

**The politics of road death:  
critical discourse analysis of  
road safety policy in Britain  
1987-2021**

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**Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree of**

**Doctor of Philosophy**

**The University of Leeds**

**Institute for Transport Studies**

**March 2023**



The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own. The candidate confirms that appropriate credit has been given within the thesis where reference has been made to the work of others.

The work attributable to the candidate comprises the literature search and review, planning, the interview process, critical discourse analysis, data analysis, and writing.

The contributions of the supervisors consisted of critique and advice during the whole process, proof-reading, and commenting.

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## Acknowledgements

During my school days I was sent to “remedial reading” class, announced to giggles, and told by the head of sixth form that I would “never amount to anything.” Those voices remained loud, and with no confidence, an academic path felt impossible, so I declined an offer to do a first degree. I started nursing, and my NHS career began. Fast forward decades, and I had two coffees with two Professors, and they both saw something in me which I did not, and I became a postgraduate researcher. But, why did I want to do this?

My motive for wanting to understand why we approach road safety in the way we do was both inquisitiveness and very personal. The reason was because of a car crash that changed my life forever. A driver and his passenger chose to drive their car at speed and race four friends. They missed a bend and his car ploughed head first into the car travelling in the opposite direction. That car contained Clara, my (then) six year old daughter, and her Mum, Juliette, who both ended up in separate intensive care units with very serious, life threatening injuries, and Alice died of her injuries, and she missed her 13<sup>th</sup> birthday by 6 weeks: forever my 12 year old daughter. What happened to Alice and Clara motivated me to ask ‘why’ questions and, eventually, find some answers to why we do not prioritise stopping road death. I hope this thesis contributes to road death policy so that other families do not have to hear that dreaded knock on the door from the police.

My research journey began in 2019 and it was both daunting and exciting. But, I only did it with loads of support:

My genuine thanks and gratitude go to Professor Samantha Jamson for steering me through the ups and downs of PhD-land: with her immense patience, vast experience, unfussy encouragement, wise advice, and her scarily impressive knowledge of road safety, and lots of coffee! My genuine thanks and gratitude go to Professor Greg Marsden for challenging my thinking on public policy and making my brain hurt, for his unassuming brilliance, calm motivation, vast experience, and wonderful reliability. Best of all though was the amazing way the two Professors complemented each other, “more depth” and “less waffle” gives a good summary! Simply, I had the best supervision team possible. Their invaluable support and encouragement is the reason I was able to write this thesis, of which I am so proud.

There were thirty five people who agreed to take part in an interview for this research which has been a major and significant contribution to my evaluation of the *politics of road death*. People from the road safety community (including civil servants, the police, charities), campaigners, politicians, and academics: they all gave their time, commitment and thoughtful and considered views. I am incredibly grateful for this, as without your contribution, this thesis

would probably not have been written. There are many other aspects of undertaking a PhD which rely on many other people within ITS, the support services such as the library and training, and the wider support from the University of Leeds.

Finally, and most importantly, PhD's take over your life and you need commitment and dedication to follow this path, and good answers to friends and family who ask: "why on earth, at your stage of life?" Crucially, you need stability, support, and patience from those closest to you. My partner, Paul, accepted my mad wish, enabled it to happen, and encouraged me throughout three and a bit years of our lives. Without his constant patience, support, tolerance, sacrifice and love, I simply would not be here almost at the end of this journey. Thank you, Paul, you are my mainstay and the reason I was able to write this thesis.

As well as being a full time postgraduate researcher at the Institute for Transport Studies at the University of Leeds, it is important to declare that I am also:

- A campaigner for safe roads, though I have taken a break from my activity whilst undertaking my research
- A member of the Deputy Mayor of West Yorkshire's *Vision Zero* Board
- A member of the Leeds City Council expert panel for *Vision Zero*
- A trustee and Board Director of the Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety (PACTS).

Finally, I was the recipient of the Universities' Transport Study Group 2022 Smeed prize for the best student paper at the 54th annual conference.

## Abstract

Britain has some of the lowest road crash casualties globally (by head of population), yet tens of thousands of people are affected each year, and numbers have plateaued. Despite the impact of road trauma, there has been limited evaluation of Britain's policy response. This research is the first to use Kingdon's (1995) multiple streams analysis to evaluate agenda setting, analyse *how* policies were made or not made, and considers framing, the impact of political and organisational factors, and future policy. Critical discourse analysis evaluates primary data acquired via thirty-five interviews with policy participants, as well as secondary data from Parliamentary debates, and policy documents between 1987 and 2021. Three case studies on macro policy making, rural roads and young drivers are analysed. Two different time periods were identified: prior to 2002, the policy problem was accepted, policy solutions advanced, the policy window opened as political discourse was constructive, the policy streams coupled, and policy change resulted. After about 2003 the policy problem was not accepted as road deaths were framed as *accidental* and so unavoidable, solutions were contested, the politics stream flowed slowly, and from 2011, the tight fiscal environment, discarded targets, the shift towards localism and significant competition for attention, policy stability resulted. Competing policy images suggested complacency due to inaction, or Britain's position was framed as *one of the best in the world*. Political and organisational factors impacted on whether there was policy change or stability. The key barrier was the politics stream, where the lack of visible public support, and indifference from the media resulted in limited attention and action from politicians. In conclusion, until the road safety community unites in engaging in *how* road safety can successfully compete with other policy areas, it is unlikely to persuade politicians it is worth the political capital of introducing unpopular or controversial changes, even if they save lives.

## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	<b>ii</b>
<b>Abstract</b> .....	<b>iv</b>
<b>Chapter 1 Introduction</b> .....	<b>1</b>
1.1 Overview .....	1
1.2 Motivation for research .....	3
1.3 Research questions .....	3
1.3.1 Has the political priority of road safety changed over time? .....	4
1.3.2 Do the views of politicians and policy actors on framing vary, and does any variation matter? .....	4
1.3.3 Which political and organisational factors contribute to the development of road safety in Britain? .....	4
1.3.4 What would need to change to develop a future policy to address road deaths in Britain? .....	5
1.4 Thesis structure.....	5
<b>Chapter 2 Road safety policy literature</b> .....	<b>6</b>
2.1 Introduction .....	6
2.2 Context of road safety in wider public policy .....	6
2.3 Approach.....	7
2.4 Road safety .....	8
2.4.1 Introduction .....	8
2.4.2 Road safety interventions .....	8
2.4.3 Policy reports .....	9
2.4.4 Road safety in public health .....	11
2.4.5 Conclusion.....	12
2.5 Public policy .....	13
2.5.1 Introduction .....	13
2.5.2 Public policy theory .....	15
2.5.3 Multiple Streams Model .....	15
2.5.3.1 Perception.....	18
2.5.3.2 Ambiguity.....	18
2.5.3.3 Technical .....	19
2.5.4 Supporting public policy models .....	19
2.5.5 Conclusion.....	21
2.6 Road safety policy .....	21
2.6.1 The literature .....	21

2.6.2 Review of the literature.....	25
2.6.3 Framing .....	26
2.6.4 Agenda setting .....	28
2.6.5 Networks, coalitions, and policy entrepreneurs.....	31
2.6.6 Policy priority .....	35
2.6.7 Time dimension in policymaking .....	36
2.7 Road safety policy and public policy at the intersection .....	39
<b>Chapter 3 Methodology .....</b>	<b>42</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	42
3.2 Case studies.....	42
3.2.1 Case study selection .....	43
3.3 Research design.....	45
3.4 Data sources .....	48
3.4.1 Interviews.....	48
3.4.2 Debates from the House of Commons .....	52
3.4.3 Policy documents .....	54
3.4.4 Road casualty data .....	54
3.5 Approach to analysis .....	56
3.5.1 Critical discourse analysis.....	56
3.5.1.1 Coding framework.....	57
3.5.1.2 Examples of coding.....	58
3.5.1.3 Validation of the coding approach .....	62
3.6 Overall approach .....	62
<b>Results.....</b>	<b>64</b>
<b>Chapter 4 Case study 1 Did the focus of road safety policy change between 1987 and 2021? .....</b>	<b>64</b>
4.1 Introduction .....	64
4.2 Problem: road safety in context .....	67
4.2.1 The numbers of deaths and serious injuries.....	67
4.2.2 Casualty types .....	69
4.2.2.1 Proportion of casualties – killed, serious and slight injury .....	69
4.2.2.2 Breakdown of killed and most severe injury data .....	70
4.2.2.3 Severe injury by road user.....	71
4.3 Policy solutions.....	71
4.4 Politics: has the focus changed over time? .....	74
4.4.1 Introduction .....	74
4.4.2 Results and analysis: 1987 to May 1997 (Conservative).....	74

4.4.2.1 Results: January 1987 to May 1997 .....	74
4.4.2.2 Analysis: January 1987 to May 1997 .....	80
4.4.3 Results and analysis: May 1997 to May 2010 (Labour) .....	82
4.4.3.1 Results: May 1997 to May 2010 .....	82
4.4.3.2 Analysis: May 1997 to May 2010 .....	89
4.4.4 Results and analysis: May 2010 to May 2015 (Coalition) .....	90
4.4.4.1 Results May 2010 to May 2015 .....	90
4.4.4.2 Analysis: May 2010 to May 2015 .....	93
4.4.5 Results and analysis: May 2015 to December 2021 (Conservative) .....	93
4.4.5.1 Results: May 2015 to December 2021 .....	93
4.4.5.2 Analysis: May 2015 to December 2021 .....	97
4.5 Interview results .....	98
4.5.1 Not a policy problem .....	98
4.5.1.1 Low political priority .....	99
4.5.1.2 Invisible problem .....	100
4.5.1.3 Crowded out by other priority areas .....	101
4.5.2 Policy delay or incremental change .....	102
4.5.3 Government inaction with attempts to depoliticise .....	104
4.6 Conclusion .....	105
4.6.1 Open windows between 1987 and 2002: multiple streams combined .....	105
4.6.2 Closed windows between 2003 and 2021: policy delay and inaction .....	107
4.6.2.1 Problem stream .....	108
4.6.2.2 Policy stream .....	108
4.6.2.3 Politics stream .....	109
<b>Chapter 5 Case study 2: Rural roads: the invisible policy area .....</b>	<b>113</b>
5.1 Introduction .....	113
5.2 Rural road safety in context .....	115
5.2.1 Rural road length and volume in context .....	115
5.3 Policy options for rural road safety .....	121
5.3.1 British context .....	121
5.3.2 International context .....	124
5.3.3 Ideas from research impacting on rural road safety .....	124
5.3.4 Rural road safety solutions: discussion .....	127
5.4 Politics of rural road safety: an invisible problem? .....	128
5.4.1 Results and analysis: 1987 to May 1997 (Conservative) .....	128
5.4.1.1 Results: January 1987 to May 1997 .....	128

5.4.1.2 Analysis: January 1987 to May 1997 .....	129
5.4.2 Results and analysis: May 1997 to 2003 (Labour) .....	129
5.4.2.1 Results May 1997 to 2003 .....	129
5.4.2.2 Analysis: May 1997 to 2003 .....	134
5.4.3 Results and analysis: 2004 to May 2010 (Labour) .....	136
5.4.3.1 Results: 2004 to May 2010 .....	136
5.4.3.2 Analysis 2004 to May 2010.....	138
5.4.4 Results and analysis: May 2010 to May 2015 (Coalition) .....	139
5.4.4.1 Results: May 2010 to May 2015 .....	139
5.4.4.2 Analysis: May 2010 to May 2015.....	140
5.4.5 Results and analysis: May 2015 to December 2021 (Conservative) .....	141
5.4.5.1 Results: May 2015 to December 2021 .....	141
5.4.5.2 Analysis: May 2015 to December 2021 .....	143
5.5 Interview results.....	144
5.5.1 Invisible problem? .....	144
5.5.2 Limited public demand for change .....	146
5.5.3 Inaccessible or controversial policy solutions.....	147
5.5.4 Lack of political will .....	149
5.6 Rural road safety conclusion .....	151
5.6.1 Problem stream.....	151
5.6.2 Policy stream .....	152
5.6.3 Politics stream .....	153
<b>Chapter 6 Case study 3: The revolving door of young driver safety policy.....</b>	<b>155</b>
6.1 Introduction .....	155
6.2 The numbers are falling so where is the problem? .....	157
6.2.1 Why the increased risk to young drivers? .....	159
6.3 British GDL policy and the path to nowhere.....	160
6.3.1 Would GDL be accepted in Britain? .....	163
6.4 Young driver safety: delay, inaction, and incremental change .....	165
6.4.1 Results and analysis: 1987 to May 1997 (Conservative).....	165
6.4.1.1 Results: January 1987 to May 1997.....	165
6.4.1.2 Analysis: 1987 to May 1997 .....	168
6.4.2 Results and analysis: May 1997 to December 2002 (Labour) .....	169
6.4.2.1 Results: May 1997 to December 2002 .....	169
6.4.2.2 Analysis: May 1997 to December 2002 .....	172
6.4.3 Results and analysis: January 2003 to May 2010 (Labour) .....	173

6.4.3.1 Results: January 2003 to May 2010 .....	173
6.4.3.2 Analysis: January 2003 to May 2010 .....	177
6.4.4 Results and analysis: May 2010 to May 2015 (Coalition) .....	178
6.4.4.1 Results: May 2010 to May 2015 .....	178
6.4.4.2 Analysis: May 2010 to May 2015 .....	182
6.4.5 Results and analysis: May 2015 to December 2021 (Conservative) .....	184
6.4.5.1 Results: May 2015 to December 2021 .....	184
6.4.5.2 Analysis: May 2015 to December 2021 .....	189
6.5 Interview results .....	191
6.5.1 Is there a policy problem? .....	191
6.5.2 Freedom vs safety .....	193
6.5.3 The use of evidence .....	195
6.5.4 Politics of time .....	195
6.6 Young driver safety conclusion .....	196
6.6.1 Problem stream .....	197
6.6.2 Policy stream .....	198
6.6.3 Politics stream .....	198
<b>Chapter 7 Framing of road safety .....</b>	<b>202</b>
7.1 Introduction .....	202
7.2 Results .....	203
7.2.1 Perception .....	203
7.2.1.1 Framed as inevitable .....	203
7.2.1.2 Framed as unimportant .....	205
7.2.2 Ambiguity .....	207
7.2.2.1 The problem is solved as Britain's roads are some of the best in the world .....	207
7.2.2.2 Dominant car-based framing .....	209
7.2.3 Technical .....	211
7.2.3.1 Complex .....	211
7.2.3.2 Distracting arguments over how to describe road safety .....	212
7.3 Conclusion .....	213
<b>Chapter 8 Factors which influence road safety in Britain .....</b>	<b>217</b>
8.1 Introduction .....	217
8.2 Results .....	218
8.2.1 Governance factors .....	218
8.2.1.1 Structural complexity .....	218
8.2.1.2 Changed relationships between venues .....	220

8.2.1.3 Leadership.....	221
8.2.1.4 Not new.....	223
8.2.2 Organisational factors .....	224
8.2.2.1 Legal factors .....	224
8.2.2.2 Resources .....	226
8.2.2.3 Casualty reduction targets .....	229
8.2.3 Political factors.....	231
8.2.3.1 Party politics.....	232
8.2.3.2 Political ideology .....	233
8.2.3.3 Relationship between politicians, the media, and the public.....	235
8.2.4 Policy entrepreneurs and networks .....	236
8.3 Conclusion .....	240
<b>Chapter 9 Future of British road safety policy.....</b>	<b>246</b>
9.1 Introduction .....	246
9.2 Results.....	247
9.2.1 Road safety interventions .....	247
9.2.2 Organisational influences.....	247
9.2.3 Future policy .....	249
9.2.3.1 Identify road safety as a policy problem .....	249
9.2.3.2 Reframe the policy image.....	251
9.2.3.3 Clear(er) national strategy.....	251
9.2.3.4 Improved governance systems.....	253
9.2.3.5 Policy entrepreneurs and visible leadership.....	254
9.3 Conclusion .....	256
<b>Chapter 10 Discussion and Conclusion .....</b>	<b>261</b>
10.1 Introduction .....	261
10.2 Summary and discussion of findings .....	262
10.2.1 Research question 1: has the political priority changed over time? .....	262
10.2.1.1 Open policy window.....	262
10.2.1.2 Closed policy window.....	262
10.2.1.3 Rural road safety: an invisible issue .....	264
10.2.1.4 Young driver safety: a revolving door.....	264
10.2.2 Research question 2: do the views of politicians and policy actors on framing vary, and does any variation matter? .....	265
10.2.3 Research question 3: which political and organisational factors contribute to the development of road safety in Britain? .....	266
10.2.3.1 More impactful factors.....	267

10.2.3.2 Less impactful factors .....	268
10.2.4 Research question 4: what would need to change to develop a future policy to address road deaths in Britain? .....	269
10.3 Limitations .....	272
10.4 Kingdon and policies for road death (conclusion) .....	273
10.5 Contribution to knowledge .....	277
10.5.1 Data .....	277
10.5.2 Method .....	277
10.5.3 Findings .....	277
10.6 Future research .....	277
<b>Chapter 11 References .....</b>	<b>279</b>
<b>Appendix A Invitation to join the research .....</b>	<b>312</b>
<b>Appendix B Participant information sheet.....</b>	<b>314</b>
<b>Appendix C Consent form .....</b>	<b>317</b>
<b>Appendix D Coding framework with nodes and definitions.....</b>	<b>319</b>
<b>Appendix E History of road safety policy interventions (car) .....</b>	<b>325</b>

## List of figures

Figure 2.1: Literature search flow chart.....	7
Figure 2.2: Policy cycle (Cairney, 2012).....	14
Figure 3.1: Two level nodal structure for ‘targets’ .....	59
Figure 3.2: Three level nodal structure for ‘focus’ .....	59
Figure 3.3: Primary nodal structure for the rural roads section in NVivo.....	60
Figure 3.4: Top level NVivo nodal structure for the young driver section.....	61
Figure 3.5: Young drivers NVivo sub node for the level of support for GDL by category ..	61
Figure 3.6: Summary of data and methodology relating to the results chapters .....	63
Figure 4.1: Documents on road safety policy: 1987-2021 .....	65
Figure 4.2: Distribution of House of Commons debates vs shorter interventions .....	65
Figure 4.3: Road deaths and serious injuries in Britain, 1987 to 2021 (DfT, 2022b).....	68
Figure 4.4: Deaths per billion vehicle miles: 1987 to 2021 .....	69
Figure 4.5: Proportion of casualty types (DfT, 2020) .....	70
Figure 4.6: Percentage of total casualties by killed and most severe injury (DfT, 2020) ...	70
Figure 4.7: Percentage of severe injury by road user (DfT, 2022b) .....	71
Figure 4.8: Policy documents used for CDA: front covers .....	74
Figure 4.9: Introduction of casualty reduction targets .....	94
Figure 5.1: HoC debates, policy documents and TC inquires including rural road safety	114
Figure 5.2: Road length in Britain: by road type (DfT, 2020a) .....	116
Figure 5.3: Rural road deaths (all types): 2000 to 2020 (DfT, 2021c) .....	117
Figure 5.4: Rural and urban casualties: rate per billion kms travelled (DfT, 2020) .....	118
Figure 5.5: Rural road deaths per billion mile travelled.....	118
Figure 5.6: Rural vs urban road deaths: 2000 to 2019 (DfT, 2020).....	119
Figure 5.7: All rural road deaths by road type (%): 2019.....	119
Figure 5.8: Rural road deaths by gender and casualty 2019 (DfT, 2020) .....	120
Figure 5.9: Young drivers killed on rural roads (DfT, 2020) .....	120
Figure 5.10 : Age distribution of drivers (under 24) killed on rural roads (DfT, 2020).....	121
Figure 5.11: Fact check - changes in road deaths between 1988-1991 (DfT, 2020).....	128
Figure 5.12: Fact check - speed compliance (cars), 2011-2017 (DfT, 2018).....	132
Figure 5.13: Fact check - pre-crash manoeuvres (I AM Motoring Trust, 2007) .....	137
Figure 5.14: Fact check for A537 [cat and fiddle] (Dangerous roads, Nd.) .....	141
Figure 6.1: Documents on young driver safety: 1987-2021.....	156
Figure 6.2: Numbers of young driver and passengers killed: 2000 to 2020 (DfT, 2021c) .	158

## List of tables

<b>Table 2.1: Inclusion criteria for the literature search.....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Table 2.2: Policy cycle (Cairney, 2012, adapted) .....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Table 2.3: Results of literature review articles from road safety policy.....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Table 3.1 : Road safety organisations utilised for case study selection .....</b>	<b>44</b>
<b>Table 3.2: Long and short list of potential case study areas.....</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Table 3.3: Document and debate selection.....</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Table 3.4: Category of interviewees .....</b>	<b>49</b>
<b>Table 3.5: Interview questions.....</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>Table 3.6: Search criteria – inclusions and exclusion .....</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Table 3.7: Procedure to undertake thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) .....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>Table 4.1 Road safety discourse analysis document summary 1987-2021.....</b>	<b>66</b>
<b>Table 5.1: Rural roads discourse analysis document summary 1987-2021 .....</b>	<b>114</b>
<b>Table 5.2: Vehicle miles, road length and change since 1994 and 2018 (DfT, 2020a) .....</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>Table 6.1: Young drivers discourse analysis documents summary 1987-2021 .....</b>	<b>156</b>
<b>Table 6.2: Government response to TC recommendations (TC, 2021b).....</b>	<b>188</b>

## Abbreviations and glossary

AA	Automobile Association
ABI	Association of British Insurers
ACF	An Advocacy Coalition Framework analyses coalitions which includes people from a variety of positions who share the same belief system and have a degree of coordinated activity (Sabatier and Weible, 2014).
Adjournment debate	A half hour debate enables a backbench MP to raise an issue and receive a Government response, where prior notice are required.
Agenda setting	The study of how and why some policy issues receive political attention and get onto the agenda and other do not.
BIBA	British Insurance Broker's Association
Brake	A road safety charity
CoPA	Committee of Public Accounts
CBA	Cost Benefit Analysis
Crash	Crash has been used frequently as shorthand for road traffic crashes.
CRaSh	Collision Recording and Sharing: software which enables the capture of details of road crash data.
DfT	Department for Transport
DHSS	Department for Health and Social Services
DTLGR	Department for Transport, Local Government, and the Regions
DoT	Department of Transport
ETRAC	Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee
EU	European Union
EuroNCAP	European New Car Assessment Programme
EuroRAP	European Road Assessment Programme
FSI	Fatal or serious injury
Framing	The process of shaping the interpretation of a social problem by influencing the image of the policy which can elevate one perspective over an alternative.
GDL	Graduated Driving Licensing or Licence
Garbage can model	A concept where policymakers kick policy ideas down the road, and so delay policy action: developed by Cohen et al. (1972) and adopted by Kingdon (1995).
HES	Hospital Episode Statistics
HMICFRS	His Majesties Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services
HoC	House of Commons

HoL	House of Lords
KSI	Killed or seriously injured. Language is used interchangeably between KSI, road deaths and sometimes excluding serious injury.
MoJ	Ministry of Justice
MP	Member of Parliament
MSM	Multiple streams model: a term identified by Kingdon (1995) to describe the continuous interplay between problems, policy and politics.
NAO	National Audit Office
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
Novice driver	Newly qualified drivers. [This research focused on young drivers as DfT data did not identify 'new drivers.' In the literature, the two terms are used interchangeably. Young driver was the preferred term except where novice driver forms part of a citation].
NVivo	Software to organize, analyse and visualise information for research.
Older driver	Drivers aged over sixty
ONS	Office for National Statistics
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PACTS	Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety
PCC	Police and Crime Commissioner
Policy entrepreneurs	A political actor who gains benefit from providing a potential or an actual public good, are important because they can help solve problems and often exist in the policy primal soup.
Policy networks	These include specialists in policy communities that include bureaucrats, policy actors, academics and researchers in think tanks who share a common concern in a single policy area.
Policy primeval soup	A term developed by Kingdon (1995) to describe the existence of a large number of competing ideas on how to solve policy problems. These ideas are usually advocated by policy entrepreneurs. The existence of policy windows allows certain solutions to rise out of the soup to become adopted policies.
Policy window	A term developed by Kingdon (1995) to describe the combination of events, which sometimes only momentarily, can lead to decision makers adopting a solution to a policy problem. Policy windows are useful opportunities for policy entrepreneurs.
Policy venues	Policy venues are institutional locations where authoritative decisions are made concerning a given issue and when considered with the policy image can be influential in explaining why a policy develops or not.
PORD	Politics of road death
Punctuated equilibrium	The idea that agendas and public policy making proceed through periods of stability interrupted by rapid change.
Road safety	Road safety and road death relating to policy are used interchangeably.

RAC Foundation (RACF)	Royal Automobile Club Foundation
ROSPA	Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents
Safe System	An approach to road safety based on the principle that life and health should not be compromised by travel. All elements of the road system: safe roads, safe speeds, safe vehicles, safe and responsible road users, and post-crash care (described as five pillars) work together to minimise the chance of a crash, or, if a crash does happen, prevent death or serious injury.
Strategic road safety	Macro level road safety policy as defined within the inclusions and exclusions, which excludes specific modal policy.
TC	Transport Committee
TfL	Transport for London
TLGRC	Transport, Local Government, and the Regions Committee
TRL	Transport Research Laboratory
USA	United States of America, or United States
Venues	Institutions where authoritative decisions are made, such as government, or the judiciary.
Venue shopping	Attempts to seek favourable audiences in other venues.
Vision Zero	Vision Zero is a strategy to eliminate all road deaths and serious injuries, whilst increasing safe, healthy, and equitable mobility.
WHO	World Health Organisation
Young driver	Drivers aged between 17 and 24

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Overview

Britain has a history of innovation and expertise across many disciplines, advancing road safety over decades. Yet, tens of thousands of people are killed or seriously injured in road crashes each year, and these numbers have plateaued after decades of decline (Department for Transport, 2021c; ETSC, 2021). There are known risk areas, for example: a disproportionate number of young male driver deaths (Greenwood et al., 2020); an increased risk for those not inside a vehicle and not protected by metal and airbags (Baker, 2019); 60% of deaths are on rural roads (DfT, 2021c); and there is an unequal impact on the poorest in society (Green and Edwards, 2008). The devastation caused by road crashes on the world's roads is well documented, with an estimated 1.35 million people killed each year (WHO, 2018). Research on road safety suggests the need for reduced road danger for ethical (Fahlquist, 2009); health (Moran et al., 2017), social (Weijermars et al., 2017) and economic reasons (OECD, 2016) in order to address the number of people killed or seriously injured.

Britain has some of the lowest casualty rates globally, as measured by fatalities by head of population, and the fall in the numbers over the past 50 years has been impressive. The number of those killed (approximately 8,000) or seriously injured (approximately 100,000) peaked in 1966 (DfT, 2021c). This decline in casualties over decades has been at a time when the number of vehicles, per head of population, has increased significantly (DfT, 2022c). However, in Britain thirty-four people were killed, on average, each week and 25,975 people sustained serious injury in 2019 (DfT, 2021c).

The politics of road death inhabits a complex (Salmon et al., 2012), contradictory (Shaw et al., 2013), and paradoxical (Elvik, 2013) place in public policy. Parts of society accept road death, serious injury and disability from road crashes in support of mobility (Johnston et al., 2014), which is argued for on the basis of the justifiable benefit of productivity (Mohan, 2003). Conversely, there is evidence of agreement from the public, cited in travel surveys (DfT, 2010a; DfT, 2020b), and from policy actors (Debinski et al., 2014) that addressing road death and serious injury should have a greater priority (Dorling, 2010; WHO, 2019). Despite, or perhaps because of the progress in road safety since the 1960s, it has also been suggested that complacency is a feature of road safety policymaking (Transport Committee, 2008). How politicians frame and respond to road deaths differs across the globe with varying responses to policymaking (Murphy, 2019), with some interventions and policies not implemented despite robust evidence of effectiveness (Hyder et al., 2012). There are claims it is already known, to a

large extent, what to do to address road deaths (Koormstra, et al., 2002; World Bank, 2021), and there are wide-ranging social and economic benefits from such improvements (O'Reilly et al., 1994; Redelmeier and McLellan, 2013).

This research aims to understand the political priority given to the numbers killed or seriously injured on Britain's roads, and to analyse the range of views on road safety policy. To illustrate differing perspectives, Conservative Minister, Robert Goodwill states that:

*"Britain's roads are among the safest in the world. We are proud of that record"*  
(Hansard HC Deb., 26 February 2014, c.383).

By contrast, Louise Ellman, a Labour MP, said: road crashes result in:

*"Thousands of blighted lives, and it is worth noting that road accidents are the largest single cause of death in people aged between 5 and 35 years old. They are tragedies for the individuals and their families, but it is a national scandal that so many people die"* (Hansard HC Deb., 2 July 2009, c.561).

This research asks what position road death holds in public policy and whether there is policy stability or change. This qualitative research seeks to understand why certain decisions are made or not made, and how politicians work with a series of policy actors to produce actions to improve road safety over time. In analysing wider transport studies, Marsden and Reardon (2017) identify that transport policy literature overwhelmingly contributes knowledge on *what* to do, but argue the literature is less effective in studying *how* policies are formulated, with questions of power, context, resources, and legitimacy largely absent. They suggest a substantial lack of engagement with governance issues means that "policy making ... is unlikely to be utilised because of the distance between it and the realities on the ground" (p.238). Applying these findings, this research considers the priority and policy response to road safety between 1987 and 2021, and *how* agendas are set, and policies formulated, or not. It does not focus on *what* interventions may impact on road safety. The research also considers whether the framing and language used about road safety, and whether political and organisational factors influence the development of road safety policy. Finally, the research considers what would need to change to develop future policy to address road deaths.

There are three sources of data:

- interviews with politicians and policy actors in Britain, conducted in 2021
- Parliamentary debates from the House of Commons (HoC)
- policy documents, including Government policy, consultation documents, Transport Committee (TC) inquiry reports and Government responses.

The data on the number of people killed or seriously injured is used to support the thesis. Road casualty statistics have been collected in Britain since 1926, reported in STATS19 (DfT, 2021c).

This data is in the public domain setting out absolute numbers, rates, and trends in casualties, but there are questions over the reliability of this data. There is debate about underreporting (Ward, et al., 2006) and how accurate these data are (DfT, 2021b), but they detail casualties from the most dangerous road users and those most vulnerable to death or injury. The 2020 and 2021 data demonstrates a reduction in absolute numbers from 2019, due to the pandemic lockdowns and reduced traffic volumes (DfT, 2021d) and for these reasons 1987 to 2019 is the selected data period. The aim of this research does not include a detailed analysis of this data, but this information is important to the context in which road safety policy can be studied.

Critical discourse analysis and case study methodology are used to analyse all data sources. The key theoretical model which inspires this thesis is John Kingdon's (1995) work on agenda setting in public policy. He explores how issues get on the agenda, what needs to happen in order for issues to be recognised and to see a policy response. In the work, Kingdon (1995) argues that there are three key streams which need to be brought together, or coupled, to effect change: the problem stream, the policy stream, and the politics stream, and the importance of the role of policy entrepreneurs: the multiple streams model – MSM (Kingdon, 1995). This thesis explores the interplay between these different elements over time. Additional public policy theories are adopted to supplement the analysis, where these add insight into the research.

## **1.2 Motivation for research**

There is limited literature where public policy theory is applied to the study of road safety globally (Wegman, 2003), and the majority of these are from non-British contexts. The study of public policy seeks to understand why and how policies get made in the way they do, or why policies do not get made, or put on the political agenda at all. The motivation for this research is to seek to understand how policy is made in the road safety research field over time, and to contribute to the literature on the focus, framing, factors, and future of road safety as detailed in the research questions (1.3).

## **1.3 Research questions**

The research questions were developed following a review of the literature in the fields of road safety and public policy, but particularly where these intersect. At the centre of this research is a hypothesis that it is already known *what* to do to address road deaths, but politicians make choices on whether to introduce policy solutions, or not. This appears to result in a contradictory position where politicians acknowledge and understand the consequences of road crashes, but seemingly not on the need for more effective policy action. The research questions are designed to be independent of each other but are connected to

enable the evaluation of the politics of road death. Each question is not directional to the next or subsequent question, so, for example, if the answer to question one is that the political priority of addressing road deaths has not changed, the following questions are still valid. Data from interviews, policy documents and debates are used to answer all four questions.

