainder of the current strategy, so that is a concern. If we are to continue reducing deaths on the road, we need to fund all aspects of the road safety strategy, and that includes a significant portion of the funding going towards road engineering and upgrades and engineering work on danger zones. We meet TII regularly and talk about these issues. TII has its own actions to complete. It has flagged some that are in jeopardy because of not having enough funding for them. We will have to raise that as part of the mid-term review of the road safety strategy and see what can be done.

TII is also responsible for education in respect of motorways. I am aware that there have been a number of tragic deaths as a result of people going on to motorways in the wrong way. I do not know the underlying reason for that.

**Mr. Michael Rowland:** TII is actively investigating those to see if there is an engineering solution that will prevent people from accessing motorways in the wrong way.

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** In respect of governance, the Minister feels that small is beautiful and the fewer numbers the better. My concern is proper representation and that a cross-section is represented. One position has been filled because we need an accountant. It is important the Minister understands we need a cross-section. We do not need a further seven suits from the city. We need some representatives from the rural community such as the road hauliers or local authorities. This must be examined before the Minister starts chopping the size of boards. We need to make sure boards can cover the areas for which they are responsible. In the case of the RSA, board members should come from a cross-section of people, be it those involved in business or in the community. I ask that this be recorded.

**Chairman:** We are against the clock here. As a result of the work of the RSA, countless lives have been saved and there were people sitting around the dinner table this Christmas who would not otherwise have been there. It could have been any one of us in this room. We will never know who those people are but what we do know is that the figures have come down significantly compared with where they used to be. Unfortunately, we have seen rises on a number of occasions and every one is one too many, but I acknowledge the work of the RSA on that issue. One never knows whose life has been saved but the RSA is saving lives.

In respect of VRT and VAT on safety equipment, this is an ever-evolving area. What might have been a optional extra 20 years ago is now standard. New equipment is always coming on stream but VRT and VAT are charged. These things are charged if somebody buying a new car. Has the RSA lobbied the Government on this issue?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** We have raised this at departmental level. Mr. Rowland has written to the Secretary General of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport about this matter. Mr. Rowland is our director of road safety research and driver education.

**Mr. Michael Rowland:** Looking at incentivising the use of personal protective equipment, PPE, and whether we could explore the reduction of VAT is one of the actions in the road safety strategy. As a consequence of that, we wrote to the Secretary General of the Department of Finance. We were advised that because of EU rules relating to VAT, there was no scope for the reduction in VAT on PPE because of the EU VAT directive on PPE. It was an action in the road safety strategy and we did follow it up with the Department of Finance.

**Chairman:** Does the same apply to VRT?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** It would be similar. We are probably talking about optional extras that coach and truck drivers may add to their vehicles and seek to exempt them from the VRT calculation but, again, we did not get any progress on that.

**Chairman:** At a previous meeting, reference was made to alcolocks, speed limiters and GPS. Would the RSA be supportive of this area? How far away is it?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** We have also been monitoring the use of alcolocks in recidivist behaviour - people who have been detected drink-driving. That is an option that some countries have implemented. We would be very open to looking at that and we recently submitted recommendations on rehabilitation programmes. Similar to the commercial vehicle risk indicator system, we have met the Office of Government Procurement and the Department of Education and Skills in terms of school transport. We believe there is an opportunity to introduce a minimum standard before a company can tender in order that professional drivers tendering for public service transport contracts must have a standard of safety equipment. Alcolocks could definitely be one of those options. People could be rewarded for investing in their fleet by being able to tender.

**Chairman:** We should aspire to stop crime from happening in the first place. The same is true of GPS and speed limiters. We have seen a serious reduction in the number of accidents involving HGVs since the introduction of the limiters. From a road safety perspective, there is no need to have a car that can travel 180 km per hour if it not an emergency vehicle. From a law enforcement point of view, one of the problems faced by gardaí is that they simply cannot catch up with high-powered vehicles that can reach 200 km per hour on a motorway. It is something we need to look at. It would be a positive move.

In regard to the changes in the blood alcohol level and the ramifications of being caught, in terms of bringing the public with us, the case has not been made strongly enough on the reasoning for the reduction of blood alcohol levels from 80 mg per 100 ml to 50 mg per 100 ml. I pressed the Minister, asking him for the evidence in support of this reduction. It is important that there would be stronger evidence produced. I ask Ms Murdock to revert to the committee with specific examples where alcohol is a factor.

I was looking at 1,000 incidents and in 670 cases, no alcohol was involved. Of the 330 cases

where alcohol was involved, 100 cases were below the legal limit of 50 mg per 100 ml. One can say that any level of alcohol impairs driving and therefore it is a contributory factor. Of the 230 cases, how many people were in the category of 50 mg to 80 mg per 100 ml blood alcohol level category? How can one tell whether alcohol was a contributory factor in these accidents versus the 670 people in accidents who had no alcohol in their system? That is the type of information I am looking for. It would help inform debate on the matter. I ask Ms Murdock to come back to us with as much information as she can.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** Absolutely. We have a paper on that. Around the time of the introduction of the penalty for the lower blood alcohol level, much academic and medical research was done on the impairment level of the different blood alcohol levels from 0.2 to 0.5 to 0.8. We have good research on that and we will be happy to send it to the committee.