### **1.3.1 Has the political priority of road safety changed over time?**

This question centres on policymaking relating to the **focus** and priority afforded to road safety between 1987 and 2021, and whether there is policy stability or change. It addresses whether there have been changes over this period and aims to examine policymaker's action or inaction on how and why certain decisions are made or not made, and how politicians choose which policies to progress rather than others. The multiple streams model (Kingdon, 1995) is used to analyse whether there is a relationship between the problem stream, the policy stream, and the politics stream. The findings from the critical discourse analysis are presented chronologically in three case studies: first a chapter which focuses on macro level or strategic policymaking (chapter 4: did the focus of road safety policy change between 1987 and 2021?); second a chapter which focuses on rural road safety policy (chapter 5: rural roads: the invisible policy area); and third, a chapter which focuses on young driver safety policy (chapter 6: the revolving door of young driver safety policy).

### **1.3.2 Do the views of politicians and policy actors on framing vary, and does any variation matter?**

This question centres on whether the framing of road safety and the language used to describe it influences road safety policy making, or not. Policy areas can be framed and categorised in certain ways to make them appear, for example, complicated, linked to wider social values to encourage greater participation, or suggest that problems have been solved. How policy images are framed is an important aspect of understanding whether policy develops or not (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009, p.26) and this question explores the impact of any differences (chapter 7: framing of road safety).

### **1.3.3 Which political and organisational factors contribute to the development of road safety in Britain?**

This question evaluates whether political and organisational factors contribute to the development or detracting of policymaking. A policy issue can fade, be seen as having been addressed, people become accustomed to the issue, or it gets crowded out by competing policy areas (Kingdon, 1995), and this question centres on those factors which impact on the position of a policy issue (chapter 8: factors which influence road safety in Britain).

### 1.3.4 What would need to change to develop a future policy to address road deaths in Britain?

The aim of this question is to elicit areas which may have an impact on future road safety policy, and consider which of these may be beneficial in influencing politicians to further address road danger (chapter 9: future of British road safety policy).

## 1.4 Thesis structure

This thesis is organised into ten chapters:

**Chapter 1** provides an overview of the thesis, the motivation for the research, and the research questions. The four research questions are summarised as focus, framing, factors, and future policy, and each has corresponding chapter(s), described below. **Chapter 2** presents the approach to the literature review, the inclusion and exclusion criteria for the search, and a critical assessment of the literature, organised by theme. The research fields of road safety and public policy, which include theoretical policy frameworks, are evaluated. The main focus is on road safety policy, which is at the intersection between the road safety and public policy literature, and is critically evaluated. **Chapter 3** details the qualitative methodological approach. This research uses three sources of qualitative data: new interviews, debates, and policy documents. Critical discourse analysis methodology is applied to all data for a consistent approach to analysis, as well as to the three case studies. In addition, road casualty data is used to provide contextual information to inform the analysis.

**Chapter 4** reports on the first of three chapters which cover the research question investigating the **focus** and priority of road safety between 1987 and 2021, and centres on macro level policymaking. **Chapter 5** reports on the research question on the **focus** and priority of rural road safety policy. **Chapter 6** reports on the research question on the **focus** and priority of young driver policy.

**Chapter 7** reports on the views of politicians and policy actors towards the **framing** of road safety and whether or how the language used impacts on policy change or stability. **Chapter 8** reports on the political and organisational **factors** which influence whether road safety policy is made, or not made, or not put on the agenda at all. **Chapter 9** presents the results of the views of politicians and policy actors on the **future** of road safety policy in Britain.

Finally, **chapter 10** summarises the main findings and discusses the implications, considers the limitations, and concludes using Kingdon's (1995) multiple streams model, and finishes with limitations, how this research contributes to existing knowledge and suggests areas for further research.

## Chapter 2

### Road safety policy literature

#### 2.1 Introduction

This chapter critically assess the available literature, identifies gaps, develops themes, and informs the research methodology. It begins by discussing the context of road death within public policy (2.2) and describes the overall approach to the review (2.3). A critical review of selected literature from road safety (2.4) and public policy, including theoretical frameworks, are presented (2.5). Section 2.6 discusses the search results from road safety policy literature, followed by a critical analysis, and the chapter finishes by making conclusions (2.7). The case study literature is included for rural road safety in chapter 5, and young driver risk in chapter 6.

#### 2.2 Context of road safety in wider public policy

Politics is present in everyday life and can generate attention from politicians, the media, and the public, and is about more than the behaviour of politicians, elections, or political parties: it is about the decisions made which impact on public life. John (2012) suggests that policymaking probably has a greater impact on the population than the “effervescence of much political debate” (p.1). Politicians make choices about a wide range of issues from budget setting, law enforcement, or the introduction of technologies. The aim of political analysis is to examine the links between politicians as they negotiate with each other, seek to influence the public, and understand the production and effects of public actions (Knill and Tosun, 2012).

Transport policy is one example of many areas considered by politicians which compete for attention, of which road safety forms one small part. In an analysis of transport policy literature, Marsden and Reardon (2017) draw a distinction between *what* policy solutions could lead to improvements, rather than the study of *how* policies are selected and implemented. They recognise the value of studying articles which advance transport policy through interventions, but distinguish between this, and the need to study *how* policies get formulated, with questions of power, context, resources, and legitimacy. They suggest a substantial lack of engagement with governance issues means that “policy making ... is unlikely to be utilised because of the distance between it and the realities on the ground” (Marsden and Reardon, 2017, p.238). This analysis may be important in informing this research and whether this distinction applies to road safety policy.

This literature review concentrates on the intersection between public policy and road safety. The focus is on why and how road safety policy is made in the way it is, or why policies do not

get made, or why they sometimes do not get put on the agenda at all. In doing so, the review seeks to understand public policy as applied to the politics of road death and policy making.

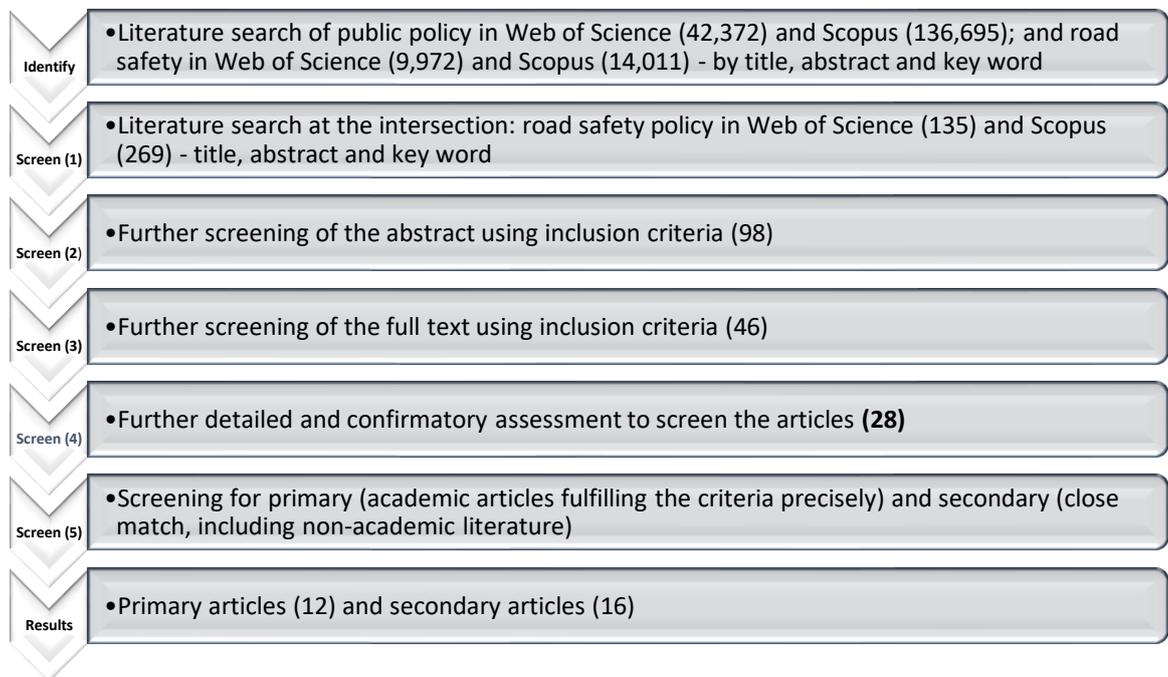
## 2.3 Approach

The approach was to discover as much literature as possible in order to frame, inform and direct this research. All literature was accessible, in English and from the developed world. A series of statements were developed to enable further objective screening to assess which literature should be included, and articles were included where at least one criteria was met (table 2.1).

**Table 2.1: Inclusion criteria for the literature search**

Inclusion criteria	
1.	Includes key words, such as road death, killed or seriously injured, road safety policy, traffic accidents or collisions, road crash
2.	Includes the fields of both road safety and public policy (Economic appraisal, technical, modelling, interventions, human behaviour, specific modes of transport, and medical or health services were excluded)
3.	A focus on macro level, strategic policy, rather than individual policy interventions, such as seat belt legislation or justice and rural road safety and young driver safety
4.	Includes specific frameworks from public policy applicable to this research
5.	References the aims of this research on policy: contribution to safe roads and / or prevention of injury or death
6.	Includes analysis of the four research questions

The approach to screening is described in figure 2.1.



**Figure 2.1: Literature search flow chart**

The initial search generated literature within the *identify* part of the flow chart and the first screen was at the intersection between road safety and public policy (*screen 1*). Using the

inclusion criteria, *screen 2* evaluated articles using the title, abstract and key words. *Screen 3* assessed the full text of the articles for compatibility with the search criteria. *Screen 4* generated a more in-depth review to ensure the selection criteria had been applied effectively. *Screen 5* identified articles in two sub categories: (i) peer reviewed academic articles (primary) or (ii) from other sources (secondary); each evaluated using the same method. Scopus and Web of Science, between 1980 to 2022, were used. In addition, a wider search was conducted using the search engines from Google Scholar and Google. Reference lists from the selected articles at *screen 3* also were used to further identify authors and articles relevant to the search. This was both to secure additional and relevant literature, and to offer quality assurance as there was limited literature.

## **2.4 Road safety**

### **2.4.1 Introduction**

There is extensive literature in the field of road safety which provides context and background to this thesis. Global organisations seek to explain the need to prioritise road safety and regularly assert the need for politicians to act (for example, UN, 2019; WHO, 2019). Much of the research on road safety sets out the need for change for ethical (Hokstad and Vatn, 2008; Fahlquist, 2009); health (Moran et al., 2017; Weijermars et al., 2018), social (Campbell et al., 2014; Weijermars et al., 2017) and economic reasons (O'Reilly et al., 1994; OECD, 2016) to address the number of people killed or seriously injured. Research exists, developed over decades which offers evidence on what interventions could be implemented to improve road safety. Global organisations such as the WHO (2017a) and World Bank (2013) have set out a series of reports with interventions and policy solutions, as have supra-regional organisations such as the EU (2010), the ETSC (2019) and the OECD (2008). There are many examples from national organisations such as from Sweden of the ethical policy approach called *Vision Zero* (Belin et al., 2012) and British reports from, for example, PACTS (2017a; 2017b; 2017c; 2017d), TfL (2018), and the British Government (DfT, 2019c) seeking to reduce casualties.

This section explores literature on road safety interventions, policy reports which discuss political and organisational factors, and as health systems are responsible for treating people post collision, briefly considers the role of public health in road safety (Rissanena, et al., 2017).

### **2.4.2 Road safety interventions**

There is extensive research, much of which simply advocates for policy change, without analysing policymaking. This is explored further in 2.6.2. Examples of *what* could be implemented include: speed interventions (Cairns et al., 2015), speed cameras (Corbett, 1995;

2000); 20 mph restrictions (Cleland et al., 2020); driving speed and crash risk (Aarts and van Schagen, 2006); and intelligent speed adaptation (Carsten et al., 2008). Civil engineering (Johansson, 2009); campaigns (Hoekstra and Wegman, 2011); human and behavioural factors (Fylan and Stradling, 2011); and phone usage whilst driving (Basacik, et al., 2012) provide further examples of what could be done to improve road safety. There is research on the role of protective equipment in improving safety, such as seat belts (Irwin, 1987); child seats (Nazif-Munoz, 2015); and motorcycle helmets (Kyrychennko and McCartt, 2006). Other interventions have been shown to improve road safety: for example, the physical separation of pedestrians and cyclists from motorised vehicles (WHO, 2011), and vehicle technology (WHO, 2017b). Other factors demonstrate a positive impact on improving road safety, such as police enforcement (Gössling, 2017), the role of reduced alcohol levels (PACTS, 2020); interventions to support novice drivers (Roman et al., 2015); casualty reduction targets (Broughton and Knowles, 2010), and the role of the legal system (MoJ, 2017). These articles are not critically evaluated, but included to suggest there are large numbers of articles (figure 2.1) evaluating *what* could be done to improve road safety, rather than *how* policies are formulated.

Fast-developing advances in automated and assisted vehicle technology aims to reduce crashes, pollution, energy consumption and congestion, and predicts benefits to transportation (Pettigrew, 2016). But, defined benefits to safety, the economy, health outcomes or social equity remain unclear (Milakis et al., 2017). The increasing investment in research into autonomous vehicles is considerable, with estimates of \$77 billion worldwide (Milakis et al., 2017). Bagloee, et al. (2016) suggest this is to ensure that autonomous vehicles, and thus private road travel remain central to transport strategies, and by continuous innovation, the car industry invests to stay competitive and relevant. However, the focus on autonomous vehicles and the levels of investment may risk holding back progress on road safety as a million autonomous cars are predicted to be on the roads at the same time as up to a billion vehicles without new safety features (Avenoso, 2018). For politicians and car manufacturers to prioritise the advancement of autonomous vehicles over the implementation of known evidence-based road safety interventions may put at risk the progress towards reducing the numbers of people killed or seriously injured from crashes.

### **2.4.3 Policy reports**

This section discusses policy reports which contribute to road safety management, and these are described in two sections: reports which focus on *what* to implement, and reports including political or organisational factors, selected using the inclusion criteria (table 2.1).

As the *Safe System* in road safety is referenced in this section; a definition is included. The *Safe System* advocates for an ambitious safety performance level, including casualty reduction targets, and best practice road safety culture. It embraces well-established safety principles and builds on demonstrably effective practice using innovative solutions and new technologies. The *Safe System* has a long term goal for a traffic system which is free from death and serious injury. It involves a paradigm shift from trying to prevent all crashes, to preventing death and mitigating serious injuries from crashes. It includes five pillars of the road system: safe roads, safe speeds, safe vehicles, safe and responsible road users, and post-crash learning and care.

**Policy reports focused on *what to implement*:** There are six examples cited from global, supra-regional or national policy documents which advocate road safety change. ***Road safety interventions: evidence of what works and what does not work*** (World Bank, 2021), and ***Saving lives: a road safety technical package*** (WHO, 2017b) both focus on *what* interventions should be prioritised and include references to, for example, *Safe Systems* and interventions on speed, or safe vehicles. ***Road safety priorities for the European Union 2020-30*** (ETSC, 2019) and ***Next steps towards 'Vision Zero'*** (European Union, 2020) are focused on *what* interventions, enforcement or education approaches should be taken with brief references by the EU to shared responsibility, targets, performance, and funding. Two British examples: ***Road safety*** (NAO, 1988) focuses on interventions, costs, education, and highway authorities, and ***Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of Britain's road safety performance*** (TRL, 2016) focuses on *what* could be improved, categorised by roads, road users, and vehicles.

**Policy reports including political or organisational factors:** There are five examples on policy or performance from global, supra-regional or national organisations. ***Zero road deaths and serious injuries: leading a paradigm shift to a safe system*** (OECD, 2016) is dominated by the *Safe Systems* approach and the need for interventions associated with the five pillars. However, there are two chapters more pertinent: one on leadership, including the need for political leadership and raising the profile in order to convince stakeholders of the need to change; and one on *governance*, including funding, targets, evaluation, and research. ***Road safety strategy: a partnership for safer journeys*** (UN, 2019) adopts the five pillars from the *Safe Systems* approach and suggests a series of interventions. Examples include *road safety management*, which includes strengthening the policy framework, improving governance, better data management, and funding. These are all described as suggested actions: for example, to “establish an organisational governance mechanism” (UN, 2019, p.13), rather than an evaluation of effectiveness of the actions or *how* to influence agenda setting or policy formulation.

***Safe Roads for All*** from a Coalition of road safety NGOs (2021) calls for a safe and healthy mobility strategy with five elements: targets; safe roads; investment; vehicle safety; roads policing improvements; and support to road victims. It is constructed in a manifesto-style setting out what they wish to see adopted by politicians, but also includes brief references to the need for better leadership, improved governance, and administration, but little analysis. ***Road safety management capacity review*** (DfT, 2018) is a detailed report published by the DfT with a sub-title indicating that it is an independent report and not a statement of Government policy. There is a wide ranging and lengthy review in each chapter which suggests strengths and weaknesses in two main sections i) *institutional management functions*: coordination, legislation, funding, promotion, evaluation, and research and ii) *interventions*: which adopts the *Safe Systems* framework. The report is not endorsed by the DfT (PA N2, 2021) and is critical in a number of areas. In one key finding it suggests there is an: “absence of defined national road safety ambition” (DfT, 2018, p.10). This report sets out a series of factors which impact on the progress of road safety policy, and whilst it does not cite public policy theories, some of these are consistent with this thesis, such as governance and funding. Finally, ***Beyond 2010 – a holistic approach to road safety in Great Britain*** (PACTS, 2007) concentrates on areas such as young drivers, the aging population, deprivation, and, within a sustainability chapter, links road safety with obesity and climate change. There are also short sections on the value of utilising visions and targets, calls for leadership, the need for collaboration between road safety organisations, and more effective coordination of the mechanisms of government.

#### **2.4.4 Road safety in public health**

Health research considers the consequences of crashes, and the cost to health services (for example, Forman et al., 2011). It is suggested there is a mismatch between the impact that crashes have on health services and the corresponding level of attention given to the prevention of road crash injury. It is suggested that this results in a lack of attention from medical practitioners and public health in this field (Redelmeier and McLellan, 2013).

A small sample of public health literature was reviewed to aid the understanding of health impacts following crashes and to support the development of the research questions. There is a role for public health to play in road safety and Christie (2018) suggests that transport poses a public health risk with the greatest burden on the poorest in society. She suggests that “we already know that creating a safer environment can significantly reduce casualties in deprived areas” (p.139) and public health should play a role in advocating for interventions. The disproportionate impact is on the poorest in society, and the link between social class and the likelihood of road crash injury was established in the Black report (DHSS, 1980). This finding

has been supported by subsequent literature, for example, Green and Edwards (2008), and by Schmitt (2020) in evaluating the relationship between socioeconomic factors, and injury.

The impact on individuals can be seen in a study which provides a systematic overview of knowledge about the relationship between injury following crashes and the quality of life (Rissanen, 2017). It finds that the quality of life significantly reduces compared to the general population. Older people, females, and lower socioeconomic groups diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder or with severe injuries are more vulnerable to reduced quality of life. A literature review assesses the current knowledge of the consequences of serious injuries on disabilities and the health burden in the Netherlands (Weijermars et al., 2016). The authors find that serious injuries following road crashes can have a major impact on victims' physical and psychological well-being and functioning. They conclude that Dutch policy should target the reduction of crashes resulting in serious injury. A study based on hospital discharge databases across six European countries by Weijermars et. al. (2018) analyses the health burden following serious injuries. The analysis selects specific injuries and the resulting lifelong consequences, finding that spinal cord injuries, injuries to the lower extremities, and head injuries account for more than 90% of the total health burden. The paper concludes that further improvement of road safety policy is needed.

Some literature is critical of the lack of prioritisation given to crash prevention from public health. Dorling (2010, p.4) frames this as the twenty-first century epidemic. In an article which focuses on autonomous vehicles, and Crayton and Meier (2017) are critical of little analysis of the public health implications arising from the widespread adoption of technology, and suggest there is a necessity to develop public health research in order to influence future policy making. In an opinion piece from the US, Richter et al. (2001) suggests that the level of death and injury from crashes is a public health failure. This literature provides a contextual overview of the impact of road crashes on health service provision and on the involvement of public health and adds to the context in which road safety policy exists.

#### **2.4.5 Conclusion**

This section provides a short evaluation of the extensive research on safety interventions, and factors associated with road safety management which contribute to reducing road casualties, and of the issues with public health in this field. Road safety professionals and academics provide extensive evidence on interventions for specific areas of risk, so the question of why some of these policy solutions are not being implemented arises. This may be in part due to the volume of possible solutions or the difficulty in evaluating the impact when compared with alternatives. For example, in traffic safety, whilst there is extensive research in driving studies,

there are difficulties with standards of study design and the applicability of methodologies (Carsten, Kircher and Jamson, 2013). This research focuses on how public policy can help to inform the policy choices and the level of priority given by politicians.

## 2.5 Public policy

### 2.5.1 Introduction

The study of public policy helps the understanding of why certain decisions are made or not made, and how decision makers, working with a wide range of actors, produce actions that are intended to have an impact outside the political system (Dorey, 2005). Politicians make choices on widely differing policy areas, from budgets to foreign policy to specific enforcement.

Important to the study of public policy are two theoretical concepts of comprehensive rationality and bounded rationality, and how some policy ideas progress to policy formation and implementation over time, rather than others (John, 2012). The idea of comprehensive rationality is that policymakers translate their values into policy in an uncomplicated, reasoned and logical way. This idealised approach suggests there are clear cut and ordered stages to the policy process, and analysis is comprehensive. By contrast, bounded rationality describes a more realistic approach to the policy process where policymakers use decision making short cuts for satisfactory solutions, rather than comprehensive and optimal rational approaches.

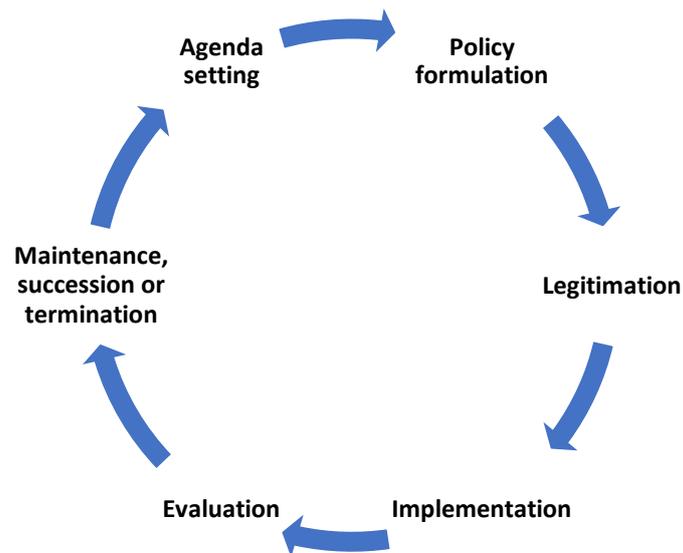
There is no single widely accepted definition of public policy in the literature though the linear, relationship-based approach of the policy cycle remains a dominant feature (Hogwood and Gunn, 1984; John, 2012). The policy cycle is based on the concept of comprehensive rationality where policy is developed and implemented within an ideal or optimal process, and this represents, in theory at least, the best way to develop policy (in public policy: Cairney, 2012; or in transport policy: Marsden and Reardon, 2017). Table 2.2 describes a summary of the policy process (cycle); though it should be recognised that this has been discussed, interpreted, and applied differently in the literature, and over time.

**Table 2.2: Policy cycle (Cairney, 2012, adapted)**

Agenda setting	Includes identifying and framing problems that require government attention, deciding which issues deserve most or any attention, and defining the nature of the problem
Policy formulation	Includes setting objectives, identifying costs, and estimating the effect of potential solutions, choosing solutions, and selecting policy instruments
Legitimation	Includes ensuring that the chosen policy instruments have support. It can involve one or a combination of legislative approvals, executive approval, seeking consent through consultation with interest groups or referenda

Implementation	Includes establishing or employing an organisation to take responsibility for implementation, ensuring resources and ensuring policy decisions are carried out as planned
Evaluation	Includes assessing the extent to which the policy was successful or not, or the policy decision was the correct one, if it was implemented correctly, and if so, what was the impact.
Policy maintenance, succession, or termination	Includes considering if the policy should be continued, modified, or discontinued.

Recent public policy literature rejects the comprehensive rationality approach inherent within the policy cycle (John, 2003; Cairney, 2012). It is suggested it oversimplifies what are complex policymaking systems and criticises the lack of effectiveness in analysing policy change over time, and in evaluating the relative success or failure (McConnell, 2010; Smith, 2009). Whilst the separate elements of the policy cycle are recognised as existing and useful, there is no assumption of linear relationships, nor that all stages feature and feedback, and an acknowledgement that wider influences play a part. It has survived and remains a part of public policy analysis and teaching as a useful introduction to policy studies. The model is described as a cycle and figure 2.2 replicates the policy cycle.



**Figure 2.2: Policy cycle (Cairney, 2012)**

Research has frequently focused on individual different elements of the policy cycle, recognising it is too simplistic, rather than attempting to make use of the whole policy cycle to understand policymaking processes. This approach is adopted for this research, and the focus is on the most applicable framework(s). There are a number of frameworks that could be used to support this research, and these are discussed in 2.5.2 below. The section will consider policy change and policy stability, and the most appropriate aspect of the policy cycle to study and whether this is, for example, agenda setting, policy implementation or evaluation. A significant variable, which is clear from the literature, is that the progress of an original idea through to full implementation can take lengthy periods of time. As an illustration, Barbara

Castle was successful in commencing the implementation of seat belt and breathalyser policies, but it could be argued that both policy areas took three decades before achieving full implementation, if indeed, these are yet complete. Seat belt policy started with requiring new cars to be fitted with seat belts, combined with the voluntary wearing of them and developing incrementally over many years before becoming compulsory in 1983 (King and Crewe, 2013).

### **2.5.2 Public policy theory**

The study of public policy is based on the nature of human action, and the power within and between relationships, and aims to provide a coherent evaluation (John, 2003, p.482). Research seeks to understand and explain a complex and ambiguous world, and why decisions and outcomes change, or do not change. Policy change or stability can be complex (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009; Kingdon, 1995). The problem of evaluation is compounded by the lack of clear chains of causation from public opinion, policy participants or governance, and political structures. John (2012) suggests that the study of public policy is difficult because of the inherent complexity, and the focus on decision making in the whole political system and its external environment. To make sense of this complexity, a number of frameworks are available, and John (2003) suggests there are three main models: Baumgartner and Jones (punctuated equilibrium), Sabatier (Advocacy Coalition Framework) and Kingdon (MSM). This thesis seeks to move from the generality of public policy theory to evaluating the applied field of road safety policy, but first, this section introduces these theoretical models to help to frame the analysis.

### **2.5.3 Multiple Streams Model**

Multiple streams was selected as the dominant model to support this research to enable the interpretation of the empirical reality of road safety in Britain over decades, and to enable an effective and convincing explanation of why road safety policies developed in the way they did, did not develop, or did not get on the agenda. Whilst multiple streams has been applied to the different stages of the policy cycle (figure 2.2), it was originally developed to understand agenda setting, why some ideas develop into policymaking at certain times, while other do not. Kingdon's model was a major step forward in understanding policy formulation and agenda setting (John, 2012, p.160), and a major strength of multiple streams is its basic simplicity: the definition of three independent streams, change and contingency (Knill and Tosun, 2012, p.257). The applicability of the multiple streams model to agenda setting, where the problem, policy and politics streams interact to produce policy change, was the main determining factor in its selection, though it is less effective in explaining stability (Cairney and Jones, 2016). The inclusion of policy windows, policy soup and the adaptation of the Cohen et al. (1972) garbage

can model in Kingdon's MSM further contributed to the selection for this research. Zahariadis (2016, p.50) explains that ambiguity is a fact of political life which makes policymaking messy, complex, costly, and less coherent, and the MSM is an effective way to explain how political systems and organisations make sense of an ambiguous world. The approach provides an analytical tool through which to explore how and under what circumstances policy entrepreneurs manipulate the policy process to achieve policy aims. The model is also described as an effective model for evaluation of public policy (Cairney and Jones, 2016; Jones et al., 2016). Multiple streams is expanded upon below and further models are included as supportive to the use of the MSM.

As a means to explore the development of policy, John Kingdon, authored his book *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies* (Kingdon, 1995) in which he identifies three streams as flowing through the policy system: the problem stream, the policy stream, and the politics stream. These independent processes are "governed by different forces, different considerations and different styles" (Kingdon, 1995, p.88). Each evolve in their own way adapting to rules, context, and the dynamics of the policy environment. There are many policy issues and only a proportion of problems are given attention by decision makers, where these issues compete for attention in the problem stream. Some conditions are not even defined as a policy problem until there is an available and acceptable policy solution. Problems need a push to receive attention of people in and around government which can be provided by a focusing event such as a crisis; a powerful symbol that catches on, or the personal experience of a policymaker. Policy ideas float in a *policy primeval soup* and are developed and adapted over time through a process of *softening up*, where ideas are tested and challenged within the policy community, consisting of specialists in the given policy area who are *scattered* through and outside of government (Kingdon, 1995, p.117). Politicians confronted with a range of problems will prioritise the ones where constructive solutions, often already defined and developed, are available. For example, in transport policy there are numerous potential policy solutions to improve road safety that compete for attention. Finally, the politics stream is composed of dynamics relating to the "public mood, pressure group campaigns, election results, partisan or ideological distributions ... and changes in administration" (Kingdon, 1995, p.145).

The three streams develop independently, and when a problem is recognised, a solution is available, and the political climate is positive for change, a policy window opens, the streams couple and this can facilitate policy change. Policy windows open when there is a recognised and compelling policy problem or through events, such as an election or a serious or series of fatalities. Equally, the lack of development of the policy stream can constrain an issue being

raised up the policy agenda. The issue may not be recognised as a problem, there may be a lack of an available policy solution or there is little political will or recognition to make change.

The role of the policy entrepreneur is important in coupling the streams. They are individuals who introduce, promote and advocate for their ideas in a range of policy communities and invest time, money, and energy to increase the chances for their policy area or idea to be placed on the agenda (Kingdon, 1995, p.179). Policy entrepreneurs are active both in the problem stream and the policy stream. They can originate from many backgrounds and be politicians, civil servants, lobbyists, campaigners, academics, or private individuals. Their success can be linked to the qualities of the policy entrepreneur such as persistence, access to policymakers, and in framing policy problems in a language acceptable and understood by policy makers and politicians. While decision makers frequently shift their attention from one problem to another, policy entrepreneurs maintain an interest in their stated policy area. Policy entrepreneurs can also be unsuccessful at coupling the multiple streams.

Kingdon builds the MSM on the garbage can model of decision-making (Cohen et al., 1972) where policy development happens under the condition of ambiguity. Ambiguity refers to a state of having numerous ways of thinking about the same policy problem or circumstances which may not be reconcilable which can create vagueness, and confusion (Zahariadis, 2014). In the case of uncertainty, more information may reduce the uncertainty, but with ambiguity, more information does not reduce ambiguity. Zahariadis (2014, p.26) suggests that the garbage can model of choice (Cohen et al., 1972) is central to ambiguity. Choice can be seen as a garbage can where policy participants dump problems and solutions, and where no one person controls the process. "The point is to stress the dynamic, complex, and chaotic nature of political life" (Zahariadis, 2014, p.27), and this is where MSM was developed to seek to understand policymaking. Ambiguity exists in organisations and governments and is a core assumption in MSM, and can be measure by three indicators: fluid participation, where turnover is high, and policymakers move from one policy area to another; problematic preferences and a lack of a clear policy objective where people often do not know what they want and decisions are made as processes develop; and unclear technology where the mechanisms of governance are largely unclear to those involved, impeding decision making.

The MSM deals with policymaking under conditions of ambiguity (Zahariadis, 2014) as set out above. This has been built upon to understand the influence of the policy image and how policymaking is impacted by the framing of the policy problem. Three factors are suggested to support the evaluation of the framing of road safety: perception, ambiguity, and technical.

These are set out below and the results are reported in Chapter 7.

### **2.5.3.1 Perception**

How a policy image is perceived is an important aspect of how or whether a policy develops (Hogwood and Gunn, 1984). Framing is a mixture of emotive appeals and empirical information which influences how a policy image is perceived. The facts pertaining to a particular policy can include many different aspects and can affect people in different ways (Baumgartner et al., 2014, p. 67). Policy actors and networks can deliberately portray issues in certain ways to win support and allegiance, to serve functions of persuasion, justification, and symbolic display (Schon and Rein, 1994). Hogwood and Gunn (1984, p.108) analyse the importance of issue definition and how the perception impacts on a policy image. They suggest three activities to support the analysis of how a policy image is perceived: i) becoming aware of a stimulus to thought or action; ii) interpreting the stimulus; and iii) relating it to what is already known or believed. They support the importance of the role of perception in understanding how a policy issue is framed, and whether it develops or not. These activities are used to inform the analysis, not to apply rigidly. As an example of how the perception of an issue can be manipulated, Hogwood and Gunn (1984, p.119) cite work by Baker where a government report frames the value of the car industry in positive and economically productive terms, and minimises the costs to health and the environment (discussed at 2.6.3).

### **2.5.3.2 Ambiguity**

The framing of a policy image can lead to it being seen as ambiguous or contested (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009; Zahariadis, 2014). By employing strategies which appeal to the emotions, policy entrepreneurs can use persuasion to alter or reinforce how a policy image is seen, and ambiguity is one element employed to deliberately frame a policy area to win support (Schon and Rein, 1994). Baumgartner and Jones (2009, p.26) suggest that policy images are always a mixture of objective facts and emotional appeals. These can be subtle or strong, but they are present, and they discuss the tone of policy images. Cairney (2016, p.107) uses a case study on fracking to illustrate how framing can influence agenda setting. He suggests policy participants frame fracking in different ways: i) only applicable to local environments; ii) needed for energy security and economic growth, and iii) avoiding fracking is a climate change mitigator. Each frame enables different networks to present their own arguments and perspectives, and these different perceptions can be developed and advocated. The framing of a policy area can be changed by focusing on tone and engaging with the media and policy participants to alter dominant frames. By creating an ambiguous framing, this can lead to differential interpretation, based on facts or emotions, and this debate can influence how a policy issue is seen.

### 2.5.3.3 Technical

Extraordinarily complex policy issues are often simplified, with the result that very few aspects are focused on at any one time, at the expense of the rest. Baumgartner and Jones (2009, p.26) suggest certain groups exploit these limitations, and create and seek to protect a policy monopoly based on a single framing over long periods of time. The authors illustrate this by using the US nuclear power sector from the 1990s which was historically described in positive tones as supporting economic progress and framed as technical and heavily science based. This technical and economic framing contributed to maintaining the policy monopoly. The authors suggest that the sector's image changed to one of danger and environmental degradation. Where policy issues are over-simplified this can result in a lack of attention, and this may explain why most policies do not change. Periods of attention which involve reframing the policy image can change the levels of attention and develop policymaking. The power of policy entrepreneurs to influence this framing is an important consideration, whether this is to maintain the policy monopoly with the established framing, or to shift the policy image to attract new attention. Framing involves the categorisation or portrayal of the policy area, and this can be technical and so perceived as relevant only to technical experts, or linked to wider social values to increase participation and acceptance (Cairney, 2012, p.185).

### 2.5.4 Supporting public policy models

John (2003; 2012) suggests that in order to address the weaknesses within different public policy models, it is possible to make use of the complementary models. This section explores models which could support the selection of Kingdon's MSM in this research.

The **Advocacy coalition framework** (ACF) focuses on the analysis of a process driven by actors promoting their beliefs. A coalition includes people from a variety of positions who share the same belief system and have a degree of coordinated activity over time (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014, p. 183). Common beliefs motivate people to form advocacy coalitions and these networks can compete against each other if the common beliefs differ. ACF form part of complex and adaptive political systems and focus on change over lengthy periods of time. Beliefs bind actors together in coalitions and different coalitions compete for outcomes consistent with these beliefs. This competition takes place in specialised sub-systems and these belief based coalitions can dominate, and display stability and continuity based on core beliefs that are difficult to shift. The ACF seeks to evaluate how social and economic factors are mediated by policy actors and networks to react to external events or changes in the evidence. It helps politicians to understand these external factors and influence them in doing so. An example: the banking sector exerts significant power within the political system and influences key policymakers to ensure their economic ideas, or beliefs dominate policy debates.

The **punctuated equilibrium model** aims to explain long periods of policy stability punctuated by short but intense periods of change which characterises political systems as both stable and dynamic (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009). It brings together several elements, including policy framing that can alter a policy problem, agenda setting, the power of participants (actors), the policy image and venues, and the role of policy communities or policy monopolies. Policy venues are “institutional locations where authoritative decisions are made concerning a given issue” (p. 32) and when considered with the policy image can be influential in explaining why a policy develops or not. Both the policy image and policy venue can change over time and just as the policy may have multiple images, it may fall within the scope of several venues. As power is exercised at different levels of government (or different venues), the relative involvement of each level can be an important factor in policy development or none. In governance structures with multiple levels, network actors shift where they focus attention to advocate policy aims, and move between different venues. This is described as venue shifting. Most policies remain unchanged for long periods but can change quickly, and punctuated equilibrium explains these changes in agenda setting, as all issues cannot be considered at all times. The lack of attention to most issues helps to explain why policy communities remain closed and why policies do not change. Policy monopolies are created by framing an issue in a particular way to limit policy actors’ legitimate role in the policymaking process. This model was developed within the American political system and is less clear about the criteria or conditions in which a punctuation occurs or how to measure one, but the discussion of policy images and venues complements the MSM in this research.

**Policy sectors** have been categorised by six factors (Hood, 1986; Hood and Margetts, 2007): i) legal; ii) financial – relating to funding or resources; iii) institutional – relating to venues and decision making; iv) organisational - different levels governance; v) informational – transmitting signals to individuals or organisations; and vi) networks – with a role in achieving policy goals. This is a useful framework to inform rather than direct the analysis, but has not been widely applied within the available literature.

**Top down or bottom up** models describe policy implementation and the tensions, or connections between the two (Sabatier and Weible, 2014). The top down model describes the perspective of higher-level bureaucrats and executive decision making where policy is decided at the centre. Lower level organisations then carry them out, or not. The bottom up model describes the involvement of lower-level bureaucrats who implement public decisions. The ideas and any influence of these actors feed back to the higher-level decision makers and are influenced by traditions, practices, and politics (John, 2012). There are critics of the top down and bottom up models who criticise the simplicity of these models stating that it is impossible

to separate policy formulation from policy implementation (Sabatier and Weible, 2014), and as the focus is on implementation, this is less relevant to this research.

**Incrementalism:** Some writers argue that public policy is best understood in bounded rationality, but Lindblom (1959) argues for a more limited model of decision making. He argues for an incremental approach to understanding decision making as politicians fail to make procedurally rational decisions: “The policy process is an endless search for solutions. Decision making is often exploratory” (John, 2012, p. 25). In this model decision making can be incremental, unplanned, and disjointed, or described as *muddling through* by Lindblom.

### 2.5.5 Conclusion

There is a range of public policy theory and the main exponents have been explored. John (2003) suggests that, in the main, writers in public policy are working within the arguments developed by Baumgartner and Jones (punctuated equilibrium), Kingdon (multiple streams) and Sabatier (Advocacy Coalition Framework). Multiple streams was selected as the dominant model to support this research to evaluate the empirical reality of road safety in Britain over decades, and to enable an effective and convincing explanation of why road safety policies developed in the way they did, did not develop, or did not get on the agenda, and as the most effective model to evaluate agenda setting. Alternative models were engaged, where these added to the analysis and the understanding of policy change and stability.

## 2.6 Road safety policy

### 2.6.1 The literature

Articles were selected using the approach set out in section 2.3 and using the flow chart at figure 2.1. Twenty-eight articles resulted from the search and filtering process. Table 2.3 details the results which are described in themes. It includes author(s), publication year, title, and country of study. Actual references are at the citation point.

The themes were derived from a combination of the influence of the selection process, the theories from public policy (2.5) and a retrospective categorisation of the themes which were observed in the critical literature review (2.6).

Table 2.3: Results of literature review articles from road safety policy

Number	Policy field	Author(s)	Year	Title	Country / region	Primary or secondary
1.	<b>Framing</b>	Belin, Tillgren, and Vedung	2012	<i>Vision Zero</i> – a road safety policy innovation	Sweden	Primary
2.		Clegg Smith, Debinski, Pollack, Vernick, Bowman, Samuels, and Gielen	2014	Research-informed evidence and support for road safety legislation: findings from a national survey	USA	Primary
3.		Johansson	2009	<i>Vision Zero</i> – Implementing a policy for traffic safety	Sweden	Secondary
4.		Kristianssen, Andersson, Belin, and Nilsen	2018	Swedish <i>Vision Zero</i> policies for safety – a comparative policy content analysis	Sweden	Primary
5.		Wales	2017	The political economy of road safety: a policy-oriented literature review	Global	Secondary
6.	<b>Agenda setting</b>	Bliss	2014	Road safety in the twenty-first century: public expectations of government	Britain	Secondary
7.		Debinski, Clegg Smith, and Gielen	2014	Public opinion on motor vehicle – related injury prevention policies: a systematic review of a decade of research	USA	Primary
8.		Frey	2010	Revising road safety policy: the role of systematic evidence in Switzerland	Switzerland	Secondary
9.		Hinchcliff, Poulos, Ivers, and Senserrick	2011	Understanding novice driver policy agenda setting	Australia	Primary
10.		Langley and Kypri	2006	Politics can be deadly	New Zealand	Secondary
11.		Silver, Macinko, Yung Bae, Jimenez, and Paul	2013	Variation in US traffic safety policy environments and motor vehicle fatalities 1980-2010	USA	Secondary
12.		Svensson, Summerton and Hrelja	2014	The politics of speed – local and regional actors' views on speed limits, traffic safety and mobility in Sweden	Sweden	Secondary

13.	<b>Network, coalitions, and policy entrepreneurs</b>	Bax	2009	Cooperation and organisation in decision making: a more decisive road safety policy? Results from a multiple case study in the Netherlands	Netherlands	Primary
14.		Bax, De Jong, and Koppenjan	2010	Implementing evidence-based policy in a network setting: road safety policy in the Netherlands	Netherlands	Primary
15.		Castillo-Manzano, Castro-Nuno, and Fageda	2014	Could being in the EU save lives? An econometric analysis of the Common Road Safety Policy for the EU 27	EU (by Spanish academics)	Primary
16.		Gössling	2017	Police perspectives on road safety and transport politics in Germany	Germany	Primary
17.		Hysing	2019	Responsibilization: The case of road safety governance	Sweden	Primary
18.		McAndrews	2013	Road safety as a shared responsibility and a public problem in Swedish road safety policy	Sweden	Primary
19.		Lieder	2018	Swedish policy of road safety	Sweden	Primary
20.	<b>Policy priority</b>	Dorling	2010	Roads, casualties, and public health: the open sewers of the twenty-first century	Britain	Secondary
21.		Elvik	2002	How would setting policy priorities according to CBA affect the provision of road safety	Norway	Secondary
22.		Koornstra, Lynam, Nilsson, Noordzij, Pettersson, Wegman, and Wouters	2002	SUNflower: A comparative study of the development of road safety in Sweden, the United Kingdom, and The Netherlands	Sweden, UK, Netherlands comparison	Secondary
23.		Novoa, Perez, Santamarina-Rubio, Mari-Dell Olmo, Cozar, Ferrando, Peiro, Tobias, Pilar, and Borrell	2009	Road safety in the political agenda: the impact on road traffic injuries	Spain	Secondary

24.	<b>Time or timing</b>	Belin and Tillgren	2013	<i>Vision Zero</i> . how a policy innovation is dashed by interest conflicts but may prevail in the end	Sweden	Primary
25.		Hamelin and Moguen-Toursel	2012	Improving the links between research and road safety policy: the case of France and England's speed management	French, English comparison	Secondary
26.		Irwin	1987	Technical expertise and risk conflict: an institutional study of the British compulsory seat belt debate	Britain	Secondary
27.		Hyder, Allen, Di Pietro, Adriazola, Sobel, Larson, and Peden	2012	Addressing the implementation gap in global road safety: exploring features of an effective response and introducing a 10-country program	Global	Primary
28.		Wegman	2003	Implementing, monitoring, evaluating, and updating a road safety programme	EU	Secondary

## 2.6.2 Review of the literature

This section is organised by policy themes derived from the literature review: framing; agenda setting; networks or coalitions; policy priority; and time and timing. It was challenging to theme many of the articles into a single category as there are examples of articles which include multiple elements of the policy process. Articles are categorised based on the dominant focus, but some could have been placed in more than one category. Whilst the dominant themes are used to order this section, relevant themes are used in the critical review. Alternative options considered were to order the analysis by country, with the advantage of including the country-specific governance model, or by road safety topic, such as *Vision Zero*. These were discounted in favour of policy themes as this approach was discernibly more compatible with the research design and the literature from public policy.

There is a range of literature from countries in the developed world. Literature from Sweden dominated (8), Britain and the US (3 each) and The Netherlands (2), and Australia, Germany, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, and Switzerland (1 each). There were also global analysis (2), an analysis comparing Sweden, Britain, and The Netherlands; an analysis comparing France and England, and two articles analysing road safety in the EU. A wide range of methodologies and theories were included in the literature, including interview, case study, and document analysis. A common finding in the wider literature purporting to analyse how or why policies develop, do not develop, or are ignored, is a tendency to discuss *what* to do in terms of interventions or enforcement, or simply to assert that policies need to be implemented.

Two articles which were screened out at stage three (figure 2.1) are included as examples of the type of article removed: In a technical study, Goh and Love (2012) develop two system dynamic models in order to analyse road safety policy. The article concentrates on the methodology and its effectiveness, rather than why policies are in place or the process of policymaking to introduce new solutions. The focus on system dynamics is legitimate but is not helpful in gaining a greater understanding of public policy in road safety. A second example from Noland (2013) reviews theoretical issues in transport safety modelling and implications for road safety policy. The conclusion is that road safety solutions should be based on a theoretical foundation. Whilst this study contributes to the specific research field and asserts that effective policies are lagging behind the development of economic models, it does not consider the process of policymaking or provide insights into decision making. These articles and those with a similar approach were screened out as this type of analysis concentrates on road safety issues and solutions, and *what* to do about them, and did not meet the selection

criteria. The focus of this research is on literature which analyses why and how policies are developed and the environment in which decisions are made.

### **2.6.3 Framing**

The problem definition, policy image, or how a policy problem is framed is central to understanding policymaking (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009, p.107). Framing involves the definition of a policy's image or how issues are described. Policies do not necessarily receive attention because they are the most urgent or important. Policy entrepreneurs, actors or networks can portray issues deliberately in certain ways to win support and allegiance, to serve functions of persuasion, justification, and symbolic display (Schon and Rein, 1994). Framing is a mixture of emotive appeals and empirical information. The facts pertaining to a particular policy can include many different aspects and can affect people in different ways (Baumgartner et al., 2014, p. 67). An illustration is suggesting smoking can either be framed as a health issue leading governments to consider restrictions, or framed as an economic image, leading to the support of the tobacco industry (Douglas et al., 2011). When a single image is widely accepted, as in the early period when smoking was promoted as acceptable and desirable, this increases the chances of a policy monopoly. Where there is disagreement or different frames of a policy area, the opposing sides use opposite framing to promote their position. As an example, Hogwood and Gunn (1984) cite work about the car industry from 1977 by Baker. A report to Government framed the car industry as positively contributing to economic growth, productivity, and efficiency, and ignored other "political perspectives of the problem" (p.119). In this example, this approach was described as mis-framing and used as an example of the importance of understanding how a policy problem is presented and perceived.

A US study by Clegg Smith et al. (2014) analyses national adult population survey data and presents findings on framing, the use of evidence based policymaking, and the influence that the public have in defining the policy problem. In evaluating the level of support or opposition for road safety laws, both without and then with expanded detailed information, the authors explore how framing and re-framing can increase the support for the laws, as it did in this research. In a positive final comment, the authors conclude: "These results bode well for injury prevention efforts that seek to utilise legislation to reduce risk and enhance safety" (p.115). The authors conclude that the likelihood of adopting effective policies is increased when public opinion is understood. They suggest that exposure to injury data increases the levels of public support for road safety interventions. Whilst there was a subset of participants whose attitudes became more oppositional; the authors conclude that the value of informed public opinion influences legislative processes, and framing influences how the public see road safety.

Belin et al. (2012) evaluate Sweden's decision to introduce *Vision Zero*, making use of documentary analysis. The authors use the policy cycle as a conceptual model but focus on agenda setting, the approach to decision making and how framing road safety differently plays a significant role in adopting the new approach to road safety. In Sweden, before *Vision Zero*, road safety was seen in a more traditional frame of casualty reductions, and this "radical innovation" (p.177) shifted with the agreement to adopt *Vision Zero* in 1997 whereby the policy aim was to avoid all road deaths and serious injuries. The authors attribute this reframing as an important factor in the evolution in road casualty reduction.

The article discusses the reasons for, and the processes used to reframe *Vision Zero* as an innovative change from previous road safety framing, and so, in parts, contributes to the aims of this thesis. The analysis attributes the development of road safety and the changes brought about by the *Vision Zero* policy to how the discourse on the numbers of road deaths and serious injuries was conducted, and how this resulted in a change to the language and framing of road safety. The remainder of the article is more descriptive with assessments on the details of *Vision Zero*: what it is for, the aims, shared responsibility and those involved, rather than an analysis of road safety policy formulation. In concluding the authors highlight the need for a radical and innovative approach to road safety and "this goal may not be achieved if the approach of 'business as usual'" (p.178) continues. As described, this article includes different elements of the policy cycle and draws on framing and agenda setting, but has been categorised here as the dominant public policy theory.

A selective and adapted approach to the policy cycle is used in a Swedish study (Kristianssen et al., 2018), with the purpose of assessing whether *Vision Zero* policies could or should be transferred to other policy areas. The authors develop a framework, supported by case studies from other policy areas (for example, patient safety or suicide) and evaluate the policy decision, problem, goal, and measurement. Findings include six factors which are said to be influential in the effectiveness of policy development, including a clear definition of the policy problem (framing?), robust data and strong leadership (politics?). The analysis by Kristianssen et al. (2018) does not directly make use of public policy theory, but in reviewing *Vision Zero*, an example of significant re-framing of road safety policy in Sweden, they suggest it is easy to imitate successful policy fields, but harder to transfer these to other policy areas. They suggest that a clear policy image frame and the subsequent reframing is an important factor in the progress of road safety policy brought about by adopting *Vision Zero*.

A further article from Sweden considers "in a general way" (p.826) the adoption of *Vision Zero* with a focus on road design. Johansson (2009) identifies the importance of the framing of the policy problem, and the need for clear national strategies. The author does not explicitly make

use of public policy theory, but in analysing the adoption of improved road design and how this changes over time, he describes improvements to the road environment since the implementation of *Vision Zero*. The change from a more traditional road safety approach to the reframed strategy results in positive changes to the image of *Vision Zero*, leading to improving road design, leading to improved road safety.

A wide-ranging review by Wales (2017) concludes that there is a “lack of detailed evidence on the politics of road safety” (p.7). In a chapter on political economy, the report details two important and relevant aspects to this thesis: the nature, or framing of road safety, and the importance of venues, or the organisations or institutions where decisions are made. The author suggests a number of factors important in decision making processes: clear frameworks from national governments; strong local government with funding and capacity; targets; and political credibility. He describes road safety as a complicated area of policy where the nature of road safety helps to explain the challenges for collective action on both interventions and policy. He suggests a number of reasons for this. First, the nature of the ‘good’ where he argues that some interventions, whilst beneficial to road safety, can be seen as negative to other groups, and uses speed management to illustrate. Second, he discusses the complex associations in road safety policy and the need for different solutions in the wide range of road safety problems, and the relationship between interventions and the resulting political implications of adoption. Third, the lack of visibility causing politicians to “overlook the scale and severity” (p.27) of casualties is discussed with particular reference to the quality or availability of data on road death and serious injury. Fourth, the low priority placed on road safety by society. Even though casualties are high in number, individuals who may use the roads regularly infrequently experience road crashes and so attach a low priority to changes in road safety. How road safety is framed is a strong theme in this article running through the factors identified above, though the author does not explicitly use public policy theory.

#### **2.6.4 Agenda setting**

Kingdon (1995) discusses agendas in policy making and defines it as the “list of subjects or problems to which government officials, and people outside of government closely associated with these officials, are paying some serious attention at any given time” (Kingdon, 1995, p.3). He suggests that it is one important aspect or stream of agenda setting and policymaking.

Hinchcliff et al. (2011), focus on agenda setting in an Australian study which found strong connections between the public’s demand for and acceptance of change in influencing political support. The study identifies the main factors which influence the novice driver policy agenda. The communication of the evidence on novice driver solutions, lobbying and advocacy by

policy participants, and media reporting of crashes involving deaths are central factors in agenda setting. Kingdon's (1995) MSM is used in the analysis and is described as one of the most prominent explanations of how policy problems come to the attention of Government, and is one of a minority of articles which explicitly makes use of public policy models. Four Australian states engaged in policy-related activity which, "eventually" (p.218) led to policy reform, emphasising the length of time for policies to develop from setting the agenda to implementation. The authors identify the timing of policy change and the length of time needed for change to occur as a major factor in the progress of road safety. These processes involved media, community, and political attention, and resulted in a policy window opening for the introduction of a Graduated Driving License (GDL): restrictive licensing interventions to support young drivers (see 6.3). The authors suggest there were "a series of politically determined, incremental decisions by pragmatic policy makers" (p.221) which achieved consensus between groups of policy actors and networks advocating conflicting positions. The authors do not ascribe this to Lindblom (1959) but his incrementalism or *muddling through* description of policy implementation fit the findings. The article design aligns with the aims of this thesis in the use of interviews, the focus of policy development, assessing the factors that impacted on policy change and directly applying Kingdon's (1995) MSM.

In a contrasting analysis Silver et al. (2013) assess the variation in policy environments between different US states. Using their own model, they conclude that states with stronger regulatory frameworks and legislation on specific road safety interventions have lower crash fatalities. The regulatory strength is seen as a major factor in the reduction of fatalities, though the article did not assess the policy process. The authors describe which states have what laws to improve road safety, but did not evaluate why this was the case or how these policies developed. This approach is not uncommon in discussing road safety policy, and it would have been interesting to understand why the states with poor take up made these decisions. The article does, however, discuss the policy problem together with a series of policy interventions. Debinski et al. (2013) analyse the relationship between legislative processes and the degree of public support in the US, in setting the agenda on road safety policy. The hypothesis they test is that public opinion can be the impetus to progressing successful road safety laws, but that little is known about the views of the US public. They identify a number of policy interventions: for example: GDL; drink driving; helmets and seat belts to evaluate public opinion for each and utilise content analysis of published documents between 2003 and 2012. They searched for data on opinions about proposed or existing policies relating to vehicle or cycle mode of travel. The article concludes with three main findings: there is little evidence on the public's opinion of road safety policies; the evidence that is available pointed to the public having "generally

favourable” (p.249) opinions, and the authors recommend that this framing should be used to communicate with the media and policy makers to improve road safety policy. This US study suggests a link between public opinion, the media, and politicians, and identifies the need for evidence based policymaking in road safety in order to contribute to agenda setting.

Bliss (2014) focuses on the role the public has in raising policy problems up the political agenda in a British context. A further theme is the strong influence of the complexity of road safety which enables Government to avoid responding to those who advocate change. The author does not explicitly mention public policy, but contributes to the debate on the need to establish a policy issue in agenda setting, but then does not develop this assertion.

An analysis of the relationship between evidence and how it influences politics in a Swiss context contrasts two case studies: the implementation of 30km/hour speed limits and changes to blood alcohol levels, and reviews the evidence to progress these changes through the policy processes (Frey, 2010). Whilst the author assumes that evidence does influence agenda setting in the political process, she does not consider when existing evidence fails to contribute to agenda setting. The study concentrates on the role of evidence based policymaking within the wider political context and suggests that evidence or ‘what works’ rarely prevails in democratic politics, but the creation and diffusion of evidence and the political context are factors in legislative processes. In analysing Parliamentary processes, the role of politics seems to be prominent with the author identifying personal experience, economic interests, and ideological considerations as dominating the political discourse. The author does acknowledge these weaknesses and the need to improve public policy by the use of evidence, but does not engage with the selective role the use of evidence has in making political choices or how this contributes to setting the policy agenda.

Svensson et al. (2014) conduct a study on setting the agenda for speed management in Sweden by use of a geographically specific area within a wider context of road safety. Their study assesses the influence of local and national policy actors and the impact on the perspectives and priorities on local politicians using interviews. They found significant conflict between those wanting speed limits and those opposed, and framed this tension as a lack of consensus between the “mobility perspective” (p.47) and the “traffic safety” (p.48) perspective. On the mobility side, policy actors develop strong policy discourse in policymaking and decision making processes advocating for higher speeds in order to facilitate economic and regional competitiveness and development. Whereas safety policy actors rely on the national policy of *Vision Zero* goals for promoting and prioritising road safety. The analysis by Svensson et al. (2014) explores the power and politics, and how these factors influence policies on speed. The authors find that informal networks of those advocating mobility have more

influence and power within infrastructure and planning decision making. They contrast this to three groups, described as “silenced” (p.50): road crash victims; individuals and families who submitted applications for lowering the speed limits; and travellers who use the roads – described as drivers, cyclists, pedestrians, whose mobility, and safety in traffic are affected by speed limits. The study finds a power imbalance, and the political processes associated with decision making on speed limits were characterised as mobility versus safety, and the role that this tension plays in setting the agenda.

*Politics can be deadly* is an article from New Zealand on licensing changes for young drivers (Langley and Kypri, 2006) which calls for a focus on the evidence in policymaking, the need to inform the public and for political leadership to address the risks to young drivers. This article contributes to agenda setting and those factors which impact on the development of road safety policy, though it is more of an opinion piece than academic analysis. This article does not engage with public policy theories, but describes processes towards agenda setting, and the role of political leadership in advancing road safety policy.

### **2.6.5 Networks, coalitions, and policy entrepreneurs**

The size of government and the scale of policymaking requires that different aspects of policy be broken down into manageable units. The relationships between different parts of government, actors or groups involved in policy and the role of competing policy networks or coalitions is the focus of this section. Public policy is progressed by small numbers of policy networks, and these differ by sector, but the ability to maintain, shift or adapt ideas by policy entrepreneurs can help to progress policy processes. Networks can incorporate specialists in policy communities that include bureaucrats, policy actors, academics and researchers in think tanks who share a common concern in a single policy area (Zahariadis, 2014, p.25). Jenkins-Smith et al. (2014, p.195) describes advocacy coalitions as being defined by actors sharing policy core beliefs who coordinate their actions to influence a policy subsystem. Both terms are used in the literature and as networks and coalitions share common concerns in a policy area, whether the relationship includes coordination, as in a coalition, is not always specified.

Bax (2009) uses case study methodology on the Netherlands to investigate decision making and the role and cooperation of policy actors. The aim is to discover which factors promote or hinder establishing road safety policies. The study examines the processes leading to the implementation of road safety measures in the devolved Dutch system in six regions. Bax makes connections between the network approach and the decisiveness of the policy as the outcome of the decision-making process. The analysis includes findings on policy implementation and the factors that impact its effectiveness. By investigating the efficiency,

effectiveness, and the level of ambition in delivering road safety policy, the involvement of many policy actors, and particularly the early engagement with opponents were found to be important. She was surprised to conclude: "it makes no difference if parties that advocate road safety interests do or do not have sufficient personnel, money, and expertise" (p.42). The author makes use of the work of Kickert et al. (1997) in her analysis on managing complex networks, consistent with the work from Sabatier and Weible (2014) on ACFs whereby policy processes are driven by policy actors from a variety of positions who have a degree of coordination. There were weaknesses in the applicability, particularly in relation to the country specific governance arrangements and the generalisability of the results. This was acknowledged but the author argues that the country specific context is less relevant in contributing to the influence on policy actors in decision making. The exploration of the engagement of networks, particularly oppositional groups is relevant to the governance aspects of this research.

Bax et al. (2010) analyse the impact of a changed system for policy implementation, from the centralised governance model of Dutch road safety strategy to a devolved approach which was described as introducing fragmented networks. The relationship between the centre and local policy actors, and evidence-based policymaking are included in the analysis. This article evaluates a number of aspects of the consequences of a changed context in policy terms which the authors suggests was less advantageous than a centralised approach. The article explores the relationship between the national and local approaches to policy implementation and the need for change from a historically central design to a more fragmented approach following devolution. The result of the changed approach was that road safety has to compete with other transport policy areas, with different policy actors, and these changes were driven by a different ideology from Government to devolve responsibility. The authors express concern about the new arrangements and recommend changes to the local approach requiring a trade-off between road safety with other transport policy areas. They also suggest there is a need for road safety to be represented on an equal footing as other transport related policies. The authors focus on three aspects of the Dutch system: the need to explore new ways of linking evidence to policy making, and maintaining the branding of 'sustainable safety' in the new devolved context. The third area evaluates the role of policy actors in the new governance structures, and the need to develop new coalitions. In the devolved context where road safety is one aspect of local transport policy, it has to compete for representation, and the authors suggest the "implementation of sustainable safety (is) more difficult" (p.880). Road safety had more profile and power in the centralised system and so, less power in the devolved structures. They suggest solutions to define new roles for policy actors in building new coalitions in what is described as an 'away game' (where road safety is integrated with local

transport policy rather than the 'home game' where is centralised in a single unit), and connecting road safety objectives with other actors and sectors. The analysis of the role of policy actors and policy entrepreneurs, the need for different coalitions in the changed context and the distribution of power are relevant findings for this thesis.

An analysis from Germany focuses on the views of police officers of traffic laws and behaviour, and transport policy (Gössling, 2017). The context is from a geographically specific part of Germany and there may be questions of transferability, and the small sample size, but the analysis is useful in describing differences in perspectives between those interviewed and the legislature. The results centre around four themes: differences in perspectives between the views of policy actors at national and local levels; gaps between evidence-based interventions and the laws; an unwillingness of decision makers to challenge lobby groups and make politically difficult decisions, and a finding that legislation in Germany is unlikely to significantly reduce road casualties. The author concludes there are "considerable differences" (p.13) between the views of police officers and those responsible for national policies. The important role street level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 1980), in this study police officers, play is implicit in the analysis. The distance from the views of police officers to those responsible for national policy may be part of the explanation of "inadequate or outdated" laws (p.13) impacting on effective policy implementation as street level bureaucrats often play a major role in determining policy outcomes as they, to a large extent, are responsible for the delivery of policy. The relationship between top down, bottom up decision makers may be helpful in this thesis. When top down decisions are made, ignoring the views and advice of policy actors, failures are likely to be greater than when the advice and cooperation is secured (Dorey, 2005, p.201).

McAndrews (2013) uses documentary analysis and interviews to explore the shared responsibility of *Vision Zero* in Sweden. This in-depth study describes the aims of *Vision Zero* and the need for changes to policymaking and behaviours. The roles, responsibilities and risks of policy participants are analysed, and the author concludes that *Vision Zero* "stirred debate" (p.768) resulting in redistributing power and accountability. She suggests:

*"With respect to increasing experts' political responsibility for road safety, Vision Zero has called for including a broader set of sectors, such as public health and the private sector, in road safety decision making" (p.769).*

McAndrews' findings were encouraging about *Vision Zero*, but she suggests that further work is needed to create road safety as a public problem and proposes that engaging more effectively with the public as the solution.

Hysing (2019) evaluates the role of those involved with road safety and the impact of reponsibilisation (this term is used in the article to describe the concept of responsibility). In studying the changes to road safety in Sweden, he finds that governments need to include a

wider group of nonstate actors to take responsibility for road safety. New governance models are advocated, and the results show a shift of responsibility from individual road users to system designers, based on causal, moral, and preventive rationale. The role of policy actors and networks are involved with shifting the responsibility (or responsabilisation) within *Vision Zero* with more networked forms of governance which are beneficial in addressing road safety.

Castillo-Manzano, et al. (2014) study how traffic safety policies, institutions and networks facilitate and encourage the learning process in individual EU states. They suggest that Europeanization helps to explain the positive impact on policy development. The authors apply a model using a wide variety of variables (for example, fatalities per capita, motorway density, GDP, age) to twenty-seven countries between 2000 and 2009. The authors find a strong case for the success of Europeanisation and “econometric evidence that a country’s road traffic fatalities decrease as the number of years that the country has been a member of the EU rises” (p.223). They acknowledge weaknesses as some data were unavailable, non-EU countries were included and those included have widely different road safety performance results.

Nevertheless, there is a positive contribution of road safety policy development with networked governance resulting in fatality reduction across the twenty-seven countries. These results are attributed to being a member of the EU as an example of the wider benefits of membership as well as economic or monetary union. However, it is worth noting the inclusion of Norway and Switzerland who are members of the road safety networks, but not EU members, and questions of the strength of the overall conclusions towards the EU, rather than networked governance models.