**Chairman:** It would be very helpful if Ms. Murdock could do that. On the issue of visibility, I note that of the 35 pedestrians who were in accidents during the hours of darkness, only two were wearing high visibility clothing. Under the current law on public order offences, if one is a danger to oneself or others, one can be prosecuted, yet that is rarely implemented when a person is walking on a public roadway without lighting. It probably is not as bad as it used to be in the past, but it is still bad. Does Ms Murdock believe the Garda needs to enforce that more? I accept and agree with Ms Murdock's point that nobody wants a police state. That said, I have met drivers who through no fault of their own have been involved in fatal collisions where the person was dressed in black or the person was asleep on the road. That driver has to live with this devastating incident for the rest of his or her life. That driver is as much a victim as the individual and his or her family. Does this need to be considered? Does the legislation need to be tweaked with a specific emphasis on road safety?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** The first problem is that we need to get the message through to pedestrians that they, too, have a personal responsibility to ensure they are not so inebriated that they are going to be a danger to themselves or end up causing an innocent driver serious distress because they have been run over. What we are seeing emerge is that the relationship with alcohol is definitely concerning. Some of the pedestrians who are killed on the roads have such an excessive level of alcohol in their system that it is an issue. It is not unlike the drivers, but some of the pedestrians are equally inebriated. We need to tackle the whole relationship with alcohol as well as enforcement. It is very much a personal responsibility issue.

**Chairman:** In terms of isolated rural areas and the cars for bars scheme that was outlined in the previous meeting, would Ms Murdock be interested in examining that scheme to see whether she could support it?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** I think that is an excellent idea because we have seen research on the cost of a night out, and I know Deputy Kevin O'Keeffe believes that rural Ireland is being penalised, but we see the data on the crashes and deaths and some people have so much alcohol in their system, they are not taking responsibility for getting somebody to drive them. We need to look at a scheme where somebody volunteers to drive. Even if a group of friends agree they will give their mate €10 to do the driving one night, it would really make a difference.

**Chairman:** Even though the scheme is completely voluntary, once it is rostered, the insurance company says "no". That is a shame given the potential dividend.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** Yes. Companies such as Uber could play a part.

**Chairman:** I have two further suggestions. On Safety First, may I suggest that as an on-going public awareness effort, the Road Safety Authority would on the first day of the month inform people of the casualty figures from the previous month. This would be newsworthy and there would be free publicity for what it is trying to do to create general awareness. It would also be an opportunity to broadcast the specific areas of concern. Would Ms Murdock be interested in releasing the data to the media at the start of each month to try to generate more awareness?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** Absolutely, I think so. Previously we had a weekly announcement on the number of people killed in the past seven days. We suspended it because the format had got tired and we need to freshen it up. We will certainly be interested in developing a monthly media release.

**Mr. Michael Rowland:** We may need to promote them more but we have a list of themes on road safety issues that we promote through the year in conjunction with An Garda Síochána.

**Chairman:** Having gone through the figures county by county, I note that there were 71 fatalities in Munster, which is close to 40% of the total fatalities. The figure for Connacht was lower at 24%, while Dublin was 21%. The number of fatalities in the rest of Leinster was 51. The number of deaths in the three Ulster counties was 20. The number of deaths in Munster, in particular, seems to be extremely high. I know it is the largest province but is there-----

**Deputy Kevin O’Keeffe:** It has a large population.

**Chairman:** It has a large population but it is comparable to Dublin and Leinster combined. That has been the trend over a number of years. Is there a particular reason for it? Has the Road Safety Authority looked at this pattern? Connacht is a very large area geographically and had 24 fatalities compared with 71 in Munster.

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** We are concerned and Cork in particular has a high level of fatal accidents. As the Deputy said, the significant road network in Munster would contribute to that. In Dublin the fatalities are primarily among vulnerable road users. It is something we are looking at.

**Mr. Michael Rowland:** We are working with the analysts of the Garda authority, looking at the times the collisions are occurring. We can do further investigation. We are looking at Donegal and Cork at present.

**Chairman:** Is there a correlation between traffic corps numbers in each of those counties and the figures over time?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** We have only looked at the traffic corps numbers in a national context. We are now doing a more targeted heat map on where the crashes are happening.

**Chairman:** It would be an interesting study to see if there is a correlation. Will Ms Murdock advise the committee of the conference details and whether members could attend the June and October conferences?

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** We would be happy to extend a formal invitation to the Joint Committee on Transport Tourism and Sport. It would be great if members could attend.

**Chairman:** I thank the witnesses for their very comprehensive presentation and for the quality of engagement. I commend the Road Safety Authority on its work.

JOINT COMMITTEE ON TRANSPORT, TOURISM AND SPORT

**Ms Moyagh Murdock:** The Road Safety Authority appreciates the opportunity to make a presentation and appreciates the interest of members in road safety.

The joint committee adjourned at 1.20 p.m. until 1.30 p.m. on Wednesday, 15 February 2017.