Lieder (2018) uses content analysis to evaluate *Vision Zero* in Sweden, and the decision and law making processes which influences policy development. The focus is on the legislative approach and the relationships of different political groups. The results emphasise the “consolidated attitude” (p.80) of social groups, institutions, and individual road users which contribute to the agreement in the Swedish Parliament, and to the success of *Vision Zero*, using a 48% reduction in KSI’s as the measure of success. A further result found policy change is by the “holistic cooperation” (p.94) of all road entities at both central and local level, and the sharing of responsibility inherent in *Vision Zero*. Lieder concludes by describing very positive responses from politicians who support the road safety approach throughout the research period due to successful performance and efficiency. Network governance or coalitions are strong themes in Lieder’s work where there is alignment within Sweden as illustrated by the approach taken by the Parliament, and “consolidation attitude of many social groups, institutions, and individual road users, promoted by the *Vision Zero*, resulted in considerable successes” (p.80). Analysis over twenty years gives strength to the results “ensuring broadly

understood, multi-tasked road traffic safety is today a prerequisite for harmonious economic and social development (for example, the cost of treatment of crash victims), but also the legitimacy of authority, whose task is to ensure safety” (p.80). Svensson et al. (2014) is reviewed within the agenda setting section, but it is worth adding the importance of networks and policy entrepreneurs in the analysis, which is particularly relevant as they discuss the relationships and tensions between national and local government.

### **2.6.6 Policy priority**

‘Prioritisation’ does not appear directly in the public policy literature, but as described in the review, how politicians prioritise which policies progress or not, is influenced by a number of factors. The articles evaluated below have been categorised under policy priority, in part due to the limited way they engage with public policy theory and to draw out influencing factors.

In an assessment of the effectiveness of a package of Spanish road safety measures the authors analyse road crash data from 2000 to 2006 to discuss how road safety is prioritised (Novoa et al., 2009). The study aims to compare the impact of interventions implemented after road safety was included in the political agenda (January 2003) compared with those implemented before. The authors state there is no national repository of road safety measures as the responsibility is devolved to local government, and so defining the interventions was not possible. How prioritisation was reached and what processes were used are not clear, and with the absence of a definition of the interventions or when these were implemented, the conclusions seem to be based mainly on casualty data analysis. Novoa et al. suggest that overall road safety interventions implemented following the prioritisation of road safety policy reduce the numbers of serious injuries. They claim that their study was the first to assess the effectiveness of prioritising road safety. It is not clear how the authors use their data to make the conclusions of the effectiveness of prioritisation and there are no public policy theories deployed. The article asserts the importance of prioritising road safety policy, without engaging or evaluating in how policy is developed.

Elvik (2002) explores factors which influence the prioritisation of road safety by evaluating the impact of cost benefit analysis (CBA) in Norway and Sweden. He identifies three sources of inefficiency: the lack of power, citing vehicle safety standards which are ceded to the EU; the existence of social dilemmas, with a conflict between cost effective societal benefits that are not beneficial from the individual road user’s perspective; and alternative policy areas which are prioritised over road safety; citing regional development. The study focuses on CBA but offers insights into the factors which impact on road safety policy, societal conflicts, and questions the reliability of these approaches. To further illustrate this perspective, there is

evidence from Dutch transport policy which suggests policymakers use value judgements based on politically loaded premises when considering CBA and so its use is inherently political (Moulter, 2019). There appears to be a conflict between the professed rational and objective prioritisation implied with CBA and the influence of politics in decision making.

The comparative study from Koornstra et al. (2002) was designed to gain better insights into the development of policies and programmes, and to investigate the progress of road safety in Sweden, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands (known as the SUNflower report). The authors focus on policies for specific interventions rather than policymaking processes. An important weakness in the report is it excludes the institutional, organisational, and political factors which influence road safety, and whether different cultures impact the development or focus on road safety, or not. The article concentrates more on *what* interventions are effective and much less on *how* this happened.

Dorling (2010) explores the failure of road safety policy to be considered as a priority in Britain. He uses a public health frame, and whilst he does not use public policy theory, the approach is helpful in adding to the review of the priority afforded to road safety. The tolerance of society and politicians to accept the deaths and serious injuries resulting from crashes, and the slow progress in advancing road safety policy are the main themes. After using a historical perspective of how Britain responded to open sewers in the nineteenth century and tobacco in the twentieth century, he suggests the biggest challenge in the twenty-first century “is the way we tolerate how cars are allowed to travel on our roads” (p.3). This is a useful literature to help place the approach to road safety within an historical perspective.

### **2.6.7 Time dimension in policymaking**

The time it takes to set an agenda or move from an idea to implementation is an important factor in Kingdon’s (1995) MSM, describing policymaking as unpredictable over time. Agenda setting takes time as the policy problem has to compete with other policy areas, and solutions need to be accepted by policy networks which can take decades. The time dimension is important, and this is why this thesis is designed with an extended period of study to assess the historical context of policymaking. The analysis of policy change cannot use a single point or even short period of time. There is an evolution of ideas, an approach to agenda setting, decision making, and implementation, and each aspect has an important time dimension.

A case study on the risks associated with compulsory seat belt use in Britain is the focus of Irwin (1987), and specifically on how the debate on risk was conducted when there were different views and interpretations. Irwin describes a risk conflict between evidence and policymaking, and he characterises the disagreements as a disparity between ‘actual’ risk from

experts and the “emotional and ill-informed perceptions (or rather 'misperceptions') held by oppositional groups” (p.339) and discusses the impacts on policymaking. There are two problems: first, the analysis separates the role of evidence from the process of policymaking. Evidence is one factor of policy development and Irwin’s approach seems to reflect the more traditional rational policymaking theory. Second, the year of publication, as the policy context was very different. This raises the question of its relevance in today’s political environment and the applicability of research from more than 20 years ago. Nevertheless it is worth considering as it offers a useful insight on the role and nature of public debate, and the length of time for policy to be implemented.

The aspect in the paper that is particularly relevant is an exploration of the length of time in policy development. This was incremental in nature and the study discusses the evolution of seat belt policy over time. The two relevant areas of analysis cover, first, the interpretation of risk and how the resulting framing of debates between different policy networks and the relative effectiveness of different risk levels, and the resulting delays. Second, the gap between those who generate evidence and policymakers, and how positions of risk are understood and communicated, or miscommunicated between the two groups. Irwin suggests the route to resolve disputed evidence is through a different approach to the relationships, and by implication the effectiveness of networks. He suggests there is a need to accept there is rarely consensus over risk policies and further, that consensus was undesirable. He concludes those generating the evidence should not automatically expect this evidence to be understood as simple and unambiguous concepts by policymakers, and that there should be debate and dialogue between those generating the evidence and policymakers. Seat belt legislation was implemented, and the relevance to this thesis the discussion of factors influencing public policy: incremental policy implementation over extended periods of time; the need to accept policymaking is an iterative process; the need to ensure there is effective dialogue between those who generate evidence and policymakers, and the role of public debate.

Belin and Tillgren (2012) use documentary analysis to explore the changing role of system designers in the implementation of Sweden’s *Vision Zero*. The interest is in the development of legislative processes and the influencing factors. They initially conclude that the realignment of liability in *Vision Zero* has only been minimally realised and suggest this is a “classic implementation failure” (p.83) but offer a number of caveats: the timing of the study; formal legislation was only one policy instrument, and this tool may not have been the most appropriate way to secure a higher degree of responsibility from system designers. The authors suggest their conclusions “became more blurry” (p.100) and influenced by: conflicts of interest; complexity; information and finance; and processes at different levels of governance.

In concluding, the authors question whether this constituted implementation failure at all. There are two themes within Belin and Tillgren's (2012) study that are relevant. First, the length of time to agree policies and then to implement them. The study evaluates change between 1997 and 2009, and initially describes policy failure, but introduces the lead time for policy delivery as a reason for the initial findings of failure were too early. Time is an important factor in road safety policy in Sweden and informs the period of study in this research. The second factor is the "minimally realised" (p.100) changes to the roles of system designers may be an example of the problems with top down policy implementation, and the ineffective engagement of street level bureaucrats. Road safety in Sweden is influenced by the EU and the national government, and the 'top down' approach to implementation may have been an additional cause to "low level of achievement" (p.100). The authors suggest politically derived intentions are difficult to realise in practice (p.90).

Hamelin and Moguen-Toursel (2012) investigate different approaches to speed management in England and France. The methods used and the conclusions reached in the comparative study raises questions on the reliability. In an unconvincing conclusion, the authors suggest the "use of science is more likely to lead to an endarkenment than to an enlightenment which makes its use practically impossible for policymakers" (p. 214). Nevertheless, the stated aim of achieving improved levels of dialogue between research and policy, the discussion on evidence-based policymaking and the length of time to achieve policy change are relevant.

The analysis by Wegman (2003) on implementing, monitoring, and evaluating road safety programmes in Europe includes the time dimension involved with progressing policy. He uses two checklists to review the effectiveness of policy processes: first, an assessment of the contents of policy documents and, second, the quality of policy implementation. Within the assessments, the author identifies four factors he suggests are needed for effective policy implementation: organisation, coordination, financing, and knowledge/information. Policy implementation is assessed as being weak in the programmes described, though it is not clear which programmes are evaluated. Conclusions suggest a stronger focus on policy implementation would result in better outcomes, with improved effectiveness and efficiency, with attention on the connection between policy formulation and delivery, and a recognition that policy development involves long periods of time. Wegman's (2003) analysis is based on comprehensive rationality and relies on a simplistic approach to policy analysis by making use of elements of the policy cycle. This general approach has been criticised (for example, by McConnell, 2010) as oversimplifying complex systems where it is difficult to analyse policy change over time, and evaluating the relative success or failure of change. There are limitations to the article because of the approach adopted and the absence of public policy

theory. Wegman seeks to evaluate policy implementation and evaluation in relation to road safety programmes, but there are questions as to how effective or robust these findings are.

Hyder, et al. (2012) addresses the implementation gap in global road safety and suggest ten factors or characteristics required for effective responses from policymakers. The basis of their findings is an international collaborative programme from ten countries. Factors such as strong political will, “visionary leadership” (p.1062), and coordination across actors are some examples. The authors suggest “interventions are available, and yet Governments ... are not adopting and implementing them,” and the length of time needed for change. The author’s asserts that policymakers are reluctant to make changes, but do not discuss why. Hinchcliff et al. (2011) is reviewed within the agenda setting section, but it worth noting that the authors find the progression of a policy on GDL is lengthy and incremental.

These articles do not use public policy theory, but contribute to the literature review, particularly the impact of the time to establish agendas and formulate policy. This is a common theme in some research that proports to analyse how and why policy develops or does not develop, but the focus is on asserting the importance of policy development. It suggests limited engagement with public policy theory to understand why road death policy is progressed or not. A potential weakness in all articles is whether the literature is transferrable between different areas: the question of policy transfer. Research from other countries with different governance structures and political, organisational, or institutional environments could be problematic. As the literature originates from a range of country specific contexts, this weakness may be less significant, but as this research is not designed to study policy transfer, this is less relevant.

## **2.7 Road safety policy and public policy at the intersection**

Policymaking processes are driven by long term social and economic ideas, networks, and strategic interactions. The conscious adoption of ideas, random processes, events, competition, and selection, all exert influence on what is prioritised (John, 2003, p.495). As this thesis is about the politics of road death and considers how road safety policy is prioritised, the use of public policy theory enhances the analysis (a selection are reviewed in 2.5.2), and there are a number of options which could support this thesis. There are no articles tackling analysis by using the policy cycle in its entirety and small numbers of those from the themes of framing (n=5); agenda setting (n=7); networks or coalitions (n=7); policy priority (n=4) and time or timing (n=5). There are no articles adopting the punctuated equilibrium model or directly citing the advocacy coalition framework, and Hinchliffe et al. (2011) is the only article which uses public policy, in this case Kingdon’s (1995) MSM, for analysis. This section finds that there are

limited articles that make use of public policy theory. Despite this there are some consistent themes which emerge, and any number of the policy frameworks or models described in 2.5.2 could support the analysis of these themes within this research.

Public policy theory is used in other research fields, for example, in an explanation of policy change in climate change policy, Carter and Jacobs (2014) combine MSM with the punctuated equilibrium model and argue that this approach improves the analysis. Combining the problem, policy, and politics streams by policy actors with changes to the policy image and institutional venues are argued as being critical in opening the policy window in climate change policy between 2006 and 2010. In a study on transport policy, Marsden and Reardon (2017) adopt a different approach, which differentiates between *how* policies are made rather than *what* policies could be implemented by making use of the policy cycle.

There is value and benefit in adopting public policy theory, and John (2003) suggests the main ones derive from the policy streams, advocacy coalitions and punctuation as applied to different stages of the policy cycle. There are also criticisms and a lack of 'real world' application as explored in 2.5.2. In addition, there are limited articles from wider transport studies which use public policy theory to inform the selection of tools for analysis. In considering possible theories to support this research, a number of gaps become clear. There is limited evidence of the use of public policy in road safety (2.7), and limited evidence of the use of theoretical concepts such as policy windows, punctuations in policymaking, or the explicit description of policy stability or change. There are examples where the concept is implicit within the analysis without directly referencing the main authors of the public policy literature. This section has identified a small number articles where public policy analysis contributes to how and why policies were developed (for example, Lieder, 2018), but a stronger focus was on evaluating road safety policy in terms of *what* happened.

Whilst there are gaps in the literature, there are some clear themes which informed the development of the research questions. Only four articles were categorised within the policy priority group, but this theme appears in other articles, and five articles with a time dimension, notably the time it takes for agenda setting and policy formulation to develop. These articles contributed to a question on the focus of road safety over time (research question one: ***has the political priority of road safety changed over time?*** at 1.3.1). The influence of the framing of the policy problem or policy ideas on agenda setting were included in twelve articles and contributed to a question on framing (research question two: ***do the views of politician and policy actors on framing vary, and does any variation matter?*** at 1.3.2). Additionally, the array of possible policy solutions from the road safety review refined the question to include seeking views as to whether different framing matters. The influence that national or local

governance structures or actors play in policymaking and the role of coalitions or policy entrepreneurs appear in seven articles. The role of different policy participants is referenced in all the public policy theories, and the political and organisational factors are important considerations in seeking to understand the politics of road death (research question three: ***which political and organisational factors contribute to the development of road safety in Britain?*** at 1.3.3). Lastly, a fourth question was influenced by successful policy change, and including a 'so what' question completes the series (research question four: ***what would need to change to develop a future policy to address road deaths in Britain?*** at 1.3.4).

There is minimal literature on road safety policy. Studies on road safety infrequently refer to public policy theory or show *how* they contribute to policymaking, and as with transport literature (Marsden and Reardon, 2017) there is a greater focus on *what* to do to improve road safety, rather the study of *how* and why policies are adopted or change. It is for these reasons that the focus of this research is on *how* policies are made rather than *what* policies could be beneficial, and is focused on agenda setting and policy formulation in the early parts of the policy cycle, and sets up this research to concentrate on the focus, framing, and factors which influence policy stability or change, over time. With the addition of looking to the future of what British road safety policy could contribute to saving lives.

Whilst a number of theories may be beneficial, Kingdon's (1995) multiple streams analysis has been selected for the primary tool as the problem, policy, politics streams together with the concept of the policy window is the best fit to support the study of road safety policy. This is not to exclude other models as no single framework offers a comprehensive or targeted approach to analysing road safety policy and there are values and limitations to each as explored in this chapter. Authors in different fields of research offer analysis based on a combination of policy theories (for example, Howlett et al., 2015; Carter and Jacobs, 2017), and this research is open to the application of theoretical models where they add to the analysis of road safety policy.

Politics is present in everyday life and demands the attention of politicians, the media, and the public, and is about the decisions made which impact on public life. Politicians make choices about road safety and the aim of political analysis is to examine the links between policymakers as they negotiate with each other, seek to influence the public, and understand the production and effects of public actions. This helps the understanding of why certain decisions are made or not made, and how decision makers choose which progress to policy formation and implementation rather than others. Public policy theory and Kingdon's (1995) multiple streams offers a compelling framework on which to contribute to the understanding of road safety policy in Britain.

## Chapter 3

### Methodology

#### 3.1 Introduction

The origin of this research is a motivation to understand the relationship between public policy and the numbers of people killed or seriously injured on Britain's roads. Three cases are used to evaluate whether Britain's policy approach to road safety is one of the best in the world, or complacent and unresponsive to change. Baumgartner et al. (2014 p.67) suggest that macro policy is the politics of punctuation where the politics of large scale change, competing policy images, political manipulation and feedback combine, and applying this concept, an overarching macro level case forms the first case study. This is supported by two embedded cases of rural road safety policy, and young driver safety policy. All three case studies informed answering all four research questions and strengthens the analysis of the discourse.

Qualitative methods facilitate the understanding of the way people experience the world and build understanding, and this research relies on these methods. The aim of this research is not to answer questions by quantifying data, but it seeks to explore the discourse, meaning and interactions between policy actors and politicians, and to identify themes or patterns. Primary data were collected through interviews, and secondary data derived from policy documents and Parliamentary debates. The interest in three data sources, and in the combination is in how these are complementary, and with the aim of increasing credibility and minimising the potential for bias. To support these three data sources, the number of people killed or seriously injured, determined from STATS19 data is used for contextual analysis to support the study of road safety policy. Critical discourse analysis (CDA) and case study methodologies were selected. The methods and analysis in the research design were informed by, and not directed by rigid theoretical approaches. It was important to respond to developing themes as the research evolved and whilst the main qualitative design did not alter, an iterative path was adopted to respond to developing theoretical positions.

This chapter builds on the literature review chapter (chapter 2), sets out the approach and the choices made to the research design, where the research questions drive the type of data collected, which in turn drives the selection of the most appropriate methodology.

#### 3.2 Case studies

Knill and Tosun (2012) suggest that the study of public policy is characterised by a bifurcation between qualitative analysis investigating policy making, such as in-depth case studies, and macro qualitative studies focusing on policy patterns over long periods of time (p.288). Case

study research requires the selection of information rich cases in order to allow researchers an in-depth understanding of relevant and critical issues under investigation. Case studies are good for describing, comparing, evaluating, or understanding different aspects of a research problem. The selection approach included case study areas which aligned with the wider research questions, were relevant, and would provide new or unexpected insights. Road safety policy offers a vast array of policy options for study, for example, speed, infrastructure, mode of travel, demographics, as demonstrated in the literature review (2.4). The advantage of research that attempts to include many aspects of road safety would be wide ranging and broad, though ambitious research. However, the practical and time constraints of a single researcher attempting such research was a major drawback. A decision was made to focus on a macro level case to assess the degree of stability and change in policymaking in Britain, as each specific area of road safety policy has particular and different factors and circumstances. However, it was important to embed additional road safety topics to avoid the risk of becoming too abstract. The study of policy is distinguished by a connection between qualitative analysis investigating policy making, including case studies for in depth analysis, and macro level evaluation focusing on policy patterns over time (Knill and Tosun, 2012).

### **3.2.1 Case study selection**

Case studies offer an insight into specific environments and contexts, and this dependent knowledge was a valuable framing for this research (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p.264). The selection of case studies was influenced by the ability to provide new or unexpected insights; to challenge or complicate existing assumptions; to propose practical courses of action to resolve a problem; and open up new directions for future research. The objective was to include an in-depth investigation into policy areas, or descriptive units (Emmel, 2013) that were accessible, and contributed to answering the research questions. Case studies offer the opportunity to probe consistency, contradictions or transferability and add to the overall analysis. Selecting two embedded cases allowed an evaluation across the different aspects of road safety and cross comparative reflection. The case studies were selected to describe what was going on in specific policy areas, to inform, interpret, and explain the data (Emmel, 2013, p.107). Had the approach focused exclusively on the processes of policymaking at the macro level, there was a risk that this research could have become too abstract, or interviewees could have struggled with the application of public policy. Equally, there was a risk only using a methodology that relied on policy specific areas could have resulted in an overly strong focus on those topics, and thus detract from the research aims. By maintaining the focus on a case study on macro level policy and embedded case studies as supporting data, the risk was mitigated.

The use of case studies has been criticised (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). For example, generalisations are not possible, or they can be arbitrary and subjective, and large scale samples can be a more reliable method of study. To a substantial extent these criticisms can be attributed to misunderstandings in the selection and use of case studies. In arguing these assertions are wrong, Flyvbjerg (2006) suggests a case study is a necessary and sufficient method for research and the use “holds up well when compared to other methods” (Flyvbjerg, 2006, p.241). The aim was an in depth evaluation of the focus and influencing factors and the case study methodology was the best fit to concentrate on specific policy areas. The aim was to identify case study areas with the following selection criteria:

- indicative of on-going policy issues or discourse in order to ensure the availability of data for analysis in areas relevant in road safety policy
- where new research would contribute to available knowledge in the field selected

Deciding on the number of case studies was important. Single case studies are most common and can be justifiable when the case study is unique, novel, or atypical (Priya, 2020). But multiple case studies have distinct advantages as more robust, and compelling as there is a greater chance of eliminating data collection errors and prejudices, and produce more acceptable results. Priya (2020) suggests that an important factor in selection is deciding on achievable research where resources and time are important considerations is deciding on the scale of research.

Selection began with the development of a long list of policy areas from the literature, and the sampling of selected websites of road safety organisations (table 3.1) between 2017 and 2020. The literature review focused on academic journal articles (chapter 2) and the web-based search included other types of relevant literature such as project reports or opinion pieces.

**Table 3.1 : Road safety organisations utilised for case study selection**

<b>Brake:</b> a road safety charity working with communities and organisations across the UK and New Zealand to stop road deaths and injuries, and support those bereaved by a road crash.
<b>European Transport Safety Council:</b> an independent non-profit making organisation dedicated to reducing the numbers of deaths and injuries in transport in Europe.
<b>FACTS:</b> a registered charity which aims to advise and inform members of the HoC and the House of Lords on air, rail, and road safety issues.
<b>RAC Foundation:</b> an independent transport policy and research charity which explores the economic, mobility, safety and environmental issues relating to roads and their users.
<b>TRL:</b> a centre for innovation in transport and mobility providing research, technology, and software solutions for surface transport modes.

The main consideration when selecting the most suitable data and the most appropriate quantity of data (Grant, 2019, p.169) were that the five websites were active in the road safety discourse, were readily available, and represented sufficient quantity.

There were four policy areas from the long list with the best match with the selection criteria (table 3.2 - shaded area) with a range of search results between 24-36 examples of discourse:

**Table 3.2: Long and short list of potential case study areas**

Policy area	Evidence of discourse	Contribution to knowledge
Speed management by road classification	36	X
Young and novice drivers, and GDL	30	X
Phone use whilst driving	29	X
Drug or drunk driving	24	X
KSI by road user type		X
Older drivers		X
Seat belt compliance		X
Educational road safety programmes		X

The evaluation was, however, not conclusive. So, a simple numeric 'top two' together with the TC's decision to hold an inquiry on young drivers influenced the final selection of young driver risk and rural roads. Whilst rural roads account for the highest number of road type fatalities, they were not specifically referenced frequently, and this was interesting in itself, as was the intersection between the high proportion of young driver crashes on rural roads and it being an area where there are gaps in the literature.

### 3.3 Research design

In evaluating the most germane approach to this research both qualitative and quantitative methods were considered. The decision on how to answer the research questions was achieved after consideration of the literature and sources of data. This research focuses on seeking the views of politicians and policy participants on the process and priority of policymaking. Qualitative methods are traditionally used in social sciences and public policy in understanding the social reality, and relies on data from first hand observations. Quantitative research strategies focus on collecting and analysing numeric data, using a deductive approach in the testing of theories. The decision to use qualitative methods is based on the drivers within the research questions, and is supported by the literature review, which is dominated by qualitative methods (including interviews, case studies and text analysis), and the type of data. Whilst this research follows a traditional path, the proclivity for qualitative methods is the best fit to understand meaning, language and whether the data discloses any patterns or themes. The requirement of this research to comprehend and interpret language and meaning within the texts leads to discounting quantitative methods which relies on measurement.

The literature review identified a lack of academic articles on the views of policy participants on road safety within a British context (2.7). The use of interviews was the most suitable source of primary data to focus the analysis on the views and opinions of policy participants. A single data source was deemed insufficient and further data sources were investigated. In Britain there is a wealth of sources of policy discourse over time, and policy documents which aid in contextualising road safety policy, and Parliamentary debates, which offer an insight into the history of policy development, a key element of the research questions, were selected. Finally, casualty data were used to support the contextualising of primary and secondary data.

The selection of the most suitable data and the appropriate quantity of data to ensure it was as representative as possible is important. In considering the selection of data, Scott (1990, p.17) identifies four elements to support the understanding of the quality of the selected texts: authenticity; credibility; representativeness and meaning. There was a wide range of policy documents and debates available, and those texts appropriate to this research were selected based on the relevance to the four research questions and the criteria in table 3.3.

**Table 3.3: Document and debate selection**

**Policy documents and debates:**

There are many hundreds of debates and documents on subjects related to road safety. However, subjects such as the investment in a bypass in a specific geographical area have no relevance to road safety policy as defined within this research. Equally, the search has been narrowed to focus on the research questions asking about strategic policy. These inclusions and exclusions have been developed to guide the search:

**Include:** documents with strategic or macro level road safety policy; references to the case study topics. Sources include Government documents, consultation, Transport Committee inquiry reports and Government responses. All documents are accessible and published.

**Exclude:** documents on specific modes of travel – e.g. cycling or walking, investment documents – e.g. in specific locations or national investment plans, and unpublished documents – e.g. the DfT commissioned road safety targets document from 2020.

Data on casualty numbers (STATS19) has been collected in Britain throughout the chosen research period and the decision was made to include analysis of casualty numbers of those killed or seriously injured on Britain's roads. It is acknowledged it is not the only possible way of measuring road safety progress, and there are weaknesses with the data (discussed in 3.4.4), but as this is the primary measure from government and the most frequently cited, it was selected. The volume of data needed for research is debated in theory and practice, with divergent views about the need to be specific about the requirements of the amount of data needed, whilst others argue that the size is immaterial, and the only necessity is for the data to be convincing (Emmel, 2013, p.62). Decisions about inclusion are made cognisant of the need to be responsive to the research questions, theoretical development, and practical

considerations, such as the available resources. The result was all documents meeting the inclusion criteria in table 3.3 and the research period were included, so no further selection was necessary. This significantly reduced the risk of biased selection.

There is debate as to the effectiveness of policy evaluation (Taylor and Balloch, 2005) and the impact that political bias may have in objectivity (Dudley and Richardson, 2000). But the main factor to consider in the assessment of policy change in this research, is the period of time where evaluation could occur. Policy processes have periods of change and stability (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009) and recognising where these happen, and the significance, plays an important role in evaluation. Policy change is a dynamic concept and attention should be placed on the period over which research is conducted. This applies to all data sources. Analysis over longer periods supports better understanding of public policy and reduces the risk of the wrong or short term conclusions (Knill and Tosun, 2012). Dudley and Richardson (2000) illustrate this by citing the shift made by the roads lobby from a weak advocacy coalition to “hegemonic policy community in a few years in the late 1950s” (p.240) and suggest that this change is better understood if earlier failures, and thus the period of analysis, is evaluated. Knill and Tosun (2012) advocate that data looking at policy change should cover periods of years or decades (p.258) and that deciding on the data period is one of the most challenging aspects of policy evaluation. They identify the risk of censoring and suggest that longer periods of analysis can mitigate these potential risks.

The decision to select 1987 to 2021 is primarily derived from public policy theory, the preference to include a range of periods of political parties in government and the need to gather sufficient data. The analysis of the policy documents concludes that the choice to introduce casualty reduction targets in 1987 and 2000, and the choice to discontinue them in 2011 were historically significant, which in turn directed the selection of these dates. Steve Norris, a Conservative Minister offers a reinforcing view, after the decision to select these dates. In 1994, he suggests:

*“Modern road safety history began in 1987, when the then Secretary of State ... (Paul Channon), announced what has become known as the casualty reduction target to reduce all road casualties by one third by the year 2000” (Hansard HC Deb., 25 November 1994, c.836).*

A comparative investigation or a wider analysis, including a European Union or a European perspective was considered and discounted. An econometric analysis had been conducted by Castillo-Manzano et al. (2014) and whilst this study could have been developed further, this would have altered the research aim significantly away from seeking to understand road safety policy within a British context, and significantly alter the research questions. As well as changing the scope, it would have increased the breadth of possible areas of inquiry and whilst

research seeking to understand the politics of road death in the EU would have been valid, the core British focus was maintained. The next section (3.4) details the data sources and section 3.5 discusses the methodologies employed for analysis and section.

### 3.4 Data sources

#### 3.4.1 Interviews

The literature review found limited road safety policy articles, especially from a British context and using public policy models. The review found no public policy literature relating to road safety which includes interview data from policy participants in Britain, and this was an important starting point in deciding to use interviews to gather original primary data on the views of politicians and policy participants. The seven stages of an investigation as defined by Kvale and Brinkmann (2009, from p.97) are adapted to describe the approach to interviews:

**Design and ethical considerations:** The research aim is to seek to understand *how* and *why* policy was made or not made, and to elicit the views of policy participants, and to understand the focus of policy over time. The combined use of policy documentation, Parliamentary debates and analysis of interview data increases the reliability of the results. This research was conducted with University of Leeds ethics and data management approval. The ethical considerations were important as road death is a sensitive area which requires a considered approach to contact, consent, and participation with two important considerations:

- Confidentiality and anonymity of the data from interviews was important, both to comply with the ethical, legal, and policy-based requirements, and to secure the trust of participants to give complete and open responses
- All interviewees held professional roles and so within an organisational hierarchy where support for their well-being was available. The researcher is a trained nurse, so this training and experience enabled empathy in conducting the interview.

The original design was to invite twenty-five interviewees, but during an iterative process, this number increased to seventy. Potential interviewees were selected from organisations used within the case study selection process (table 3.1), wider active travel or modal shift organisations, statutory organisations with responsibility for elements of road safety, Members of the Transport Select Committee, motoring organisations, Members of Parliament who had a long association with road safety, local politicians, engineering or roads based organisations, and voluntary sector organisations (the organisations are not named for anonymity reasons). The rate of attrition, 'ignore' and decline, together with the importance of balance, both politically and by policy group explain this increase. It was also important to

balance interviewees with a historical perspective of road safety, as well as those with a more contemporary knowledge base. It was important to recruit political and civil servant interviewees who had been involved with road safety policy, particularly from a historical perspective, and the final interview panel did include such experience. Once the above degree of balance was achieved, all interviewees were included in the research and relative importance was not attached to any individual or group. Four main groups were identified, and three were subdivided into local and national (table 3.4). This categorisation was chosen to maximize the identification of the type of interviewee to help understand the analysis, whilst protecting the anonymity of individual interviewee.

**Table 3.4: Category of interviewees**

Academic (n=5)	Researchers currently in the field of road safety with different academic backgrounds and interests. Sub-disciplines include psychology, public health, and policy*
NGO (n=9)	Non-government organisation: for example charity, think tank, motoring organisation (divided by national and local)*
Policy actor (n=13)	Involved with road safety as employee: for example – senior civil servant, senior police, office of a police and crime commissioner, qango, devolved organisation (divided by national and local)*
Policy maker (n=8)	Elected politicians from different legislatures (divided by national and local). Members of Parliament equally split between Conservative and Labour*
*Clustering has been used to maintain the anonymity of the interviewees.	

Thirty-five interviews were completed, 50% of those invited, and were representative of the groups, with one exception. Local politicians were very reluctant to either respond to the research request or to engage. There were difficulties getting through diary minders and when responses were given, time constraints, or lack of knowledge were cited. In contrast some national politicians were more interested in engaging, and with those who did not participate, it was because they did not respond or due to blocks from diary minders.

Despite having an important voice in road safety, a decision was made not to invite victims of road crashes due to the need for increased care and concern, and the need to potentially offer additional support, and a high level of ethical clearance. However, in selecting the interviewees, three had information in the public domain of their personal experience of a road crash and in addition, two disclosed this information during interview, though the question was not directly asked. These circumstances ensured that some perspectives from road crash victims were included in this research.

A great deal of time and effort was dedicated to the organisation of the invitation, discussion, answering questions, and consenting process to secure interviews. These were all initiated through an email with the option to discuss or ask questions through either email or a phone call. The processes and outcomes were captured in data secure and confidential cloud-based

University of Leeds storage with password protection. These included the date, content, and the outcome of any interactions: for example, the detail of any questions or concerns, and practical requests around scheduling. Details of the information shared with prospective interviews are included: the invitation letter (0), participant information sheet (0) and the consent form (0).

**Interview questions and conducting the interview:** These are set out in table 3.5.

**Table 3.5: Interview questions<sup>1</sup>**

1. What is your role and your organisation; what is your involvement or interest in road safety?
2. What are your views on road safety and the number of road deaths in Britain?
3. Road safety is described in different ways. Illustrated by: Britain has “some of the safest roads in the world” (i) or we need to “end the scandal of complacency” of not addressing road safety (ii). What is your view?
4. How important is the language that is used and does different language make a difference?
5. Grant Shapps raised the debate between freedom vs safety. His answer was there no need to restrict freedoms to improve safety. What is your view?
6. Since the 1980s, do you think the focus on road safety policy has changed?
7. In 1987 and 2000, Governments set road casualty reduction targets. The Governments over the last decade have not. Is the presence or absence of a target important?
8. I am interested in the balance between local and national responsibility. “To deliver decentralisation and empowerment we do not consider that local service deliverers need further central persuasion on the importance of road safety. We do not therefore believe that over-arching national targets or central diktat that constrains local ambitions and priorities are now the most effective way of improving road safety” What are your views?
9. In the past decade, there were three road safety statements. How effective has this policy activity been? Why have KSI numbers pretty much remained unchanged?
10. Since 1987, there have been 3 TC reports and six dedicated HoC debates on young drivers. Do you think this area is a policy problem? If so, why has little progress been made in reducing casualties?
11. There is a disproportionate risk of driving on rural roads which accounts for 60% of fatal crashes: why does rural road safety attract little attention in Parliament?
12. Over time, there has been variation in road safety progress. What factors do you think explains this?
13. Is there a need for national action on rural speed limits?
14. What role does politics or party politics play in road safety? What is the consequence?
15. What action would need to be taken to develop future road safety policy?
16. Why does a fatality in a rail crash create more policy action than one on the roads?
17. Do victim groups support the advancement of road safety policy or detract from it?
18. Which three policy interventions would you prioritise to further improve road safety?
19. Is there anything you would like to add or reinforce?

<sup>1</sup> Interview questions shaded in grey have not been utilised in this thesis: see below for the rationale.

The interview questions were designed to focus on the research questions and draft versions of questions were discussed throughout their development with supervisors and tested with four volunteers: these were two individuals with knowledge of road safety and two academics with knowledge of qualitative research. Questions were adapted and the numbers reduced before the final set was confirmed (table 3.5). Changes include: more specificity and accuracy; reducing the length of quotes as feedback suggested these were distracting; and adaptations to the choice of language used, for example, question 11: *why has rural road policy been ignored?* was changed to *why does rural road safety attract little attention in Parliament?* In addition, the practice interviews were helpful in informing how to conduct the interviews and there were two main reflections: each interviewee has their own individual experience and knowledge requiring more or less explanation of the question, so being receptive to individual needs was important; and time management was more dependent on the interviewee rather than the interview questions as some had much more or less to say.

**Interview question data rationalisation:** The interview question design was to ensure the research questions were answered, and although these were piloted and reviewed prior to commencing, following the completion of the interviews, further selection was necessary. The volume of data was too great to use; there was a need to further focus on the four research questions; and there was the practical aspect of a word limits. Interview questions 1, 2 and 19 (table 3.5) were not coded separately as these were introductory, or contextual, and a means to introduce the interview. As interview data was confidential and anonymised, demographic, or organisational data was not required. Interview question 7 on road casualty reduction targets, question 13 on speed limits, and question 16 on rail comparisons were de-prioritised, and as the construction of the question elicited personal opinions which did not add to the research questions, whilst this data was interesting, it was decided it was not essential.

**Interview variation and quality:** All interviews were one-to-one, with adults, and were conducted by the same interviewer. There were two minor problems: first, with most academics, national NGOs, and policy actors there was insufficient time and all interviewees consented to additional time (planned time was 60 minutes, plus fifteen for introductions and questions); second, some interviewees cited a lack of knowledge on some questions, which were omitted: examples include a lack of a historical context or knowledge in the embedded case study areas. The semi structured approach using the questions as the skeleton was effective in securing answers. There was a wide range in the length of interviews. The total transcribed interview time was 2,399 minutes: with an average interview duration of 69 minutes. The two shortest were both politicians (24 and 32 minutes) and the longest two were a policy actor (150 minutes) and someone from an NGO (155 minutes). This information does

not lead to any conclusions as there was a range of rationale that directed the duration time: for example, some were scheduled for a shorter duration, some interviewees had little to say, and others had a verbose interview style. The experience and skills of the researcher were important considerations. The researcher is a trained nurse which was beneficial given the subject matter; had more than thirty years working in the NHS which included numerous non-academic interviews; and experience of academic interviews from dissertations for master's degrees and within a research project led by one of the supervisors. Online training supported this experience.

**Transcription and interview analysis:** Thirty-four interviews were conducted using Teams with full recordings and the final one was conducted on the phone with note taking by the interviewer, due to technology issues. These were captured with the Microsoft transcription software, which was an effective way of recording, but less effective in achieving accurate transcriptions. The transcripts required significant quality assurance, with a three stage process adopted: an initial conversion from the original transcript to readable text, a read across between the text and the recording at the same time to correct mis-transcription, and finally a verification of the accuracy of the text. This was very time consuming but resulted in high confidence levels of the quality and accuracy of the text. All data was saved using anonymised documents with separate password protected code identifiers and saved on password protected cloud based storage. The quality assurance approach was beneficial in preparing the texts for analysis, both through familiarisation with the content and generating usable text, which was uploaded in NVivo, specialist software, for analysis.

**Quotes:** These have been used extensively throughout the thesis to illustrate, demonstrate, and cite directly from the data. In many cases the quote itself makes the point within the analysis and so the meaning of the quote is not repeated, nor summation used. Where quotes are used, they are representative of a point, and used as an illustration of other examples. The results rely on two elucidations: representative of all interview groups or representative of some interview groups, which indicate the strength of the analysis. All quotes are directly quoted with some noted amendments where a section was not needed – for example, the removal of fillers (i.e. 'you know,' 'I think'), repetition, Parliamentary convention, for example: 'the Honourable gentleman' or when there was an irrelevant diversion from the main point.

### **3.4.2 Debates from the House of Commons**

All debates were selected from January 1987 to December 2021 within the search criteria (table 3.6) from <https://hansard.parliament.uk> using the 'reference' and 'debate titles' search functions in Hansard. The range of descriptive language used in Hansard varies over time and

by the style of the MP. The key identifiable words in the selection criteria were used to identify the debates, adjournment debates, and those relevant aspects of debates for analysis. The choice of language is important when identifying meaning as language could simply reflect the period of analysis, the way the debates were designed rather than anything more meaningful.

**Table 3.6: Search criteria – inclusions and exclusion**

Search criteria - included	Search criteria - excluded
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Car transport associated with road safety</li> <li>• Road crash or serious injury</li> <li>• Road accident, casualty, collision, crash, death, fatality and / or killed</li> <li>• Road safety</li> <li>• Road traffic safety</li> <li>• Rural roads or country lanes</li> <li>• Speed, speed limits, speed management, or speeding</li> <li>• Young, new, naive and novice drivers</li> <li>• All of the above + policy</li> <li>• The above with different combinations – e.g. road speed; road speed policy; road speed limit, rural road speed limits; etc.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Engineering without an explicit connection with road safety – e.g. bypass in X locality</li> <li>• Insurance</li> <li>• Legislation – e.g. sentencing</li> <li>• Locality or geography specific</li> <li>• Specific initiatives associated with road safety – e.g. schools; trailer, or towing safety; HGV licences; driving instruction; seat belts; breath tests; drink driving, etc.</li> <li>• Specific transport modes – e.g. motorcycles, cycling, horse riding</li> <li>• Specific types of roads (except rural roads) – e.g. smart motorways</li> <li>• Speed cameras</li> <li>• Vehicle safety or automation</li> </ul>

Due to the nature of political speech, each debate was read in its entirety as the meaning beyond the individual word can be missed by sampling. For example, there is a contrast between the high quantity of references to targets in debates around 1987 and 2000 where targets formed part of the policy solution, to lower quantity of references beyond 2010 when targets did not form part of national policy solution or discourse. This data could simply be reflective of the policy options considered rather than anything more significant.

The source was HoC debates and TC inquiries. It includes written answers where these were referred to in a speech. Debates from the Westminster Hall were included initially, but these were removed due to the volume of text and a decision to focus on the HoC as the main legislature. House of Lords debates were also excluded with the same rationale, and divisions, petitions, committees, Ministerial corrections, written answers, and written statements were not included, unless directly cited in speeches. A limitation is in periods when the responsible Minister was a member of the House of Lords, though practice is that the Secretary of State for Transport represents the Government in debates in the HoC, so this was a minor limitation. Archive detail was not available in order to identify when there was a roads Minister in the House of Lords.

### 3.4.3 Policy documents

The definition of a document can be wide ranging, including text from different sources, photographs, social media (Grant, 2019, p.30), but what is more important is the selection of the texts in order to understand, analyse the meaning, and interpret the text (Fairclough, 2003, p.14). For this research, the selected text was from strategy, policy and consultation documents, and TC inquiry reports together with the Government responses. These texts are relevant as they set out a narrative or discourse on policy development and the factors which have been influential over time. This sample includes documents with written text that were available, have been published and were focused on the remit of this research (table 3.6).

There are eight policy documents and eight TC inquiries (each has a Government response, but these have paired and shown as one process step, but each has two documents) on which CDA has been undertaken. There was one omission: *Road safety: towards safer roads* (1997) was published after the 1996 consultation document on targets, and before the integrated transport policy in 1998, but was not accessible. It was described as a document to develop “new policies for safety related to post 2000 targets, together with a strategy to achieve them (Sabey, 1999, p.19).

The details of the documents are set out in the relevant individual chapters on the focus of road safety policy (chapter 4), rural roads (chapter 5), and young drivers (chapter 6). So, documents specific to, for example, motorcycle safety, debates on specific geographical problems or legislative changes are excluded. Acts of Parliament are also excluded, though there were some references to these Acts in some debates. Inevitably, by selecting documents, others have been excluded (table 3.6), and this may have been a limitation in this research. There was a risk that there was insufficient depth or detail and a bias in selection, but as all relevant documents within the time period which fulfilled the criteria were selected, the risk of bias was significantly reduced.

The selected documents provide background and context, which enabled the framing of interview questions, were a means of tracking change and development over time and afforded an element of verification of findings from other data sources. Bowen suggests that “documents may be the most effective means of gathering data when events can no longer be observed or when informants have forgotten the details” (Bowen, 2009, p.31).

### 3.4.4 Road casualty data

This research uses a single supplementary quantitative data source of road casualty data from the DfT: STATS19. Data is collected by police force areas in Britain (STATS19 excludes Northern Ireland) in three categories: those killed, seriously injured, and slight injuries. The data period

for this research was 1987 to 2021. Each year, provisional data is produced, and final reports are published eight months after the previous data period closes. The original intention was to use both KSI data to describe the context, scale, and change over time. Slight injury data was discounted at the outset as the focus of the research is on those killed or seriously injured. However, this approach was changed to focus only on data on those killed. KSI analysis was always secondary to the primary methods, and whilst it was important to include accurate data and justifiable interpretation in how road death policy was framed, the ongoing debate and changes to the methods of collection and definitions about serious injury data, was considered an unnecessary distraction. The rationale for this decision was associated with data quality, methodological, and collection issues. These are discussed below:

**Data quality and under reporting:** Historically, there have been concerns about relying on a single data source collected by police forces and not linked to Health Episode Statistics (HES) data (Jeffrey et al, 2009) leading to misinformed policymakers (Cryer et al., 2001). There is evidence of an increased tendency for police forces to report injuries as slight rather than serious (Jeffrey et al., 2009) which was acknowledged as a weakness, as serious injuries “may have been classified as slight injuries which impacts the comparability of these figures over time” (DfT, 2021b). There is also concern about the levels of under reporting (Ward et al., 2020) which was acknowledged by the DfT:

*“A considerable proportion of non-fatal casualties are not known to the police, as hospital, survey and compensation claims data all indicate a higher number of casualties than those recorded in police accident data” (DfT, 2020c).*

**Methods - injury-based reporting systems:** The DfT identifies problems with the methods for collecting KSI data and instigated a review focused on the need for a common way for police forces to collate and submit data (DfT, 2021b). The conclusion was a new approach with a consistent injury based method for collecting data; with the Collision Recording and Sharing (CRaSH) system being the dominant approach (ONS, 2019). This more detailed data includes adjusted severity figures for police force and local authority breakdowns (ONS, 2019), with the nature of serious injury further categorised by very serious, moderately serious, or less serious, with clinical detail such as serious head injury or broken neck (DfT, 2020c).

**Police force logistical issues:** There was an incremental approach to implementing the CRaSH system (Ward et al., 2020). As a result national reports include data collected from injury based and non-injury based systems which raises questions about comparability of serious injury data (ONS, 2019). By March 2022, CRaSH or similar systems were used by thirty-one police forces (out of 44) and published data is available only from 2019 for twenty-three police forces (DfT, 2020c). Much of this research includes descriptions of and discourse about both killed and seriously injured, and so the impact of disconnecting these data was carefully

considered. The difficulty of this approach was reflected by one interviewee (NGO L1, 2021) who expressed concern that by not dealing with those seriously injured equitably, it reduced the importance of this group. On balance, the decision to maintain the discourse analysis on KSI data, but to focus on road death data was made based on the factors described above.

**Global pandemic:** The impact of the Coronavirus pandemic from 2020 and the associated travel restrictions affected casualty numbers. Road casualty numbers decreased in line with reduced road traffic and national lockdowns. Road casualties decreased by 68% in April 2020 compared to the 3 year average for 2017 to 2019. This aligned with the first full month of national lockdown and the reduction in motor traffic (DfT, 2021d). This significant factor is important when evaluating trends over time, and data ending in 2019 is predominantly used.

### 3.5 Approach to analysis

#### 3.5.1 Critical discourse analysis

As discussed in section 3.3 the research period of interest spans more than three decades and so it is not possible to understand all changes that happened via the interviews alone. This therefore means that there is an advantage in supplementing this data and to analyse the language of policy documents and discussions over this period. To do so requires an approach which enables evaluation of discourse. A number of qualitative methods are available, such as narrative analysis, content analysis and critical discourse analysis (CDA). The first two approaches enable analysis of specific content or narrative, through a more didactic method and focus on the coding framework (Schreier, 2014) and describe events or themes (Elliott, 2005). These are similar to CDA in these respects.

CDA is a form of critical research which supports the study of social or political fields through research questions, understood through the analysis of language, meaning and power (Fairclough, 2003, p.202; Grant, 2019, p.66). Shaw and Bailey (2009) describe “the study of social life, understood through the analysis of language in its widest sense” (p.413), and CDA attempts to unravel the collection of ideas and themes (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009). These can conflict or be contradictory. The main difference and rationale for the selection of CDA is its consideration of the data beyond the surface meanings (Grant, 2019). Evaluating the language, discourse, and meaning is particularly important in policy discourse in order to answer the research questions, so CDA was the most appropriate methodology.

The CDA process first involves a superficial examination, followed by thorough reading, re-reading, and analytical interpretation of the discourse, an iterative process which enables thematic analysis (Grant, 2019). Some data (for example, interviewees with long careers)

enabled longer historic contexts and insights, and this historical analysis provides a means of identifying change in road safety policy over time. This process aids the verification or corroboration of the evidence from other sources and helped to formulate questions for the interviews. The analysis needs to be as rigorous and transparent as possible due to the subjective nature of the researcher as the interpreter of the data (Bowen, 2009, p.40). The approach included finding, selecting, appraising, and synthesising data contained in texts, analysing then recording to the pre-defined coding framework (described in section 3.5.1.1).

In the literature there are examples of more quantitative approaches to CDA, but these are contested (Grant, 2019). The option to quantify discourse was considered but was dismissed due to the range of language used with similar meaning: for example road traffic accident, collision, crash, death, or fatality; the impact of officialdom language which has changed over time; the many hundreds of references; and the use of themes were deemed significantly more effective as they allow the clustering of quotes about similar topics, whilst accounting for the differences in the language of the time. The two main problems with quantifying data are because the main purpose of CDA is the study of language in order to analyse data beyond the surface meaning or in “the spirit of sceptical reading” (Gill, 2006, p. 216), and analysis of the amount of data, or phrase or word counting is a single and unhelpful dimension of political analysis. Thematic, rather than quantitative CDA was apposite. A coding framework, an integral aspect of CDA is used to analyse data from excerpts, quotations, or entire passages, and organise them into themes (see 3.5.1.1). In the results chapters, where quotes are used, these are illustrative of at least three other views, and in many cases more views. If a quote is less representative, this is described appropriately.

### **3.5.1.1 Coding framework**

Coding involves attaching keywords to a text segment or a systematic categorisation of a quote or statement, both of which enable the identification of text for analysis (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009, p. 201). The development of a coding framework to facilitate this organising, condensing and the interpretation of meaning is vital (Kvale and Brinkmann, 2009, p. 202). This is an essential element of CDA which is used by this research and uses specialist software (NVivo 12 Pro) to systematise the analysis. Codes developed from the analysis of documents and debates are used, but these were built upon as the CDA developed. The coding framework was ‘fixed’ prior to the analysis of the interview data. The coding framework has twenty-two nodes used for all data sources, of which twenty have sub-nodes. Section 3.5.1.2 gives examples of coding to illustrate the functioning of the framework. Many of the interview questions appear on the main node structure (12/18) and the remaining six interview

questions are sub nodes. The coding framework, including the definitions and categorisation of each node and sub node is included at 0.

Data was reviewed and based on its characteristics, coded to the nodes within the coding framework. NVivo with its query tools supports the recognition of patterns within the data, identifies emerging themes which become categories for analysis. Objectivity, representing the data fairly, and sensitivity, responding to even subtle meaning were important elements of academic practice. It was not feasible to replicate the totality of the NVivo framework in the thesis, but examples are given below (3.5.1.2). A single coding framework is used for analysis for all data from interviews, debates, and policy documents. The NVivo query function allows analysis by the different types of data via searches of interview, document, or debate, or by the category of interviewee. All data files are coded and have classifications by the type of text; the coding framework was classified as described above, and cases (the interview text) were classified by interviewee type (for example, academic). Each of the three data sets were dealt with in the same way in NVivo and these are discussed in more detail in 3.5.1.2. NVivo software was selected as the design and functionality provides structure and the ability to organise and interrogate data for analysis, meets the need of this research and is the University of Leeds's preferred tool.

### 3.5.1.2 Examples of coding

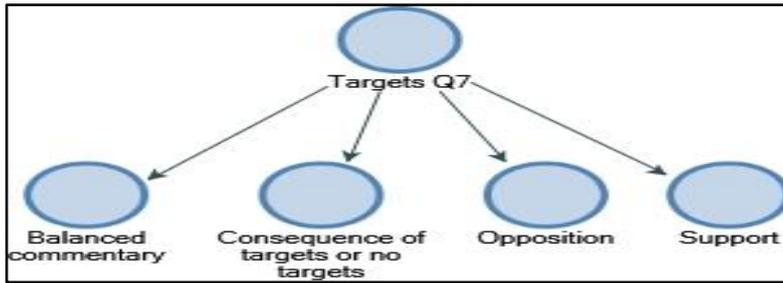
Grant (2019) suggests that the thematic analysis of coding is an active process rather than a passive representation or counting of the text. Braum and Clarke (2006) provide a procedure for thematic analysis, and this was adopted, though not in a sequential form (table 3.7).

**Table 3.7: Procedure to undertake thematic analysis (Braum and Clarke, 2006)**

1.	Familiarisation with the data through reading and note taking
2.	Generating initial codes from across the whole data set
3.	Searching for themes
4.	Reviewing themes
5.	Defining and naming themes
6.	Producing a report

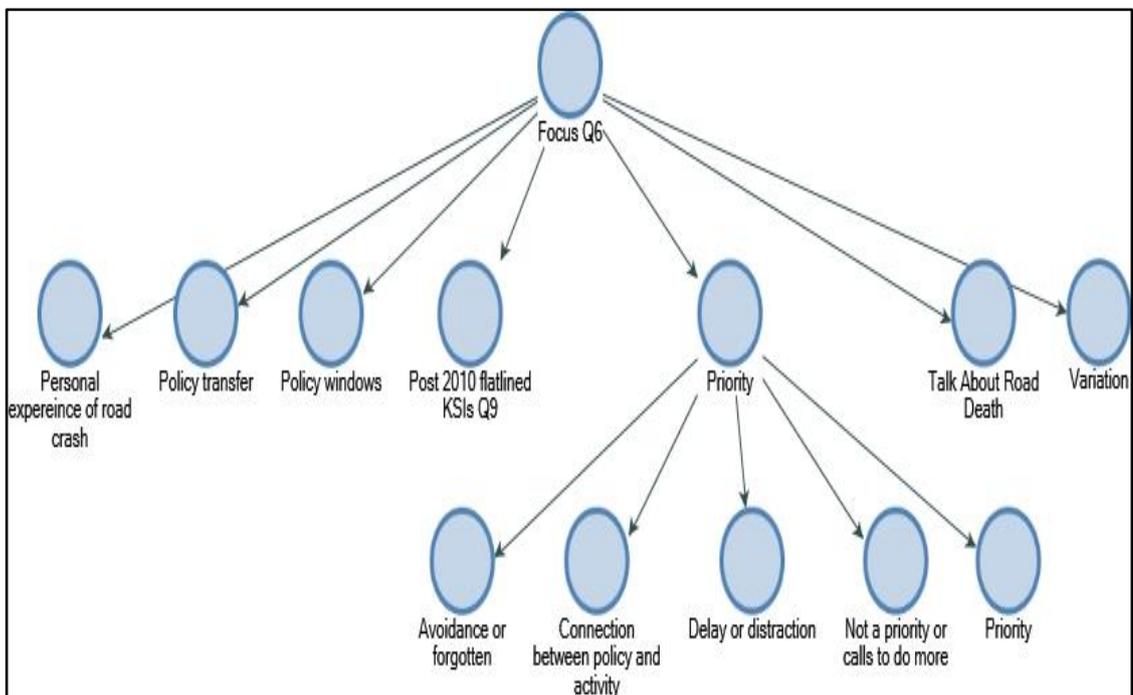
To demonstrate how the approach to coding was conducted, four examples are given. First, interview question 7 asks about casualty reduction targets which is referenced in all data sources. The initial three codes sought to analyse whether there was support or opposition to the introduction of targets and the consequences of action or inaction. An additional code: 'balanced commentary' was included because data includes more balanced views that

expressed more nuanced answers to the question, hence the need for an additional code. This is represented in figure 3.1, and is an example of a two level nodal design.



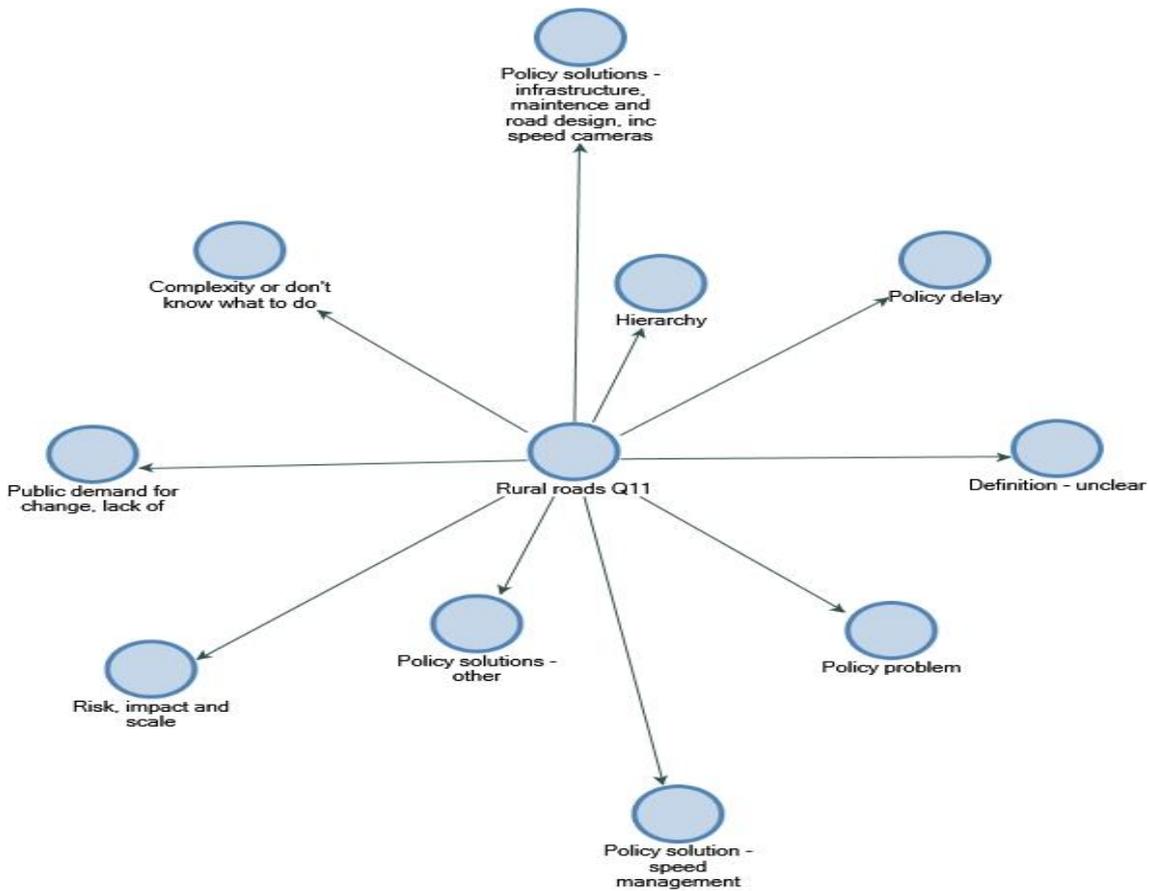
**Figure 3.1: Two level nodal structure for 'targets'**

A second example in figure 3.2 identifies the nodes specifically associated with the focus interview question, number 6 (table 3.5) and is set out over three levels. Searching, reviewing, and defining themes as described by Baum and Clarke (2006) in table 3.7 require a greater availability of codes. These codes are not analysed in quantitative terms but by the meaning, the priority and the degree of support or dissent attributed to road safety. This was a challenging node to code as there are frequent examples, particularly from data from documents or debates, where the language is unspecific. This proved not to be a major problem with the interview data as the interviewer was able to probe for more specific answers. The data relevant for this research question includes a second interview question (on casualty levels in the 2010's – question 10) which adds to the data on the degree of focus.



**Figure 3.2: Three level nodal structure for 'focus'**

Figure 3.3 describes the primary nodes for rural road safety used for coding as a third example from one of the case studies.

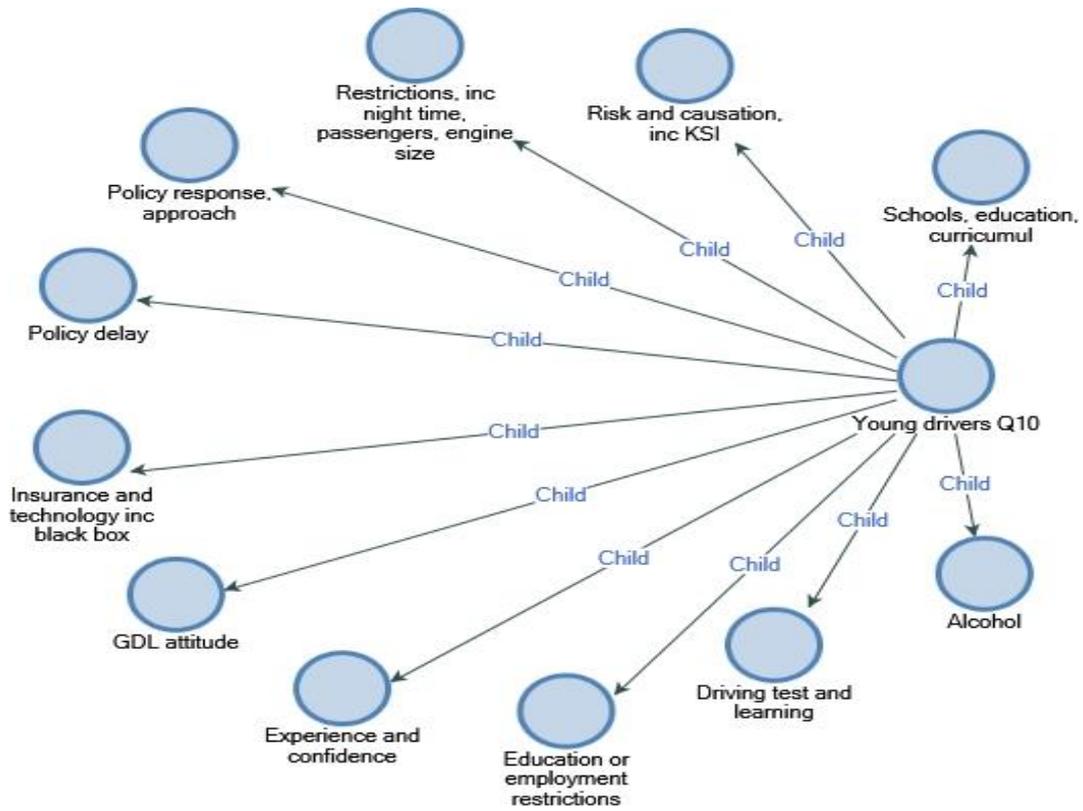


**Figure 3.3: Primary nodal structure for the rural roads section in NViVO**

The approach taken to coding is illustrated using the sub node for 'complexity':

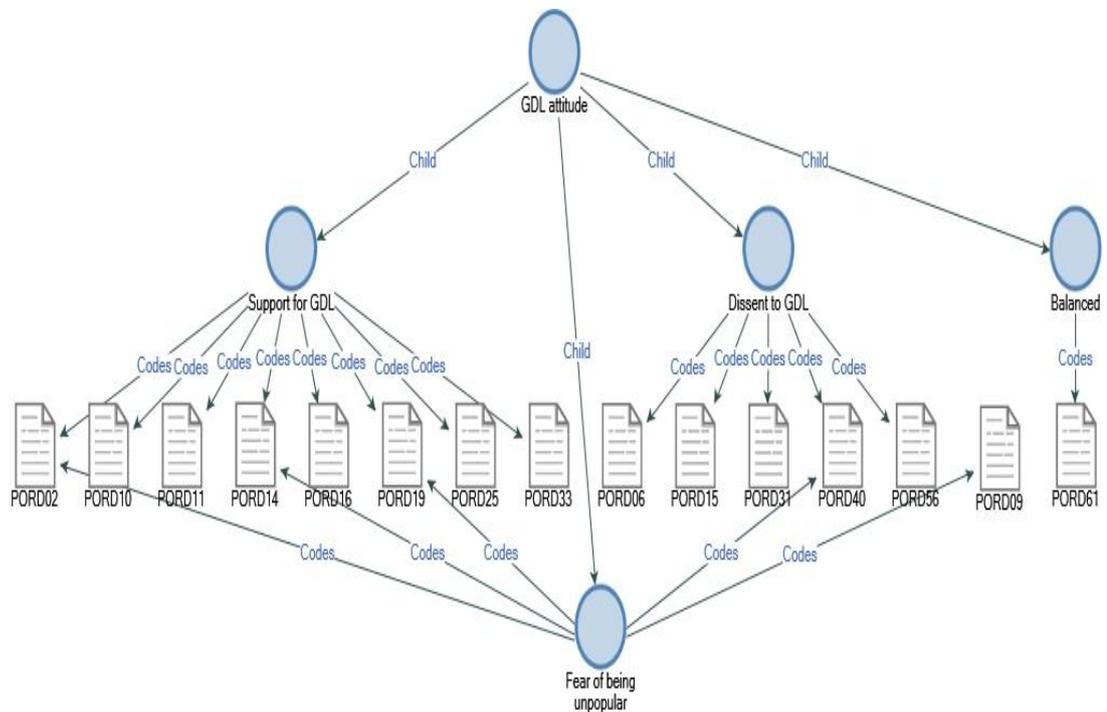
- i) Primary: the relationship between the primary code, the 'complexity' sub code and interview data
- ii) Secondary: the relationship between 'complexity' sub code and the interview data.

When coding in NViVO it was important to code the text to the most appropriate node in order to support analysis and to aid data navigation. The final example describes the primary nodes for young drivers to which data references are coded (figure 3.4)



**Figure 3.4: Top level NVivo nodal structure for the young driver section**

To illustrate the approach taken to analysis, the attitude to GDL sub node within the young driver coding framework is shown as an example and includes the level of support for GDL: support, dissent, balanced view (figure 3.5).



**Figure 3.5: Young drivers NVivo sub node for the level of support for GDL by category**

It is not possible to replicate the whole coding framework due to the volume of data.

### **3.5.1.3 Validation of the coding approach**

A validation process took place after the interviews were completed on the approach to coding and interpreting the meaning in the data. This was in two parts: first, review and discussion with supervisors throughout the developmental period prior to making decisions. This included reviewing the coding framework and how the nodes were constructed and connected; avoiding duplication of nodes, or nodes which could be interpreted as too similar, with a clear focus on the definitions; ensuring the connection with the research questions, and due diligence on the coding and repeat coding to ensure accuracy. Second, an external validation process, where the whole nodal structure was scrutinised by an independent academic. The academic selected an interview from a member of a national NGO (NGO N3, 2021). This consisted of a compare and contrast exercise of the approach to coding after the independent academic had coded the same text as the researcher, using the same nodal structure.

Some changes were made, or techniques strengthened as a result of both processes. The main improvements were associated with the specificity of the language used in describing and defining the individual nodes. This was invaluable in assisting in the process of coding to ensure the data was placed in the correct node which supported analysis, the development of the themes, and searching for quotes. As a result of this there were some changes made to the structure of the sub codes, particularly with the embedded case study questions. There were sub sets within both the embedded case study nodes which were repeated in some of the general nodes. To illustrate, there was a 'focus' sub node within rural roads and as well as a general 'focus' node. This was designed to enable a greater level of specificity but was confusing as text dealing with the focus over time could have been coded to two different sub nodes. This was rationalised to the 'focus' node only. The same issue applies to young drivers and speeding which were rationalised so that the dominant theme within the text was coded to the correct destination node. Finally, ensuring very high levels of knowledge and certainty of the coding and the destination were advocated, as well as by Braum and Clarke (2006).

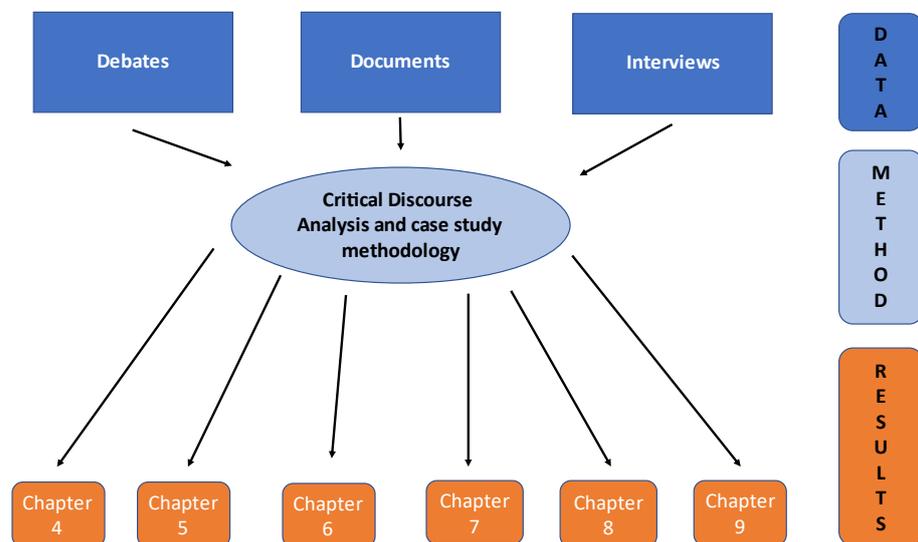
## **3.6 Overall approach**

This research is framed by three case studies: an overarching macro level case applying the approach taken by Baumgartner et al. (2014, p.67) to the study of stability and change; and two embedded cases on rural road safety policy, and young driver safety policy. The thesis uses three separate sources of qualitative data: interviews, debates, and policy documents which are analysed using CDA to answer the research questions. In addition, KSI data from STATS19 are used to support the evaluation of the context of road safety policy. This combined approach strengthens the validity of this research by triangulating these data sources with the aim of verifying or corroborating events, views or facts reported in this research. Or clearly

identifying where there are contradictions or disagreements. Triangulation is beneficial as it enables multiple perspectives to be combined to deepen the understanding, support the validation of the findings, and thus increase the levels of confidence in the findings (Grant, 2019).

The consequence of the research design is a large volume of data: for example, there is more than forty hours of interview transcriptions, some of which have not been used in this thesis, and a degree of complexity to the methodology and thesis writing. Analysis for each research question is dependent on the coding framework software where quotes and text are categorised. These quotes are used extensively throughout the thesis to report the analysis and provide evidence or illustrate themes. The thesis makes use of direct quotes, some of which are lengthy, and also uses descriptive language to provide examples of themes. By combining multiple empirical methods, including new data from interviews, this richness and volume of data reduces the risk of bias, insufficient or weak data, especially when compared to research based on single data sources, and thus this research is more likely to be of interest to politicians and policy participants.

Finally, figure 3.6 sets out a summary of the relationship between the results chapters, the source data and the methodological approach adopted, where the discourse in all data sources are critically analysed and informed the answering of all four research questions.



**Figure 3.6: Summary of data and methodology relating to the results chapters**

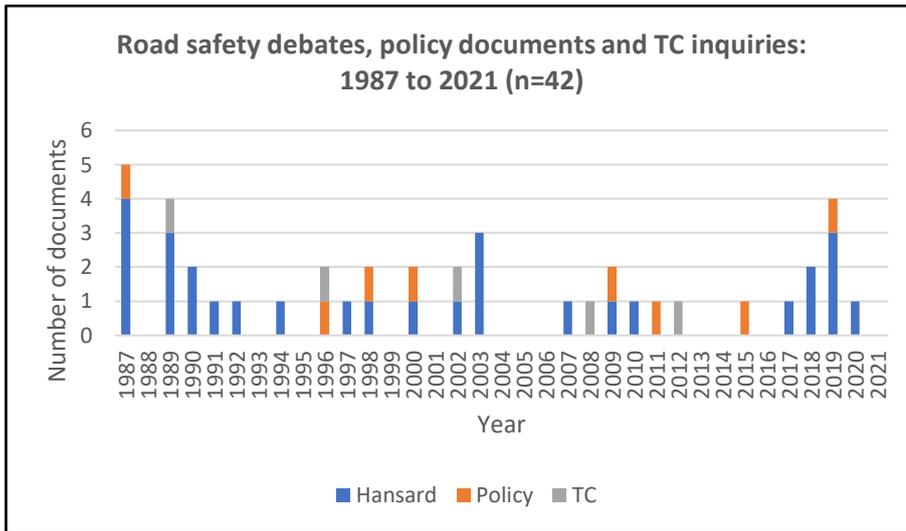
**Chapter 4****Case study 1****Did the focus of road safety policy change between 1987 and 2021?****4.1 Introduction**

Politicians make choices about many policy areas, including road safety. The aim of political analysis is to examine policymaker's action or inaction as they negotiate with each other, seek to influence the public, and understand the effects of public actions (John, 2012). This helps to understand why certain decisions are made or not made, and how decision makers choose which policies progress to implementation rather than others. There is limited British literature on road safety policy and limited sources from the developed world (Wales, 2017), as reviewed in chapter 2. Studies on road safety infrequently refer to public policy theory or analyse how it contributes to policymaking. There is a greater focus on *what* to do to improve road safety, rather the study of *how* and *why* policies are adopted, or change over time. This is the finding from Marsden and Reardon (2017) in relation to transport policy literature.

This chapter focuses on macro level or strategic policymaking relating to the focus and priority of road safety between 1987 and 2021. It answers the first research question on whether the political priority of road safety has changed over time. It excludes subjects relating to specific policy areas, such as motorcycle safety, active travel, or legislative changes associated with causing death by dangerous driving. Road safety is complex and covers a large range of areas, each with individual characteristics. The reason to exclude specific areas, other than those in the two case studies, is to maintain an overarching policy perspective in the analysis, rather than a focus on how policymaking is approached in, for example, cycle safety. Table 2.1 describes all inclusions and exclusions. This chapter employs critical discourse analysis of selected published text and primary interview data to evaluate the focus of the politics of road death over time (see chapter 3 for the methodology).

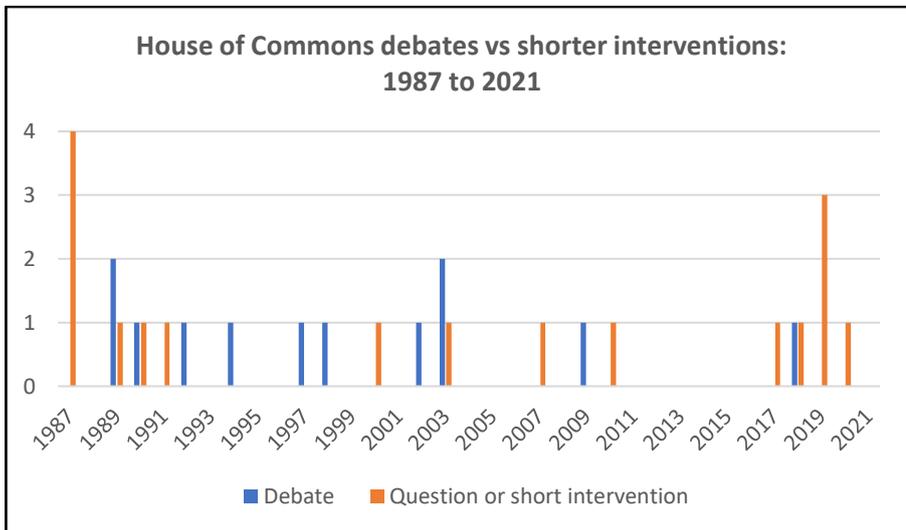
The analysis uses data from thirty-five interviews, and forty-two documents (figure 4.1):

- House of Commons debates on road safety policy (29)
- Transport Committee inquiries - 1989, 1996, 2002, 2008 and 2012 (5)
- Government reports: six policy documents and two consultation documents setting out proposed policy (8).



**Figure 4.1: Documents on road safety policy: 1987-2021**

The primary analysis uses qualitative tools to evaluate the meaning of the text. However, it is worth noting the distribution of full debates compared to questions or shorter interventions. Hansard assigns either the column length of short debates or the timings of full debates. Figure 4.2 shows that the majority of full debates occurred prior to 2003 (9 of 11) during the first Conservative period and the early part of the Labour period. Two further long debates occurred in 2009 (Labour) and 2018 (Conservative). This data suggests there was greater Parliamentary time committed prior to 2003, but the exclusions (table 2.1) to this research are important factors as there was some discourse in excluded policy areas.



**Figure 4.2: Distribution of House of Commons debates vs shorter interventions**

Each of the Parliamentary processes were analysed in chronological order, grouped by date, and the ruling governing party (shown in table 4.1 as blue for Conservative, red for Labour and yellow for the Coalition Government).

These are listed in table 4.1:

Table 4.1 Road safety discourse analysis document summary 1987-2021

	Title of Parliamentary process	Source	Date and Government
1.	Road safety	Hansard debate	1987: 12 January
2.	Road safety	Hansard debate	1987: 16 March
3.	<i>Road safety: next steps</i>	Government document	1987: May or July
4.	Road safety publicity	Hansard debate	1987: 20 July
5.	Road safety	Hansard debate	1987: 9 November
6.	Road safety	Hansard debate	1989: 16 January
7.	<i>Road safety</i>	Committee of Public Accounts	1989: 23 January
8.	Road safety	Hansard debate	1989: 25 July
9.	Road safety	Hansard debate	1989: 3 November
10.	Road safety	Hansard debate	1990: 9 July
11.	Road safety	Hansard debate	1990: 16 November
12.	Road safety	Hansard debate	1991: 14 January
13.	Road safety	Hansard debate	1992: 15 May
14.	Road safety	Hansard debate	1994: 25 November
15.	Risk reduction for vulnerable road users	Transport Committee	1996: 4 July
16.	<i>Road safety casualty reduction: targeting the future: saving lives</i>	Government document	1996: August
	<i>Risk reduction for vulnerable road users: Government observations</i>	Transport Committee	1996: 30 October
17.	Road safety	Hansard debate	1997: 5 November
18.	Road safety	Hansard debate	1998: 28 January
19.	<i>A new deal for transport: better for everyone</i>	Government document	1998
20.	Road safety	Hansard debate	2000: 11 January
21.	<i>Tomorrow's roads: safer for everyone</i>	Government document	2000
22.	Road safety	Hansard debate	2002: 8 March
23.	Road traffic speed	Transport, Local Government, & the Regions Committee	2002: June
24.	Railways and transport safety Bill	Hansard debate	2003: 28 January
25.	Road safety	Hansard debate	2003: 24 June
26.	Road safety	Hansard debate	2003: 8 December
27.	Road safety	Hansard debate	2007: 17 July
28.	<i>Ending the scandal of complacency: road safety beyond 2010</i>	Transport Committee	2008: 29 October
	<i>Ending the scandal of complacency: road safety beyond 2010: Government response (two documents)</i>	Transport Committee	2009: 14 January and 22 April

29.	<i>A safer way: consultation on making Britain's roads the safest in the world</i>	Government consultation document	2009: April
30.	Road safety	Hansard debate	2009: 2 July
31.	Road safety	Hansard debate	2010: 2 December
32.	<i>Strategic framework for road safety</i>	Government document	2011: May
33.	<i>Road safety report</i>	Transport Committee	2012: July
	<i>Road safety: Government response</i>	Transport Committee	2012: October
34.	<i>Working together to build a safer road system: British road safety statement: moving Britain ahead</i>	Government document	2015: December
35.	National road safety targets	Hansard debate	2017: 30 March
36.	Road safety	Hansard debate	2018: 1 March
37.	Road Safety	Hansard debate	2018: 5 November
38.	Road safety	Hansard debate	2019: 14 February
39.	Excessive speeding and driving bans	Hansard debate	2019: 23 May
40.	Road safety	Hansard debate	2019: 13 June
41.	<i>The road safety statement 2019: a lifetime of road safety</i>	Government document	2019: July
42.	Road safety	Hansard debate	2020: 30 January

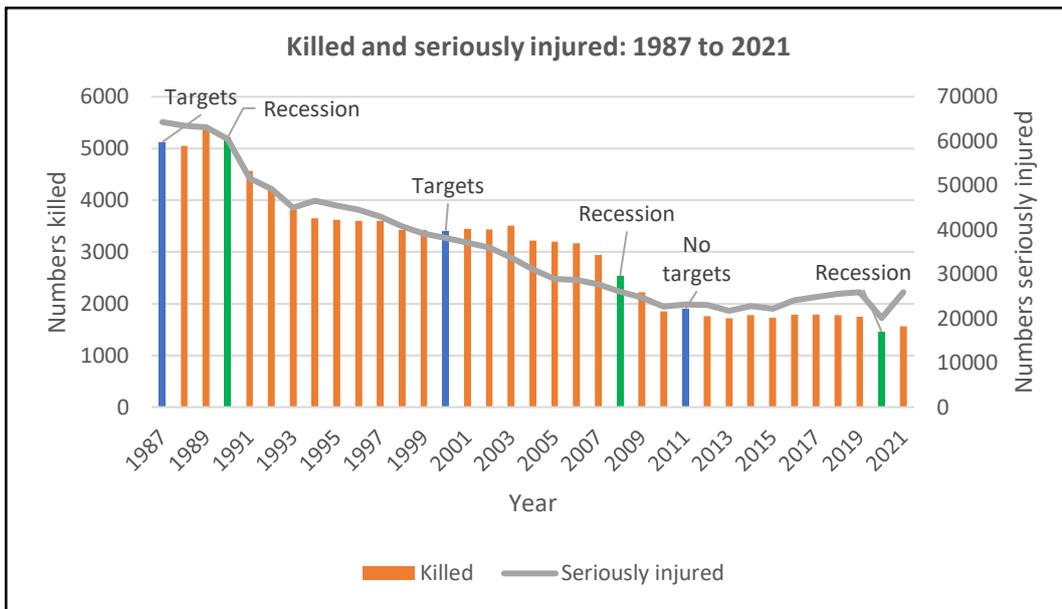
The following sections are structured using the three streams analysis of problem, policy, and politics. This is followed by the results from the interview questions, and conclusions.

## 4.2 Problem: road safety in context

In order to analyse the approach taken to road safety policy and whether it was seen as a policy problem, this section considers a series of contextual metrics relating to casualty numbers to inform the analysis.

### 4.2.1 The numbers of deaths and serious injuries

Overall, the numbers of deaths and serious injuries has continued to decline throughout the period, but there has been variation in both the pace and pattern of change over time. Figure 4.3 includes two additional pieces of data: the blue column shows when casualty reduction targets were introduced and the green column when there was a recession.



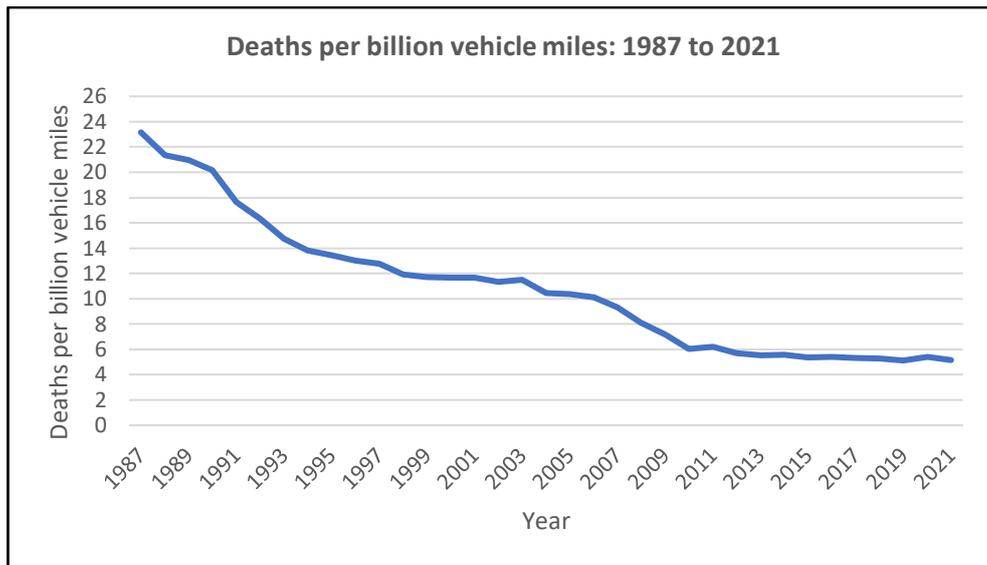
**Figure 4.3: Road deaths and serious injuries in Britain, 1987 to 2021 (DfT, 2022b)**

In 1987 there were 5,125 deaths, and this dropped below 5,000 in 1991 (4,568) and below 4,000 in 1993 (3,814). There was a fourteen year period until the numbers fell below 3000 in 2007 (2,946); and below 2,000 in 2010 (1,850). Road safety campaigners describe an average daily death rate and if this metric is used, there were fourteen deaths per day, on average, in 1987 compared to five deaths per day, on average, in 2019, which shows a significant reduction. How casualty data is presented, and the choice of time periods may be a factor in the discourse of road safety. Figure 4.3 shows three periods when there was a significant decrease in the numbers of deaths. There was a sequence of reductions between 1990 and 1993 (-27%), between 2007 and 2010 (-37%), and again between 2020 and 2021 (-17%). Whilst this thesis does not seek to establish a cause for these reductions, it is worth noting that two episodes of rapid falls in deaths followed periods of recession. In the earlier period, traffic volume plateaued after a previous rapid rise, fell after 2007 (-3%), and fell by 17% after 2020 (DfT, 2022b). In relation to the period around 2007 and 2010, Lloyd et al. (2015) concluded that the economic recession changed behaviours resulting in fewer deaths, partly as a result of reduced traffic, but when the other two periods are considered, these conclusions may be less applicable across time. However, traffic volume has consistently had the strongest association with the number of crashes, and it explains nearly all the systematic variation in the number of crashes (Elvik and Hoye, 2023).

Data from 2020 and 2021 on reported road casualties have been impacted by the Covid 19 pandemic and the national lockdowns, which resulted in less traffic. The pattern in the numbers of those killed or seriously injured largely reflect changes in traffic patterns and overall casualty rates have remained broadly stable over these years (DfT, 2022b). An alternative data source accounts for the relationship between deaths and traffic (figure 4.4).

An almost halving of the fatality rate was observed between 1987 and 2003, and a further halving in the following seven years, and a flattening pattern towards the end of the period.

Figure 4.4 shows a reduction from twenty-three to eleven deaths per billion vehicle miles between 1987 and 2003. There was a further reduction from ten to six deaths per billion vehicle miles between 2004 and 2011. From 2012 to 2021 there were between 5.6 and 5.1 deaths per billion vehicle miles. Splitting the data by periods of government, there was a drop of ten deaths between 1987 and 1996; of five between 1997 and 2009; of 0.4 between 2010 and 2014; and of 0.1 between 2015 and 2021. The rate of reduction has slowed over time.



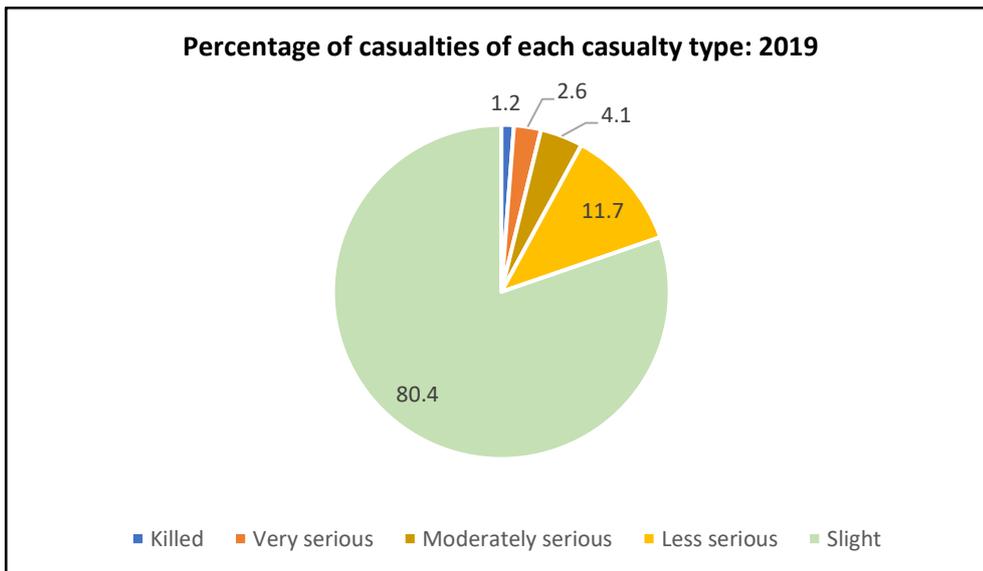
**Figure 4.4: Deaths per billion vehicle miles: 1987 to 2021**

## 4.2.2 Casualty types

The original intention for this research was to use both KSI data to describe the context, scale, and change in the numbers over time. This approach was amended to focus only on data of those killed, because of data quality, methodological, and collection issues, as explained in 3.4.4. However, in order to provide additional context, particularly describing the impact on the health and care system, and the economic cost of road crashes, a factor identified in the literature (Bougna et al., 2021), examples of the breakdown of casualties and the types of severe injury are detailed below. 2019 data is used as the last full pre-Covid year and the first publication of the serious injury data by severity.

### 4.2.2.1 Proportion of casualties – killed, serious and slight injury

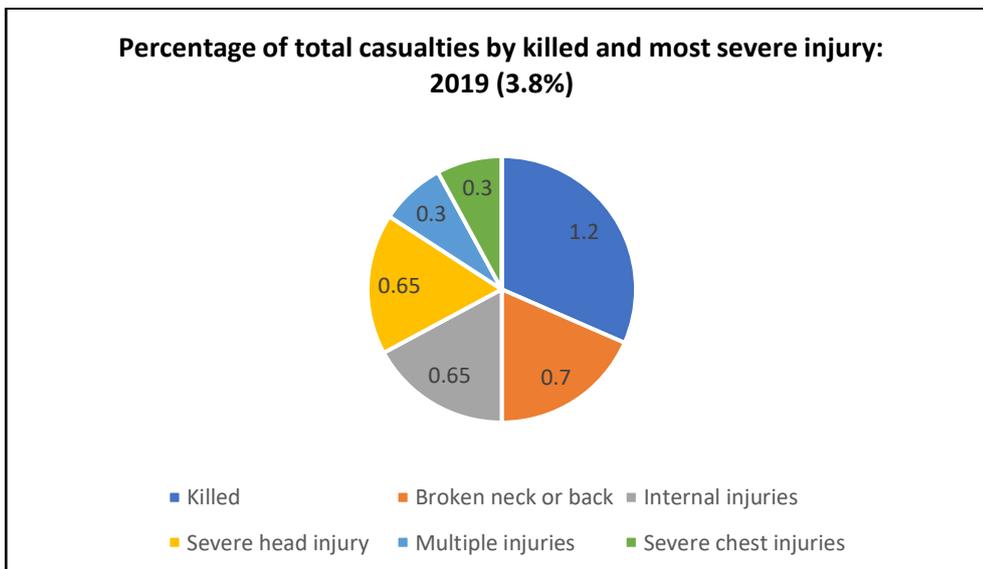
As a proportion of the total number of casualties, there were 19.6% people killed or seriously injured and 80.4% who sustained slight injuries. Figure 4.5 breaks down the serious injury category to the three constituent parts (very serious, moderately serious, and less serious).



**Figure 4.5: Proportion of casualty types (DfT, 2020)**

#### 4.2.2.2 Breakdown of killed and most severe injury data

Since 2012, some police forces have provided STATS19 casualty data through injury-based reporting systems. Figure 4.6 shows 2019 data from twenty-three police forces using the CRaSH system and as this is not all police forces, the sample may not be representative. Figure 4.6 details severe injury data by clinical condition, one subset of serious injury data. It provides further detail on the numbers of those killed and those with severe injury (3.8% shown in figure 4.5). This shows a range of severe injuries with broken neck or a broken back accounting for marginally the highest proportion, closely followed by head injury and internal injuries.



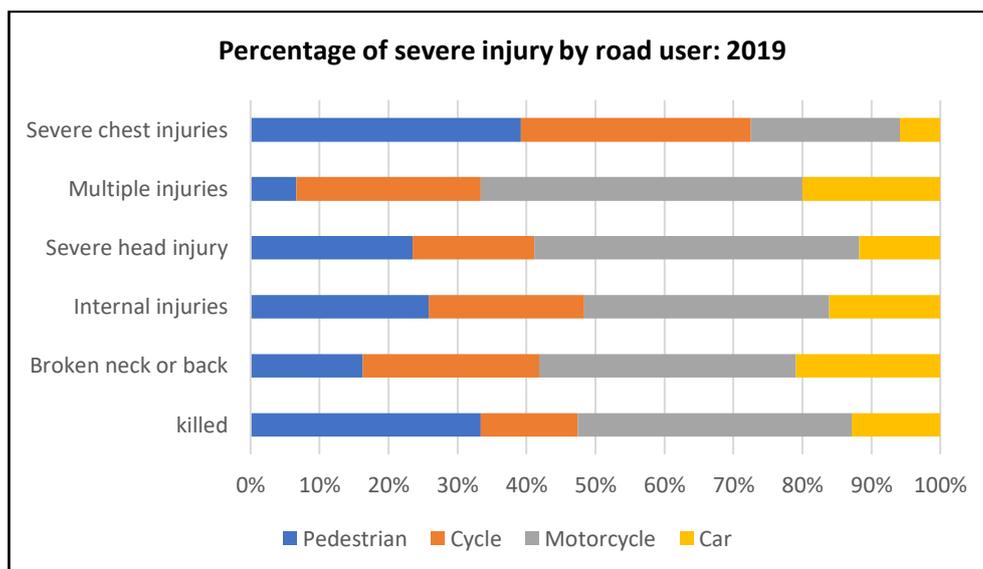
**Figure 4.6: Percentage of total casualties by killed and most severe injury (DfT, 2020)**

This is the first time this data has been published and shows the level and nature of severe injury and suggests the impact on the NHS. It is also not possible to review changes in this data over time as it forms a single published data source from the DfT. There are problems with

data inconsistencies between STATS19 and HES data (Cryer, et al., 2001) which is discussed further in 3.4.4.

#### 4.2.2.3 Severe injury by road user

Figure 4.7 shows the distribution of severe injuries by road user, with motorcyclists accounting for the highest, and car occupants the lowest proportions, and the higher injury risk to vulnerable road users.



**Figure 4.7: Percentage of severe injury by road user (DfT, 2022b)**

The number of road deaths has continued to decline throughout the research period (figure 4.3) though there has been some variation, and the rate of decline has slowed (figure 4.4). Slight injuries make up the highest proportion of all crash injuries with 80.4%, but seriously injured have the greatest impact on the health system and the wider economy (DfT, 2013). Finally, the nature of the severe injury type (figure 4.6), and the types of road users injured (figure 4.7) may be relevant to how road safety is framed (Rissanen et al., 2017). The analysis of whether road safety is seen as a policy problem may be impacted by the levels and nature of serious injury and the changes over time.

### 4.3 Policy solutions

There is extensive literature in the field of road safety which provides context and background to this thesis. Chapter 2 reviewed road safety literature and argues there is extensive insight into *what* road safety interventions could contribute to reducing road casualties. The *three E's* of road safety: education, engineering, and enforcement (Plant et al., 2018), and *the fatal five*: speeding, not wearing a seat belt, distraction, drugged or drunk driving, and dangerous or careless driving (Road Safety GB, 2019) are two examples frequently cited as areas where interventions or solutions should be prioritised. More recently *Safe Systems* or *Vision Zero*

strategies (Lieder, 2018; OECD, 2008) have been advocated. Many organisations seek to explain and assert the need to prioritise road safety based on this evidence, and have frequently called for politicians to act, and these assertions have been set out in a series of documents from many organisations over decades (for example, UN, 2019; WHO, 2019).

The question of *why* some interventions are not implemented arises, and is a theme within this thesis. In policymaking there is an almost unlimited number of issues and possible solutions, or ideas which could be considered. Kingdon's (1995) MSM helps the understanding of whether policy problems are identified and whether ideas are acceptable. In evaluating the focus on strategic road safety, the complexity of the problem and the volume of potential policy solutions may contribute to this analysis (Belin and Tillgren, 2013). It is worth considering the distribution of when politicians decided to implement road safety interventions. A series of policies are described, beginning in 1903 with the introduction of the driving licence in 0. It is not designed to be a comprehensive review of the history of road safety interventions, and is focused on strategic policies which apply to car travel. So, as an example, the introduction of helmets for motorcycle users is not included.

The purpose of the chronology (0) is to evidence that many major policy initiatives were adopted prior to the time period in this thesis. For example: licensing; testing; giving local authorities statutory responsibility for road safety; the MOT; the Highway Code; the introduction of seat belts; measuring blood alcohol levels with breathalysers, based on maximum legal levels; speed management; and dangerous or careless driving penalties were all implemented prior to 1987. Sabey (1999) suggests there has been little attempt to assess which interventions have played what role in improving road safety and it is difficult to evaluate the impact of interventions when compared with alternatives. This view is consistent with interview data. Sabey (1999) suggests, as an example, in relation to whether there is a relationship between targets and casualty rates:

*“While the achievement of targets for fatal and serious casualties has been realised overall, progress towards achieving the targets set has only been crudely checked and little attempt has been made to identify benefits from different interventions on a nationwide basis” (1999, p.7).*

Sabey (1999) identifies five interventions which had a major impact on casualty figures prior to 1997: drink driving, seat belts, motorcycle safety, local authority practice and vehicle safety.

This thesis hypothesises it is already known, to a large extent, *what* policy interventions could be effective and many of the major policy initiatives were implemented before the research period. It is acknowledged further research is required to assess the connection between policy interventions and impact on death or disability. A distinction is made between policy interventions introduced through British legislation rather than vehicle safety improvements

initiated through manufacturers, the EU, or the impact of EuroNCAP. This question is not the aim of this thesis, but the extent to which politicians refer to these developments is in scope.

Road safety literature suggests a number of policy interventions were not advanced despite many advocating for change. Three examples are offered:

- Politicians chose not to reduce the blood alcohol level as recommended in the North report (DoT, 1988). The exception was in Scotland where this was reduced to 50mg per 100ml in 2014 (Scottish Government, 2018). England, Northern Ireland, and Wales remain the only countries in Europe where the blood alcohol level is 80mg per 100ml and is the highest legally permitted level in Europe.
- GDL is not British policy despite young and novice drivers continuing to be over represented in fatal road crashes (chapter 6). In Northern Ireland there have been plans to pilot GDL, but this has not started as at the end of 2022.
- Reducing national speed limits is in much of the discourse (for example chapter 5.3) but it has not occurred during the research period. The national speed limits remain in place: from 1960 for 30 mph in built up areas, and for motorways and dual carriageways (70 mph), and single carriageways (60mph) from 1977.

It is important to reference 2020 and 2021 at the end of the research period. There was an increase in policy activity that includes a number of consultation processes and implementation dates beyond the research period (0): for example, plans for a Road Safety Investigation Branch, an updated Highway Code, new penalties for the use of handheld mobile phones and increased penalties for causing death by dangerous driving. Any policy with an implementation date beyond 2021 has not been included in the analysis.

In contrast, whilst there were further incremental changes in many areas, such as seat belt wearing, learning, and testing, and laws pertaining to what constitutes careless or dangerous driving and the associated penalties, it is suggested that a major policy advancement between 1987 and 2021 has been the introduction of casualty reduction targets (Academic 1, 2021). In 1987, the Conservative Government, and in 2000 the Labour Government, introduced targets. The 1987 plan (DoT, 1987) was to reduce all casualties by a third by 2000, and the 2000 plan (DfT, 2000) was for 40% reduction in KSIs by 2010. The DfT commissioned research to assess the role and effect of targets from Loughborough University in 2020. The report remains unpublished and a freedom of information request to the DfT was declined.

It is important to note there were numerous policy changes during each period, including, for example, improvements in vehicle safety (Peden, 2020); the introduction of improved attend and retrieve standards from emergency services (NAO, 2010); the introduction of trauma networks (Moran, 2018); infrastructure investment (Thompson et al., 2020); the use of speed

cameras (Allsop, 2010); or the incremental introduction of compulsory seat belt wearing for all car occupants (McCarthy, 1989). This historical policy perspective, as discussed, may be helpful in analysing the focus of politicians during the period of research.

## 4.4 Politics: has the focus changed over time?

### 4.4.1 Introduction

This section is consistent with the methodology applied throughout the thesis (see chapter 3) and includes critical discourse analysis of all data sources set out in table 3.6. The structure of this analysis is organised around eight policy documents (figure 4.8) and TC inquiry reports. This analysis is supported by selected text from debates set out chronologically in four sections. Interview data is presented separately as this is not chronological.



Figure 4.8: Policy documents used for CDA: front covers

### 4.4.2 Results and analysis: 1987 to May 1997 (Conservative)

#### 4.4.2.1 Results: January 1987 to May 1997

During this period there are two policy documents (one setting out, and one proposing policy), two TC inquiry reports and twelve debates. There are two short debates prior to the first major policy initiative in this period. The first is on drink driving which includes a call for and acceptance that Christmas drink driving campaigns need to be clearer and stronger, and in the same discourse the Minister argues that sentencing is not a key determinant in reducing drink driving (Hansard HC Deb., 12 January 1987, c.9). The second is focused on safety measures for

school children with a focus on the need to increase safe routes of travel to school (Hansard HC Deb., 16 March 1987, c.12). Both debates are issue specific and there is little discourse.

**Road safety: the next steps** (DoT, 1987) is policy produced jointly by the Departments of Transport, Health and Education, the Home, Scottish and Welsh offices, and the Treasury. The aim is to assess the effectiveness of existing measures, and to recommend future action needed to reduce casualties. Statistics of death and injury between 1965 to 1985 showed an overall decrease, and the total cost of road crashes in 1985 was estimated as £2.82 billion. The historically low level of priority given to road safety is referenced and it describes a position where society does not rank road safety as a priority, and where there has been little Parliamentary activity since 1967:

*“The promotion of road safety does not easily make headway in the face of other objectives and competing claims on limited resources. The Commons debate ... [on] road safety in November 1985 was the first such occasion for as long as anyone can remember” (DoT, 1987, p.18).*

Major constraints to further progress are financial limits, restraint from international safety measures, social indifference, individual ignorance, and limitations in knowledge of how to reduce crashes further. The recommendations include a focus on cost effectiveness, and:

- the introduction of new casualty reduction targets: two thirds by 2000
- a 40% increase in research, particularly in the role of human behaviour in crashes
- further improvements in engineering, education, and enforcement

This was the first White paper since 1967 (p.18) and it recognises the importance of wider awareness and engagement. The document is specific when describing constraints:

*“These hinge less on organisational or resource considerations than on limitations in knowledge, distortions in understanding, differing perceptions and, to a degree, outright prejudice. They appear to have their roots deep in both the psychological make-up of the individual and the values of society as a whole” (p.16).*

There are two short debates which follow the policy document. In the same month there is a call for the banning of hand held car telephones and the need for further publicity on road safety (Hansard HC Deb., 20 July 1987, c.2). The second makes direct and positive comments about the *Road safety* policy document. The Minister reinforces the point that the strategy followed a major cross government review, and he emphasises that prioritisation was given to measures which do the most to reduce casualties. Sir Anthony Grant (Conservative) supports the Government’s direction suggesting:

*“I welcome the fact that our record is not as bad as that in Europe ... we cannot afford to be smug when the number of deaths is equivalent to those in a jumbo jet crash every month of every year” (Hansard HC Deb., 16 March 1987, c.8).*

In 1989 in a short debate on how to reduce road casualties, there is a question on unlicensed motorcycle couriers. Sir Peter Bottomley, the Minister, makes a general point about prioritising those areas where the most benefit could be realised:

*“We can direct most Parliamentary attention on areas where most lives are to be saved. It is worth remembering that fourteen people today will lose their lives on the roads - 5,000 a year. We may have the best record in the world, but there are still far too many deaths” (Hansard HC Deb., 16 January 1989, c.14).*

The Committee of Public Accounts establishes a **Road Safety** inquiry in January 1989 to examine the respective responsibilities of national and local government in relation to road safety, where economic considerations are emphasised (CoPA, 1989). The main conclusion is that the levels of death and serious injury remain socially and economically unacceptable, and it makes recommendations in a number of areas including: strong support for targets; identifies variation between local authorities; the need for better coordination between local and national government; and the need for improved data collection.

The report is positive about the 1987 policy document’s strong “determination” (p.5) and the resulting reductions in deaths and serious injuries, but:

*“Present levels, with the pain, grief and suffering they cause and their heavy economic cost, remain unacceptable; and we are glad to see that the DoT agree that we should never stop being critical [about] ... road safety” (DoT, 1989, p.5).*

The report suggests that more needs to be done to address the variation, and the difficulties resulting from the central government/local government split of responsibilities. Relying on cost data from the 1970s on the economic impact of road crashes it criticises the backlog of road engineering schemes. The report welcomes the legislation enacted in June 1988 which requires restraints to be used by children travelling in rear seats, but is critical of the “extremely poor” road safety record for child pedestrians in the 6 to 14 year age group, which was one of the worst in Western Europe. Finally, the report focuses on the disregard for speed limits “as a matter of grave concern” (p.6) and the need for new technology to address the problem. There are echoes of the debate from 2021 on Intelligent Speed Adaptation and the lack of legislation to implement what is now available technology.

In 1989, in a lengthy debate on whether the UK is legally required to accept road safety legislation from the EU, the Minister, Michael Portillo (Conservative) argues measures on road safety, seat belts, reducing the maximum permitted alcohol level to 50mg, and speed limits are outside the competence of the EU. He argues:

*“We do not see road safety as one of those areas. Road conditions, social habits and outlooks, driver behaviour and police enforcement practices vary enormously from country to country” (Hansard HC Deb., 25 July 1989, c.952).*

The majority of the debate relates to arguments about the competence of the EU on transport

measures and diminution of Parliamentary sovereignty. Labour's argument is based on the lack of clarity of the legislation and not the relative strength of any of the road safety measures. The framing of the argument about road safety stems from Britain's record as one of the strongest in Europe and Michael Portillo, the Minister suggests:

*"We are constantly on guard against complacency, but the fact remains that we have the best road safety record in the European Community" (c.556).*

There is limited support for the measures and Roger Livsey (Liberal Democrat) suggests that whilst Britain's record on road safety:

*"Is extremely good ... that does not mean that there is no room for improvement in future. I would certainly support measures to achieve improvement" (c.568).*

The Government won the point, and the measures were not adopted. The Minister concludes:

*"Our approach ... should concentrate on measures on which we can be reasonably sure that our proposals will reduce casualties ... We doubt whether some of its proposals meet the test of having been proven to improve road safety" (c.973).*

The discourse includes text on the measures, but there is limited debate on the efficacy, other than the Government questioning the measure suggested by the EU.

The scope of the November 1989 debate is across the breadth of road safety and is introduced as a follow up to the 1987 policy document. The Government assert there has been strong progress in improving road safety and cites infrastructure, seat belts and breathalysers as examples. It points to a refocusing of policy on roads, vehicles, drivers, and vulnerable road users, particularly children as set out in the inter-government review. There is a very long section which diverts the debate into congestion in London and objections to road building, a key component of the Government's policy. It is notable that there is consensus throughout the debate on the nature of the policy problem and on the need to prioritise road safety across the House. Robert Atkins, the Minister suggests:

*"This has been one of the best debates ... constructive approach that all hon. Members, without exception, have adopted to a subject that concerns all of us. There is no difference between us on the objective that we wish to attain, merely ... constructive discussion about the way in which we should achieve it. We have covered a wide variety of issues" (Hansard HC Deb., 3 November 1987, c. 643).*

In an assertion of the priority afforded to road safety by the Government, widely reflected in the debate, the Minister makes the following concluding remarks:

*"Road safety is one of the most important matters ...facing us ... The constant number of deaths and injuries ... is unacceptable ... Britain's record on road safety is better than many other countries, but as long as one person dies on our roads, our record is not good enough ... We shall continue to press strongly to reduce those dreadful statistics and to cut out the dreadful carnage on our roads" (c.648).*

The short debate in July 1990 relates to a question of prioritising road safety for children (Hansard HC Deb., 9 July 1990, c.6). There is general support for the action being taken, with a single backbench Labour MP complaining about the levels of funding to local authorities. A lengthy debate in November 1990 is an opportunity for the Government to review the progress since the 1987 policy document (Hansard HC Deb., 16 November 1990, c.808). There is general support for prioritising road safety and Sir Christopher Chope, the Minister suggests:

*“Fourteen people are killed and 165 seriously injured on our roads every day of the year. That is one hundred people killed every week. That is the price in wasted and ruined lives, that we pay for the convenience and flexibility of road transport on which we all depend. The financial price is equally daunting - some £6 billion each year” (c.808).*

There is both support and criticism on Government progress on achieving the casualty reduction targets, but given 2000 is the date at which the target is set, the criticism of not achieving the targets appear premature. Joan Ruddock (Labour) adds wider criticisms:

*“It will be impossible to reach the target ... We support and welcome much of what the Government are doing ... However, that is no substitute for a strategic plan for an integrated transport policy that gives priority to an efficient, environmentally friendly, and affordable public transport system. Public transport ... has the potential to be the safest form of movement” (c.826).*

The debate is wide ranging, and includes discourse on casualty reduction rates, drink driving, rear seat belts, and media campaigns. Sir Peter Bottomley (Conservative) suggests:

*“If we want to continue the reduction in the rate at which we kill or injure one another on the roads, we shall not do it primarily by legislation, or by exhortation. We shall do it by changes in our roads, in our vehicles and in how we behave. How we behave depends on our understanding and our attitude” (c.862).*

Whilst there are some disagreements on some areas of policy direction, there is recognition across the HoC of the nature and seriousness of the policy problem. The length of the debate is also notable. Sir Christopher Chope, suggests:

*“Many of us have spent ... five hours in the Chamber during this debate and I cannot imagine five more worthwhile hours that I have spent here. We have had a high quality debate, and I pay tribute to all the participants” (c.871).*

The Government sets three areas on which to focus: raising awareness, vulnerable road users, and the introduction of cost effective measures in vehicle and road engineering.

In a Parliamentary opportunity to ask the Minister questions, three areas are raised (Hansard HC Deb., 14 January 1991 col.604). An argument about daylight hours saving, capital investment in roads and a specific local scheme, and speed limiters for heavy good vehicles. In each case the Minister suggests these are not the responsibility of the DfT. He refers each speaker to either the Home Office (for daylight saving) or the respective local authority for the other two questions. His response is a clear redirection of responsibility away from the DfT.

There is a sixteen month gap until the next debate, which is long and wide ranging, with a focus on reviewing the 1987 policy and targets. In setting out a 19% reduction in deaths which was the lowest in the common market, the Minister, Kenneth Carlisle, in acknowledging the reduction suggests “there is no room for complacency” (Hansard HC Deb., 15 May 1992, c.882). The relationship between declining road deaths and recessions is suggested as a cause for the reduction. The Minister argues, given a 3% rise in traffic volumes between 1990 and 1991 and reductions in road deaths over six quarters, he disputes the assertion the reduction is caused by a recession. The debate covers a range of issues, including drink driving, vehicle safety, speeding, young drivers, and the role of advertising and the media in speeding, and the effectiveness of the first local authority road safety plans are discussed. Four themes emerge:

- There is a strong defence of targets by the Government with the Minister stating: “We agree that the right way to achieve that [casualty reduction] is to set a target for reducing the number” (c.907). The opposition appear to deflect towards the lack of priority afforded to public transport, rather commenting on the policy
- The North report (DoT, 1988) resulted in the 1991 Road Traffic Act replacing ‘reckless driving’ with ‘dangerous driving’ and ‘death by dangerous driving’
- Recognising what the Minister states as “the danger they cause to themselves or others” (c.851), behavioural research is prioritised
- Concern about traffic volumes from Tom Cox (Labour): “Traffic is given priority over the safety of pedestrians and the protection of the local community” (c.871).

The tone appears to have been influenced by Toby Jessel (Conservative) who shares that his five year old daughter had been killed in a car crash and he is very supportive of the priority, and is positive about the increased rate at which deaths have declined. The debate is lengthy and there are many contributions from across the HoC.

There is an eighteen month gap before the next debate on road safety. The tone, seriousness, length, and content of the debate is similar to the previous debate. There is a wide ranging discourse on many aspects of road safety, the impact of the policy problem and debate on a range of interventions. There is broad support for the priority afforded to road safety from across the HoC, reflected by the Minister, Steve Norris:

*“By common consent, it is a matter of vital importance to us and to all our constituents, and one to which the Government devote a great deal of effort and they will continue to do so” (Hansard HC Deb., 25 November 1994, c.836).*

There is strong support for targets as illustrated by the Minister:

*“Where so many other players are involved, setting a target can act as a focus for attention ... a beacon to remind people that they are not working alone, but that we are all striving for a common objective. In many ways, we set a trend” (c.836).*

The 1987 targets were reviewed and there was a 33% reduction in deaths and 39% reduction

in serious injuries. As the targets were set for all casualty types (including slight injuries), the overall figure fell short of the target, but the point is made that if the target had been for killed and seriously injured only, the 2000 target was achieved early.

The risks to children and young drivers are developing themes. The cross government review in 1988 resulted in the target in the *Health of the Nation* (DoH, 1992) where targets are set for accidents, the cause of the highest number of young deaths. The policy document set targets to reduce accidental deaths in children under fifteen by a third and for the 15-24 age band by a quarter. The seriousness and generally supportive tone of the debate appears to have contributed to the adoption of targets and the progress of road safety policy.

***Risk reduction for vulnerable road users*** (TC, 1996a; TC, 1996b) is a TC inquiry into the risk of vulnerable road users. The focus is on walking and cycling, and as such is primarily outside the scope of this thesis. However, the inquiry references more general areas of related policy such as the importance of targets, the use of technology in lowering speed; changing driving behaviour; transport modal shift; and enforcement. There is debate about the relationship between local authorities and national government, where the Government concludes “local authorities are best placed to decide on local priorities and may need new powers to achieve this” (p.4) and the inquiry suggests resources are an important factor in progressing road safety. On the direction of policy, the TC is supportive.

A consultation paper: ***Targeting the future*** (DoT, 1996) establishes a direct connection between the setting of targets in 1987 and the resulting reduction in casualties, and it commits to continuing targets. The document proposes a number of options about the type of target, the measurement, the level of technical detail, and the need to avoid policy that is “complicated, diffuse or unconvincing” (1996, p.7). This short but important document gives a clear policy intent to continue targets as “an important part of the Government’s transport policy” (1996, p.1). The document proposes the new headline target would be accompanied by a strategy, an action plan, and an implementation plan.

#### **4.4.2.2 Analysis: January 1987 to May 1997**

This period began with an acknowledgement that road safety policy had frequently been crowded out by other policy priorities and historically it had low levels of Parliamentary participation, with suggestions this dated back to 1967. During this period there was frequent Parliamentary activity with five lengthy dedicated debates, which accounts for 45% of all lengthy debates in the research period, with participation from across the HoC.

The beginning and end of this period are bookended with policy documents focusing on the unacceptably high levels of deaths and serious injury, and the main policy direction resulting

was the setting of targets. The Conservative Government commissioned a cross government review of road safety which resulted in: **Road safety: next steps** (DoT, 1987). The numbers of those killed or seriously injured had been reducing prior to the policy activity which does not seem to be the catalyst, but the total cost to the economy was referenced frequently. This together with the previous lack of policy activity appear to be major reasons for policy change and an aim to implement cost effective interventions to reduce casualty numbers. The policy document introduced a number of ground-breaking improvements in road safety, notably the targets, significantly increased research funding recognising knowledge deficits and a strong focus on leadership and the visibility of casualties. The 1996 consultation document: **Targeting the future** (DoT, 1996) towards the end of the Conservative Government identified a clear policy intention to extend the use of targets as a major strand of policy.

During this period, there was a consensus of the seriousness of the policy problem and the need to take action illustrated by Robert Atkins (Minister):

*“There is no difference at all between us on the objective that we wish to attain ... constructive discussion about the way in which we should achieve it” (Hansard HC Deb., 3 November 1987, c. 643).*

There are a number of debates, and two TC inquiry reports during the period, and the inclusion of targets to reduce child deaths, another first in policy terms. There was a wide ranging debate, the impact of the policy problem and discourse on a range of interventions throughout the period. There was disagreement about some elements of road safety policy, but the main strand of policy was supported. The two TC inquiries explicitly supported the policy direction.

There was political disagreement during this period, but it does not appear to have detracted from the general policy direction. Examples of disagreement include the July 1989 debate on the competence of the EU in transport policy, specifically related to road safety interventions and criticism from Joan Ruddock (Labour) on the lack of focus on public transport, and a failure to achieve the targets. There was discourse about the roles and relationships between local and national governments, and many partners, and the problem of variation in delivery but this does not detract from mainly consensual policymaking.

The policy problem was clearly articulated and accepted across the HoC, policy solutions were developed and agreed to, and the political discourse was consensual. The Government set a clear priority, with national targets but much of the implementation did not occur centrally, with local government and delivery organisations the focus of policy implementation. The three streams came together with the prominence of targets and the regular and significant debates over this period generated proactive policymaking, and a clear open policy window.

### 4.4.3 Results and analysis: May 1997 to May 2010 (Labour)

#### 4.4.3.1 Results: May 1997 to May 2010

During this period there are three policy documents (two on Government policy and one on proposed Government policy), two TC inquiries and nine debates. The period begins with calls for more effective progress despite broad support from the previous Parliament. David Kidney (Labour) suggests improving road safety is a journey:

*“We sit in the driving seat, barely having switched on the engine ... I hope that today we shall signal our intention to move forward ... We shall want to look back ... fewer people have been injured on our roads and fewer killed” (Hansard HC Deb., 5 November 1997, c.230).*

The context is set by an explicit connection between the plateauing of road death numbers, the decade since the North report on penalties for areas such as drink driving, and a need for new measures to reduce road deaths. There is a focus on drink driving with ten deaths each week, and speeding with twenty deaths each week. There is a call for a reduction to the blood alcohol levels which is supported by PACTS, the BMA and the public, and the Government’s response is to reference work within the EU on harmonising EU-wide blood alcohol levels.

Sir Peter Bottomley (Conservative), the Minister to introduce targets in 1987 strongly supports his previous decision to introduce them and the resulting success, and calls for targets to be part of the new strategy. Glenda Jackson, Minister, acknowledges the success of the 1987 targets, introduces the Government’s determined policy aim to bring down the numbers of avoidable deaths by discussing the planned new strategy, including plans for targets.

Two developing themes appear in this debate, one on the absence of coalitions and the other the role of party politics. These are summarised in a quote from Barry Shearman:

*“The best way to form partnerships is not to have ‘hearts and flowers’ campaigns. I have seen those come and go and they do not work. The campaigns that work are those based on good science, good technological information, and best practice ... We must maintain a cross-party approach ... By and large, people of good will have worked extremely hard to make road safety a success” (Hansard HC Deb., 5 November 1997, c238).*

Three months later, Michael Wills (Labour) introduces a debate suggesting road safety is important, but not new. He shares the story of a road crash in which a constituent was killed and highlights the unacceptably high numbers of deaths. The discourse includes the behaviour of dangerous drivers, young drivers, traffic growth and public indifference to road death. The role of the car in society is a theme in the debate:

*“We need to send clearer and stronger signals that dangerous driving will not be tolerated. In the past, such signals have not been as strong and clear as they could have been because we have a central ambivalence about the motor car ... Now, we are coming to terms with the costs. Environmental consequences are now central*

*to public policy but unfortunately the same does not appear to be true of the role of the car as a lethal weapon. Every year, there are five times as many road deaths as murders, yet the Home Office does not appear to consider that road safety should be a core activity for the police” (Hansard HC Deb, 28 January 1998, c.287).*

**A new deal for transport: better for everyone** (DETR, 1998) follows **Road safety strategy: current policy and future options** (DETR, 1997a) and **Road safety: towards safer roads** (DETR, 1997b). The 1998 document is introduced as a radical plan for the future of transport and includes possible road safety policy. Areas suggested include: vulnerable road users, novice drivers, drink driving and vehicle safety standards. It sets out and accepts the policy problem of the numbers of people killed or seriously injured and proposes solutions, including casualty reduction targets and speed management. It establishes a review to develop speed policy:

*“The numbers killed on our roads are equivalent to thirty ... commercial aircraft, fully loaded, crashing in the UK every year. But because road casualties occur only a few at a time they are not always noticed as much as aircraft or train disasters where, overall, the number of people killed is very much lower” (DETR, 1998, p.74).*

The document references the success of the 1987 target and suggests they had a major influence in raising the profile of road safety and on reducing casualties. Whilst the number of deaths reduced by 36% and serious injuries by 42%, the overall number of casualties did not reduce by a third. The Government signal a plan to set new targets and a “strategy and programme of measures for achieving” them (p.74). It does not include any new policy but covers issues identified for future policy action. These include: learning and testing; improved enforcement; vehicle safety; novice drivers; and drink driving. It identifies a series of organisational factors stated as important in improving road safety and identifies local authorities; the police; schools; vehicle manufacturers; and all road users, with the need for the “positive cooperation of many organisations” (DETR, 1998, p.75).

In a short debate on road safety questions (Hansard HC Deb., 11 January 2000, c.144), Members ask about rural roads, young drivers, local authority funding and speeding. The main Government response is to point to the planned strategy focused on vulnerable road users.

The resulting policy is set out in **Tomorrow’s roads: safer for everyone** (DETR, 2000b) which sets out how to improve road safety in a context where ten people are killed and 110 are seriously injured each day, which is “unacceptable and it is not inevitable” (p.3). It follows the 1997 and 1998 policy documents referenced above which identified future policy, and it delivers the commitment to introduce targets:

*To encourage our collective efforts we are putting forward a target to reduce deaths and serious injuries overall by 40% and by 50% for children and also to keep slight injuries well below the increase in traffic. Government will give the lead, but every user has a responsibility to help us make the roads safer for everyone” (p.3).*

It focuses on vulnerable road users, road safety interventions (training and testing, speed management, infrastructure, and drink and drunk driving, safe vehicles, and promotion of safer road use), and the enforcement of the law. There is a dedicated section on how the strategy would be implemented which discusses governance, detailed and timed project plans, and the need to work in partnership with many other stakeholders as “Government cannot achieve such a major improvement in road safety on its own” (p.5). The strategy also highlights the need for effective working across government and identifies health, education, environment, social inclusion and fighting crime as important contributors to the strategy.

The document continues the focus set by the 1987 strategy on working across government and with partners to achieve reductions in casualty numbers with the continuation of targets.

Whilst the document covers a wide range of interventions, much of the strategy includes the need for further work, research, or reviews. For example, the strategy acknowledges speed is a major contributing factor in a third of all crashes, where “excessive and inappropriate speed helps to kill around 1,200 people and to injure over 100,000 more” (p.39). ***New directions in speed management – a review of policy*** (DfT, 2000), is published in the same year and is a significant and important contribution to policy development. It details review findings on setting the right speed limits, the need for better information, road design, driver education and training, and enforcement and penalties. This major contribution to speed management and speeding policy in Britain was a catalyst to crucial discourse on the need for a strategic approach to speed management and the effective engagement of the road user.

The focus in this analysis is on ***Tomorrow's roads*** which details action to:

- publicise widely the risks of speed and the reasons for limits
- develop a national framework for determining appropriate vehicle speeds
- research speed management problems to develop and test new policies (p.39).

There is further analyses of the second bullet point which became known as the speed hierarchy in section 5.4.3 which was a significant policy process. This was not implemented. In relation to drink or drug driving the policy solutions are to develop new ways to improve safety, conduct more research or to improve awareness. The strategy accepts the need to reduce the blood alcohol levels from 80 to 50 mg alcohol to 100ml blood, but does not act suggesting instead it awaits for further research from the EU.

In 2002 the debate focuses on road traffic, speeding and crashes (Hansard HD Deb., 8 March 2002, c.610). Mark Lazarowicz (Labour) seeks to persuade Government to introduce further policy on speed cameras, higher fines, more licence enforcements, bans and 20mph zones. He describes the numbers of deaths and injuries as staggering which far exceed those caused by other crimes of violence. He suggests the way road death is framed forms part of the problem, and suggests the term *accident* is a misnomer and results in a perception that crashes are a

natural phenomenon. In response, Phil Woolas, the Minister suggests a number of complicated and contributory factors influence the relationship between speed and crashes. For example, poor data, the media advance misleading story lines, changing speed limits in the responsibility of local authorities, and the public attitude to speeding is a major factor. He accepts clear evidence which connects speeding to crashes and injury, but offers no policy solutions. He concludes suggesting that all suggestions “will be taken seriously by me” (c.618).

The TLGRC inquiry, chaired by Gwyneth Dunwoody (Labour) on **Road traffic speed** (TLGRC, 2002a) follows two major government reports on road safety (DETR, 2000b) and speed management (DETR, 2000a). The inquiry report is critical of slow progress:

*“Our decision to examine this subject has also been influenced by growing concerns that since 2000 progress has been slow and that road safety has become less of a priority for the Government” (TLGRC, 2002a, para.8).*

The report begins with contrasting the immediate and high profile way in which the Government dealt with the Potters Bar rail crash (in which seven people were killed in 2002) and the slow approach in addressing road crashes. The report is clear about the direct relationship between speed and the severity of the crash and the resulting injury, and the indirect health effects of speed causing reduced physical activity. It states:

*“The largest single contributor to casualties ... is driving at either excessive ... or inappropriate ... speeds. It is now a more important factor in road traffic deaths and serious injuries than alcohol. As the AA told us: ‘the wrong speed on the wrong roads kills around 1000 people a year.’ [Speed] inhibits walking and cycling ... It reduces the quality of life” (TLGRC, 2002a, para.4).*

The report makes fifty recommendations, many of which are statements rather than specific actions, and challenges the Prime Minister directly to offer leadership. The Government:

*“Needs to make it very clear that speeding is unacceptable ... He now has to decide whether ... policy on speed will be dominated by concerns about how it is portrayed by a section of the motoring lobby and ... the press. The alternative is research of experts ... the evidence ... [it] would be popular with the public for whom speed is a very serious concern” (p.65).*

The report questions where the advice to Government should be derived and asks whether this is from experts, or the motoring lobby and the media. This theme appears elsewhere in the discourse, but this example is one of the most direct in the language used and specificity.

The 2003 debate on the Railways and Transport Safety Bill focuses mainly on the action following the Potters Bar train crash in May 2002. Most of the discourse on the Bill points to the lack of focus on road safety or in some cases accusations that the Bill ignores road safety. The title of the Bill is important to note as it is rail and transport, and not just rail safety. The Secretary of State, Alistair Darling suggests the Bill will:

*“Take important steps to improve the safety of transport. It will set up a rail accident investigation branch; it will introduce new alcohol offences in relation to marine and aviation activities; and it will create an independent police authority for the British Transport police” (Hansard HC Deb., 28 January 2003, c.764).*

More than halfway through a debate which lasted in excess of four hours, Sir George Young (Conservative) challenges the Government on policy:

*“I very much welcome the Bill ... and I wave it a metaphorical handkerchief as it passes through the House ... The Bill contains nothing on road safety. I hope that the Minister can assure the House that that does not mean that the Government accord road safety policy less priority but, rather, that it is travelling at least as quickly in a separate but parallel lane. Travelling by rail is already much safer than travelling by road” (Hansard HC Deb., 28 January 2003, c.797).*

In another critical intervention Dr Andrew Murrison (Conservative) highlights the gap between the Government words and a lack of action. In urging the Minister to rethink the omission of road safety, he identifies a missed opportunity to complement the rail crash investigation branch with an equivalent for roads. It is, however, worth noting the approach the Minister took to the many criticisms about the lack of equivalence, John Spillar suggests:

*“It would have been helpful if they had prefaced their remarks by pointing out that our roads ... the safest in Europe. Under Governments of both parties ... there has been a steady decline in road deaths” (Hansard HC Deb., 28 January 2003, c.824).*

He does not reference any of the specific criticisms raised, but concludes, the Government:

*“Are committed to delivering a transport system that is modern, reliable and safe, and central to quality of life” (Hansard HC Deb., 28 January 2003, c.825).*

Two short debates follow and offer little discourse. In June 2003, a backbencher, Mark Lazarowicz (Labour) attempts to secure a road safety Bill on speed management without success (Hansard HC Deb., 24 June 2003, c. 893). Later the same year another Labour backbencher (David Kidney) asks questions about roads policing and safety camera schemes (Hansard HC Deb., 8 December 2003, c.773) to which the Minister, Caroline Flint supports the comments, but commits to no policy action.

After a gap of four years the next debate is a short question and answer session (Hansard HC Deb., 17 July 2007, c.152). Paul Flynn (Labour) raises the issue of how to reduce the number and severity of injuries resulting from collisions between vehicles and pedestrians. In a brief response framed in the context of a successful policy drive from 2000, the Minister, Jim Fitzpatrick suggests the solutions are with vehicle manufacturers in relation to design, and local authorities to reduce speed.

A strongly critical report, *Ending the scandal of complacency: road safety beyond 2010* (TC, 2008) challenges the attitude which differentiates between how rail, air or maritime deaths are approached, and how they deal with road deaths as a series of separate incidents. As

clearly stated in the report's title, it calls for the end to complacency and advocates for road crashes to be dealt with equitably, as with the safety of other modes of transport.

The report suggests that deaths have halved between 1958 and 2007 whilst the number of vehicles and vehicle miles increased by 400%, the rate (in 2007) of 3,000 deaths and 250,000 injuries is unacceptably high. Road crashes are the single largest cause of death for people between the ages of 5 and 35 and cost the economy £18 billion each year. The number of deaths and injuries on roads far outweighs the deaths and injuries in other transport modes, and the report suggests it should be viewed as a major public health problem. The report covers many areas of policy. These include: vulnerable road users; a systems based approach; a road crash investigation branch; action on young drivers (see chapter 6); improved enforcement, referencing drink and drugged driving; and more 20mph speed limits.

The Committee also recommends the establishment of an independent Road Safety Commission with powers to work across government and agencies to ensure a high priority and adequate resources is given to road safety. The report is critical of the lack of progress and concludes that the number of deaths and injuries:

*“Far outweighs [those] in other transport modes ... It is time that we stopped seeing this as a collection of individual tragedies and started viewing it as the major public health problem of our age ... For decades, every road safety Minister has [made] reference to this terrible toll; yet this is not news and somehow it is accepted ... We should tolerate it no longer. A bolder and more integrated strategy is required ... to restore the UK to its position as a world leader” (p.38).*

The Government respond in two documents in January (TC, 2009a) and April 2009 (TC, 2009b), describing the Committee's report as “thought-provoking and challenging” (p.1). There is a timing issue in that the later Government response was published in the same month as the proposed plans set out in a consultation document, described below. Whilst there are mainly non-specific responses to the report, the replies mainly reference the consultation document, and the Government argues that it answers the concerns of the Committee. There was a commitment for a further response, which is not available (or was not produced).

***A safer way: consultation on making Britain's roads the safest in the world*** (2009) follows ***Towards a Sustainable Transport System*** (DfT, 2007) and the consultation document ***Delivering a Sustainable Transport System*** (DfT, 2008). The 2007 and 2008 documents contain five policy priorities, and the approach to road safety is set out. The main proposal is for targets to be achieved by 2020 and the structure mirrors elements of the *Safer Systems* approach. ***Road safety strategy beyond 2010: a scoping study*** (DfT, 2009) concentrates on *what* to do to improve road safety, including vehicle safety, engineering, and targets, and also on the role that a road safety vision could play in progressing policy. It concludes:

*“A newly invigorated determination to bring down the risk of death and injury on the roads from its still disproportionate level will contribute directly and substantially” (DfT, 2009, p.129).*

There are a number of policy documents in this period which appear to complement each other and set a clear strategy, but these did not result in policy which is discussed in 4.4.3.2. Jim Fitzpatrick, the Minister, suggests the road safety measures presents:

*“An economically rational package of measures. Given the massive economic and social cost of road accidents, this is a pressing priority” (DfT, 2009, p.5).*

After a gap of two years between debates, there is a lengthy debate in July 2009 in follow up to **Ending the scandal of complacency** (2008). It is introduced by Louise Ellman (Labour), and is critical of the Government’s approach describing the numbers of deaths and injuries as:

*“Tragedies for the individuals and their families, but it is a national scandal that so many people die ... The scale of the carnage on our roads is not acceptable in any other mode of transport” (Hansard HC Deb., 2 July 2009, c.561).*

She introduces the main findings from the TC report, framing road safety as a public health issue. The debate includes discourse on many aspects, including the need to improve data quality, rural road safety, and young driver risk (see chapter 5 and chapter 6). Three further themes are identified from the analysis:

- Discourse suggests there are unfavourable comparisons with other transport modes, generated by differential media reporting, framing crashes as unavoidable. Eric Martlew (Labour) suggests road safety loses out to other policy areas:

*“If we were having a debate about knife crime, there would be many more Members in the Chamber, even though the number of people killed by knife crime is a fraction of the number killed on the roads” (c.565).*

- The poor level of participation is identified by Norman Baker (Liberal Democrat):  
*“We are debating an important subject, and although this is the fag end of a Thursday afternoon, it is disappointing that only 10 Members are present including the umpire and two linesmen” (c.569).*
- Bob Russell (Liberal Democrat) comments on the use of targets, their effectiveness in reducing casualties, and in focusing local authority’s priorities. On a future solution:  
*“There should be no target other than a zero target, because one road death is one too many. I do not find much cause for rejoicing in saying, only 120 children got killed last year, whereas it was 130 the previous year. We need to drive down, literally drive down the number of road deaths” (c.567).*

Paul Clark, the Minister accepts the need for more policy change and to build on what he describes as the success over the previous nine years. He focuses on the role of local authorities in improving, for example, speed management or engineering schemes, and in order to focus on the “hard case of road safety” (c.582) there is a need for “collaborative work and ideas will help us to achieve what many of us want, which is zero deaths” (c.579). He

states that targets to reduce the numbers of those killed or seriously injured by a third, by 2020 will continue, but these plans were not acted upon as Labour lost the general election.

#### **4.4.3.2 Analysis: May 1997 to May 2010**

There are two different findings defined by approximate time periods. The first is from clear evidence and the second is more complicated, and both are derived from all data sources.

**1997 to 2002:** In the first period, there was policy formulation including two significant policy interventions in 1997 and 1998. Both documents discussed future policy, but neither instigated new policy. This period was strongly influenced by *Tomorrow's roads*, a major policy intervention which set out a clear policy problem, with a clear plan to address road safety with policy ideas. The language and intent were clear with the policy aim to focus primarily on targets and managing the consequences of crashes where speeding was a contributory factor. The policy problem was identified and supported from across the political spectrum and the major policy initiatives of targets, speed management and strong governance. The political discourse on the policy direction and policy aims was constructive and mainly endorsed. Between 1997 and 2002 there were five lengthy and dedicated debates which account for 45% of all lengthy debates from the total research period: these all occurred before 2002.

**2003 to 2010:** In the second period, the number of debates significantly reduced with a gap between 2003 and 2008, and discourse changed to be much more critical. There were accusations that policies had been dropped, and the Government had lost interest. The criticism was evident from the opposition, the TC, and particularly from Government backbenchers. This change began around the 2002 TC inquiry which was very critical of slow progress and suggested the Government had lost its focus. This TC report was published over the same period as the speed hierarchy was slowly abandoned, and the Government focused on prioritising rail safety at the expense of road safety. Unusually, this TC report was, in part, directly critical of the Prime Minister who was encouraged to "*decide whether Government policy on speed will be dominated by concerns about how it is portrayed by a section of the motoring lobby and in parts of the press*" (TLGRC, 2002a, p.65). However, publicly reported animosity may have been a factor in this unusual personal attack (Daily Post, 2001).

Six years after the 2002 TC report and limited discourse, the next TC inquiry was again critical of the lack of progress and a dearth in policy solutions, and the title summed up the report's conclusions: *Ending the scandal of complacency*. The criticism contrasted how rail, maritime, and air safety received a differential and prioritised response over road safety. It is noteworthy that both critical TC inquiries were Chaired by Labour MPs, and both called for a greater focus and leadership from a Labour Government to advance road safety policy.

A further example was in the 2003 debate on the *Railways and Transport Safety Bill* which was critical of slow progress from the Government. Opposition Members described the Bill as a missed opportunity to increase the priority given to road safety and, for example, use the plan to implement a rail investigation branch, but not a road investigation branch.

Explanations were put forward that slow progress was because the public and Government were complacent because KSIs were falling. A frequent response from Government Ministers was to deflect or depoliticise responsibility away from national government towards local authorities, drivers, the media, car manufacturers, or the lack of data from police forces. A further example was framing Britain's record as the *safest in Europe* which was used by Government Ministers on a number of occasions, notably in the 2003 *Railways and Transport Safety Bill*. However, during this period the numbers of those killed and seriously injured continued to reduce and the targets were met. This may have been a contributory factor to the approach to road safety policy where Government may have considered the problem was being fixed. There was some policy activity later in the period resulting in the consultation document: *A safer way* (DfT, 2009) which identified road safety as a priority, but as there was no discourse from the HoC and no implementation, this has not significantly altered the analysis. Labour lost the general election which ended any progress.

There was a further theme worth referencing from a number of different sources, which was the role that policy coalitions play. An example is from Barry Shearman (Labour) who suggested that *hearts and flowers* campaigns do not work and that the focus needed to be on building effective partnerships between politics, road safety organisations and the public. He suggested that much more effort needed to be put into coalitions. Other discourse suggested the need to maintain cross party support for road safety as a valuable factor influencing the success of road safety.

#### **4.4.4 Results and analysis: May 2010 to May 2015 (Coalition)**

##### **4.4.4.1 Results May 2010 to May 2015**

During this period there is one policy document, one TC inquiry and one debate. In the December 2010 debate, Paul Blomfield (Labour) asks a question about whether the Government has assessed the impact on crashes and fatalities of cuts to road safety research funding and grants, and the ending of government funding for speed cameras. Mike Penning replies that "no assessment has been made" (Hansard HC Deb., 2 December 2010, c.949). The interventions and responses are short, as is the debate. Liberal Democrat and Labour Members suggest the ending of ringfencing increases pressure on local authorities, quoting a RAC report suggesting that speed cameras prevent eight hundred deaths and serious injuries

each year. Paul Blomfield urges the Government to think again about “the dangerous consequences of the lack of priority the Government are giving to road safety (c.949). Mike Penning responds that the responsibility lies with local authorities with local communities to agree local approaches, that the evidence on the effectiveness of speed cameras is mixed and: “as an ex-fireman, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that road safety is paramount for this Government” (c.949). Andrew Gwynne (Labour) asks:

*“How it is supposed to ensure that road safety remains a priority when his Government are cutting funding ... more than 30%? Ending funding ... is nothing to do with dictating priorities to local government but all about them making cuts to vital road safety measures that he does not wish to defend” (c.949).*

Mike Penning responds:

*“The shadow Minister is better than that ...It is up to local authorities to use the money that has been given to them by central Government for their communities. It is for them to decide, not central Government” (c.949).*

The policy document and the TC inquiry report in this period are analysed below, but is worth noting there are no further debates during this four year period.

The ***Strategic framework for road safety*** (DfT, 2011) is the first intervention from the Coalition Government and it marks a significant shift in national policy for road safety. Philip Hammond, the Secretary of State, introduces the document:

*“Road deaths and injuries are a tragedy for all those affected. And as well as the terrible human cost, they impose a heavy economic burden. The casualty reductions we have seen in recent years are very good news, but we cannot afford to be complacent ... Britain has a road safety record that is the envy of the world, but I believe our roads can be safer still” (DfT, 2011, p.5).*

The Government states the priority is to restore public finances and return the economy to sustainable and secure economic growth, as well as addressing road safety. The resulting actions include ending decision making from the DfT, which were said to be previously imposed from above, assuming that one size fits all, and:

*“Empowering and capability building – giving people the powers, tools, and funding flexibility rather than imposing proscriptive and constraining central regulation” (DfT, 2011, p.7).*

There is little evidence that the contents of this quote translated into policies or policy activity. The major policy solution in the framework is localism. Much of the narrative is based on devolution, the role of local authorities, other public bodies, or industry, and a large role for drivers themselves. In the forward, Philip Hammond states that the approach is:

*“For road users to do the right thing - improving education and training instead of resorting to more bureaucracy, targets and regulation” (DfT, 2011, p.5).*

It is important to consider the analysis within this context:

*“To deliver decentralisation and empowerment we do not consider that local service deliverers need further central persuasion on the importance of road*

*safety. We do not therefore believe that over-arching national targets or central diktat that constrains local ambitions and priorities are now the most effective way of improving road safety. We expect central and local government to continue to prioritise road safety” (DfT, 2011, p.8).*

The policy direction identifies vehicle safety, road design to reduce speed, skills and attitudes, and a shift in driver behaviour, but there is little detail on policy solutions. The localism shift in policy is significant, especially when considered in the context of significant funding reductions (see 8.2.2). Previous Governments from both parties strongly advocate for targets and this move to localism, without evidence that targets were ineffective, suggests depoliticisation to distract from the wider changes across government and funding reductions.

**Road safety** (TC, 2012a) is a TC inquiry, chaired by Louise Ellman (Labour), published following the first annual increase in deaths since 2003. It covers leadership, localism, young drivers, cycle safety, motorcycle safety, speed limits, technology, and engineering. The report is critical of a number of aspects of the Government’s performance:

*“In a departure ... Government has decided not to include the use of targets ... an important contributor to improvements in road safety. We heard that targets help focus attention on road safety and prioritise resources ... The principal factor in improving road safety is political leadership. For some, the presence of targets was a sign of this leadership. If the Government is not going to adopt this approach, then it should be making more effort to provide leadership” (TC, 2012a, p.3).*

The report is critical in a number of areas and questions the effectiveness of the Government’s strategy and approach. The absence of targets, the localism approach when resources are “under pressure” (p.13), and worrying variation in local authority performance lead to the report suggesting these factors should generate a “wake-up call for the Government to step up and provide stronger leadership in the road safety field” (p.31). Plans to consider increased speed limits on motorways is raised and suggests this should follow a debate in the HoC. PACTS (2012) are equally critical of the Government’s approach and suggest the TC has: “highlighted the lack of leadership ... the current Government seems more committed to reducing the deficit than it does to cutting deaths and injuries” (PACTS, 2012).

Despite the rise in deaths, attributed to the effect of *bad weather*, the Government’s response was that Britain remains a leading performer in Europe, and the main approach is to empower local decision makers to provide leadership. In answering the criticism of a lack of leadership, the Government planned further work on understanding which groups of road users do not respond to risk reduction and consider further policy interventions. This is a further attempt by Government to transfer the responsibility to drivers and road users, suggesting that individualised responses were needed to address road safety, described as a collective social response. Other responses include the confirmation of the intention to consult on increasing

speed limits on motorways, an expectation insurance premiums should reduce for young drivers and the focus of national policy on undefined but effective measures to reduce risk.

#### 4.4.4.2 Analysis: May 2010 to May 2015

During the period of the Coalition Government there was little discourse as competing policy areas dominated. There are four main themes which emerge:

- The human cost of crashes together with the economic burden was included in the 2011 policy statement, but it stated the priority was public finances. The reduction in road deaths, and framing Britain's position as the envy of the world were used to present the new approach which suggested that road safety was not a priority
- The policy approach was based on localism by devolving responsibility to local authorities, other public bodies, industry, and drivers themselves. This is an example of governmental depoliticisation
- Targets, which had been national policy since 1987 were not renewed. There was criticism from the TC which focused on the removal of targets and the reduction in road safety funding (TC, 2012a). This coincides with the reduction in police numbers
- The TC inquiry coincided with an increase in road deaths and this, together with the factors cited, were used to illustrate the lack of priority and national leadership.

During this period there was limited discourse and evidence that neither the problem stream nor policy stream developed. Road safety was crowded out by major and competing policy priorities following the financial crash in 2008 which dominated the period.

#### 4.4.5 Results and analysis: May 2015 to December 2021 (Conservative)

##### 4.4.5.1 Results: May 2015 to December 2021

During this period there are two policy documents, no TC inquiries on strategic road safety, and seven debates. In December 2015, the Government publishes *Working together to build a safer road system: British road safety statement: moving Britain ahead* (DfT, 2015). It begins with the framing, which describes Britain as one of safest countries in the world, and an area of national importance and priority for Government. It establishes the *Safe Systems* approach as a key priority, but the policy document does not include all elements of the approach. Policy ideas include: increasing penalties for driving whilst using hand held mobile phones, providing a broader range of 'real-world' driving experiences for learner drivers, including motorways, £750,000 funding for police forces to build drug-driving enforcement capability; funding for research on driver education, training and behaviour interventions for learner and novice drivers (which became *Driver 2020*, DfT, 2019a); and £50 million grant over 4 years to

support cycle training in schools. There are consultations on areas such as urban cycle safety, motorcycle safety, and drug drive rehabilitation schemes and a road safety management capacity review to identify areas to improve joint working, local innovation, and efficiency.

This statement offers a series of observations which are disconnected from one another. This may be due to the theme-based structure of the document rather than specific risk groups, *Safe Systems*, or age groups, or may be due to an unfocused approach. It is not possible to say which is the case, but the result is a confusing document which contains little policy action.

In a short debate from March 2017, which follows a seven year gap, there is a question asking the Government to reconsider and introduce targets, to which Andrew Jones (Minister) states:

*“We do not believe that targets will provide further persuasion on the importance of road safety; it is already at the heart of departmental thinking”* (Hansard HC Deb., 30 March 2017, c.388).

Kate Hollern (Labour) who asks the question follows it up by connecting targets, the increase in deaths by 2% (2015 to 2016) and a 25% reduction to roads policing. The Minister references the KSI data as being the second best in British history, and quotes HMIC stating there is no link between officer numbers and crime levels. The Minister concludes:

*“I simply do not accept that policymaking is as simple as setting targets ... If policymaking was as simple as setting targets, Gordon Brown would have left us a very well-run Government, and nobody pretends he did that”* (c.389).

The next debate is a year later advocating for a road crash investigation branch, calls for all-lane running rollout to be halted, and for drink driving levels to be reduced. Karl Turner (Labour) asks about:

*“The correlation between his Government’s decision to scrap road safety targets, introduced by Labour, and their failure to reduce the number of those seriously injured or killed on our roads?”* (Hansard HC Deb., 1 March 2018, c.953).

#### Fact check: Targets

Casualty reduction targets were first introduced by a Conservative Government in 1987 (DoT, 1987).

**Figure 4.9: Introduction of casualty reduction targets**

Jesse Norman, the Minister responds by referencing the 2015 policy document and “we are making excellent progress in delivering its objectives” (c.954). Responses to specific questions were vague, referring to the need for more information or that situations are under review.

After sixteen months, the Minister, Jesse Norman introduces the half day, November 2018 debate setting out the importance of road safety policy:

*“There is no Member ... whose constituency ... is not affected by the impact that road collisions have on their constituents. Road safety touches all of us”* (Hansard HC Deb., 5 November 2018, c.1313).

The Minister makes a connection between the tragedy of those impacted by crashes, and the resulting impact on the health system and the economy. In a balanced discourse, he repeats the “safest roads in the world” (c.1313) framing, and that crashes such as the November 2011 M50 crash, where seven people were killed and fifty-one injured during a foggy weekend in a thirty-four vehicle crash, are rare. He says he is proud of Britain’s record but acknowledges “as in many other countries, our road safety figures have generally plateaued since 2012” (c.1314). The cause he suggests is demography – more older drivers and the known risk to young drivers, as well as technological advances such as mobile phone usage resulting in distraction.

A wide range of issues are discussed, not repeated here, such as infrastructure, close passing, the need to update the Highway Code, the risk to recovery workers, the risks to horse riders, and the essential links between roads, *Vision Zero* and the economy. There are also calls for language used to shift from *accident* to crash with the argument that *accident* implies the inevitability of crashes. Within the debate there are two areas impacting on policymaking which fall on party grounds with opposite views from the Government and the opposition. First, there is disagreement about the progress made with improving road safety policy. The plateauing of the numbers of people killed or serious injured, and a 24% reduction in traffic police is presented as policy failure. Matt Rodda (Labour) sets out his case:

*“In recent years, our record has stagnated. Ministers have said that the picture is mixed and generally heading in the right direction. We cannot be clearer: it is not ... The Government talk a good game about road safety being a top priority, but I am very sorry to say that their legacy so far is one of disappointment and, indeed, failure ... Since 2010, progress has well and truly stalled ... We are no further forward ... More could be done” (c.1340).*

The Minister relies on policy activity to defend the Government’s record. He suggests that the current plan and the forthcoming policy interventions, increases to penalties for mobile phone use, investment in police training for drugged driving, investment in new breathalysers and plans to consult on increasing the tariff for death by dangerous driving to a life sentence is sufficient to tackle the number of casualties. He does not respond to Labour’s two specific arguments on the numbers of KSIs or police numbers, simply stating the Government is moving in the right direction by listing the interventions being implemented. Second, there is disagreement about the effectiveness of targets as a part of road safety policy. The opposition argue there is a correlation between previous reductions in KSI numbers and targets, and the plateauing of numbers since targets ended in 2011. This is disputed by Jesse Norman who suggests targets do not make a difference. He asserts:

*“The issue of targets is constantly raised with the Government ... some countries with great safety records have targets, and some do not. There is not necessary correlation, and it would not be right to hide behind targets” (c.1344).*

There are numerous disconnects between questions posed which are not addressed. This is in part the nature of political debate, but appears more pronounced in this discourse than previously, and demonstrates clear disagreements on the policy direction.

Road safety questions in February (Hansard HC Deb., 14 February 2019, c.1016) and June (Hansard HC Deb., 13 June 2019, c. 661) follow a similar pattern though the specific subject matters differ. In February issues such as roads investment, tyre safety, and crash investigation are raised, and in June issues such as roads investment, sentencing for dangerous driving and the safety of travelling blind people are posed. Ministers do not answer some questions and are vague with others. Positive responses include ‘best in the world’ or ‘good progress’ is being made with improving road safety. Specific answers include £100million investment in addressing dangerous roads and increasing mobile phone penalties. These debates occur prior to the July road safety statement which is referenced to indicate future policy announcements.

The TC inquiry **Road safety** (TC, 2019) is established under the chair of Lilian Greenwood (Labour), which sets a wide ranging scope on the Government’s record, and gathered written evidence which is published. Due to the general election and the dissolution of Parliament, the inquiry was closed. In the new Parliament, the TC elected a new Chairman, Huw Merriman (Conservative) and the Committee changed the scope from a wide ranging inquiry into the Government’s record to an inquiry on young and novice drivers (see chapter 6).

**The road safety statement 2019: a lifetime of road safety** (DfT, 2019c) is framed as a follow up to the 2015 policy document and is introduced in a familiar way:

*“The UK has some of the safest roads in the world, but the effects of every death or serious injury on our roads are devastating, for the bereaved, for families and loved ones, and for those who support the seriously injured, some of whom may have long-term life-changing injuries” (DfT, 2019c, p.4).*

It goes on to describe a 39% reduction in deaths by comparing 2017 with 2007 as a success of road safety policy, but also acknowledges:

*“Since 2010 the fatality statistics have flatlined. There has been little change in the number of reported fatalities on British roads since 2010” (p.6).*

The approach of selecting more favourable data periods for the foreword of the document (reduction in fatalities) masks what the same document later describes as “plateauing” (p.6). The document is structured using three of the *Safe Systems* pillars of safer people, safer vehicles and safer roads and it acknowledges *Safe Systems* as important, but there is no dedicated section on either safer speeds or the fifth pillar on post-crash learning and care for victims. The statement focuses policy for the coming two years on young, older vulnerable, and rural road users, and motorcyclists. There are measures to increase seatbelt compliance

with increased penalties, a commitment to undertake a review of roads policing, and measures to improve data quality by encouraging police forces to use the CRaSh reporting system.

There is a bold statement that “we can no longer keep doing the same things in the same way if we want to improve” (DfT, 2019c, p.6) but this is not followed through with new policy actions. Areas such as speed management on rural or urban roads, and the debate of the effectiveness of targets are not mentioned. PACTS suggest:

*“It falls well short of the more ambitious, structured, outcome-focused approach recommended in its (the DfT’s) Capacity Management Review” (PACTS, 2019).*

There is a significant and detailed discussion on the risks to young and novice drivers and proposals to review the benefits of the GDL (analysed in chapter 6) and in a dedicated section on rural roads there is a commitment to establish a working group to advance rural road safety (analysed in chapter 5). There are seventy-four different actions for consideration, including further research into elements of road safety management and grants for targeted projects. The Government commits to publish a new road safety strategy during 2021 with a review on the progress from 2019. This was not published in 2022.

The final and short debate is in January 2020 where there are two issues, one relating to school safety which is not answered and all lane running on motorways. The Minister reports on a rapid review into the safety of all-lane running as a serious and important piece of work. Grant Shapps reports the review raised a number of questions in explaining the delay and the need for further research. He suggests that it is important to discover whether all lane running on motorways, which are the safest in the network, makes them more safe or less safe.

#### **4.4.5.2 Analysis: May 2015 to December 2021**

During this period there was little change in the numbers of road deaths and there were clear differences in approach between the Government and the Opposition. The Government’s assertion was that British policy was successful, it had pride in the record as one of the best in the world, used 2007 data to suggest road deaths were reducing, and suggested that the plateauing of road deaths was consistent with many other countries. The Government asserted targets and reduced roads policing numbers were not proven factors impacting on road safety, and the many interventions in both statements were commensurate with reducing casualty numbers. In contrast the Opposition suggested that road safety policy had stagnated, quoted increased numbers of deaths between 2015 and 2016, and that the plateauing of the numbers of deaths was a sign of ineffective policy. A direct causal correlation was claimed between the reduction in police numbers, the abandonment of casualty reduction targets and the stalled numbers of road deaths. The two policy statements setting out the Government’s approach were deemed ineffective and not addressing the policy problem.

There is contradictory data as to whether road safety was seen as a policy problem and whether the solutions were sufficient to address the number of people killed or seriously injured, or whether the two streams connected. There seemed to be a lack of focus or agreement about what the policy solutions were. Perhaps this is the nature of Parliamentary debate, but there were numerous possible solutions suggested in Government documents and politicians advocated for their own solutions resulting in little consensus. There was evidence to suggest there was insufficient priority given and the impact of the incremental interventions was ineffective in reducing the numbers of deaths. There was clear political disagreement about whether there was a policy problem and whether the policy solutions were acceptable in addressing it. Political discourse was limited and divergent, and that in itself was suggestive of problems with developing the politics stream. Whilst there was evidence of policy activity, this period failed to open the policy window or keep it open for long enough for policy change, and disagreements dominated: it is difficult to recognise road safety as a policy problem.

## 4.5 Interview results

The approach to conducting the interviews is set out in 3.4.1 and these results derive primarily from two interview questions:

- *Since the 1980s, do you think the focus on road safety policy has changed? (6)*
- *In the past decade, there were three road safety statements. How effective has this policy activity been? Why have KSI numbers pretty much remained unchanged? (9).*

Thirty five interviews were conducted, and the interview data is presented within themes developed from the literature search set out in chapter 2 and the findings from the interviews. It is notable that the majority of the interviewees became involved with road safety after 2011 (74%) and were either unable to provide any detail of the period prior to about 2010 or where views were expressed, these were based on subsequent learning. Interview data includes a wide range of views but there are many consistencies within and between the interview groups, but there are also some inconsistencies. There are three main themes:

### 4.5.1 Not a policy problem

Road safety has not always been seen as a policy priority over time, nor a problem needing resolving. There are some exceptions to this as analysed, but these possible punctuations (the periods around 1987 and 2000) were not clearly seen in the interview data. The results from the different data sources are brought together in the conclusions section (4.6).

#### 4.5.1.1 Low political priority

Road safety has not been seen as a political priority during lengthy phases of the research period and this view was expressed from a wide range of interviewees, with different possible explanations. Politicians from the parties represented in the sample identified the low political priority. Both Labour and Conservative politicians were critical of their own political parties:

*"I am not entirely sure that my own party has been brilliant at looking at the issue of road safety, I don't think it's got a very high priority, full stop, at the moment. Maybe it was in the past" (Politician N4, 2021).*

This comment illustrates the suggestion there is not a problem to fix. There is a general:

*"Complacency that's reflected in society that we've done it, we've solved all the major problems, we've got the rates down and so there has been complacency. We're finding it quite hard to get new Parliamentary interest" (Politician N6).*

This politician attempted to explain the disconnect between limited public demand for change and the relationships within Parliament:

*"The tension has been over time between Government and backbenchers, between the multiple pressures on Government versus the community anger expressed through backbenchers and that's where that tension is" (Politician N3, 2021).*

They went on to describe the infrequent contact from the public on road safety and when it was raised it was a rare tragic event or based on issues such as cycle lanes, or pavement parking. A more widespread view was the weak public demand, and this interviewee suggested it was a major cause of it being a low political priority:

*"Not visible enough ... It is of intense interest to a small number of people. Whether they are people whose lives have been suddenly affected by this issue, or whether they have professional or policy interest in it. But the root cause of inaction is ultimately, that the public are not demanding change. And so, you could look at this as being invisible in terms of a policy" (PA L6, 2021).*

The level of discourse was cited as problematic with insufficient debate within Parliament and the media. When it was debated this academic suggested there were problems:

*"I don't think there's anywhere near as much seriousness or serious debates applied to road safety. [It] often gets to be forgotten within policy making ... I think we need a senior politician to challenge the narrative" (Academic 2, 2021).*

Political philosophy was raised in some interviews as an explanation why road safety was seen as a low priority. In describing, in some detail, contradictions with Boris Johnson's approach when Prime Minister, this politician suggested:

*"He's towards the libertarian end of the spectrum and I'm closer towards the other end. Everything from wearing seatbelts to banning smoking ... tried and tested public health remedies, as is restricting freedom to drive wherever and whenever and however you want ... the interesting conflict is between the Government of libertarians and the Prime Minister himself" (Politician N3).*

This MP suggested one of the reasons certain aspects of policy were developing – and cited cycling and walking – were directly because of Boris Johnson, but the libertarian influence

within the Conservative party was the cause of road safety not progressing more generally. The politics of road death was complicated and where there were such contradictions, linear analysis was impossible. Nevertheless, this previous quote illustrated the tensions between freedoms and safety (see chapter 6) and equally relevant to the focus of road safety over time.

It was important to reference one interviewee who commented on the early research period and suggested this was a time when road safety was seen as a policy problem with corresponding action within a political climate supportive of change. They contrasted 1987 with 2010:

*“The Next Steps was ... landmark policy ... In 2010 they decided they weren't going to have any more ... targets. It was a pivotal move in the wrong direction. If I compare and contrast 1987 to 2010 ... that was absolutely devastating alongside a recession that meant that a lot of the road safety teams were decimated” (Academic 1).*

Whilst there was insufficient data to be precise about exact timelines, there was a more positive view of policymaking prior to about 2002/3 where road safety was dealt with more favourably, compared with the later period. There was also evidence of some views being overtly party political describing all policy during the Labour administrations as largely positive and all policy during the later Conservative administrations as wholly negative. These overly simplistic views are explored within the conclusions section (4.6).

#### **4.5.1.2 Invisible problem**

Interviewees frequently cited a lack of interest from politicians, the media, and the public, suggesting different explanations. This policy actor close to Government said:

*“It's forgotten. I think people think road safety is solved. There are of course stakeholders who are adamant that it is not solved, but amongst the general public I don't think they notice. We're looking at the moment at violence against women ... [road safety has] certainly been at the bottom of the trough for ten years, possibly 15” (PA N3, 2021).*

It is suggested that road safety was forgotten because “we only tend to see people dying in very small numbers” (Academic 2), and by a local politician because “it's not got enough profile, it's a Cinderella area” (Politician L1, 2021). There were many other interviewees supporting this analysis.

A direct connection was drawn between insufficient attention and the lack of targets in the 2010s, which was a strong theme. For example:

*“Frustration we accept the current level of road deaths and serious injuries ... It's flatlined and maybe got worse, it just feels wrong ... We haven't paid sufficient attention ... and we're not looking at it because we haven't got targets to reduce it, I feel that is partly why the flatlining has occurred, and ignored” (Politician N4).*

There was a contrast between two periods: those where targets were in place (1987 to 2010) and after 2010 after they were stopped. The positive impact of targets on casualty reductions was a strong theme across interview groups, though there is little published evidence to reinforce either view of supporting or disagreeing with targets.

#### 4.5.1.3 Crowded out by other priority areas

Politicians have a vast array of possible policy areas to choose to focus on and interviewees cited the prioritisation of other policy areas as a cause of reducing the priority of road safety.

*“For most of this 25-35 year period ... you've had a laissez faire approach ... which is we leave things as they are because certainly with four plus Governments, they had too many other plates to spin, and transport had been shown early on to cause major problems if they're going to try and rock the boat” (Academic 4, 2021).*

This interviewee cited the early period of the Blair Government with plans to reduce traffic levels and manage speed, but neither were effectively advanced due to pressure from other policy areas, such as economic growth. And:

*“It's very easy to be complacent about road safety, particularly when there's so many other perceived priorities ... and that's been true for last ten years, so with economic recovery, COVID recovery, those sorts of things. I don't think it's an area in its own right that comes to the fore as much as it should” (PA L4, 2021).*

The role of drivers, and powerful motorist networks resisting restrictions to driving, together with a strong safety record were offered as an explanation of why road safety lost out:

*“I think it's become part of the wallpaper of modern life. Driving is something we all do, and in modern countries lots of people go driving. Our roads are safer than practically anywhere else, so that's pretty good. And there are lots of other things that are causing death and unnecessary injury” (NGO N3).*

Policy actors close to Government described the difficulties of raising road safety with different Ministers throughout the 2010s, which was exacerbated by the fast turnover in the junior Minister ranks. The roads policing review which was claimed to be as a result of civil servants connecting policy problems with the plateauing of KSIs and crime, was described as an important catalyst for road safety beginning to be seen as a policy problem. A further example was given by a different policy actor, close to Government:

*“We had been slowly driving the message that road casualties were too high. They were not acceptable; they hadn't gone down effectively in the last ten years, and something had to be done about it ... we had to hook our goal into the other things the Government wanted to do with decarbonisation and active travel ... People aren't gonna walk and cycle on roads that they don't feel safe on” (PA N3).*

Though described as a Machiavellian approach to bringing road safety into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, these examples were used to suggest optimism for progress, despite being pushed by Civil Servants. It was suggested that a new road safety strategy, a new cross government road safety board and a new governance structure, and a positive response to the roads policing

review were evidence of developing policy. At the end of the research period the examples cited of strong progress have not materialised.

The challenges of being crowded out and the resulting low profile of road safety was frequently suggested, and this interviewee predicting it would continue:

*“Events do impact on policy ... and I think this comes down to the political will, and policies and knowledge of where politicians and national politicians won't want to go ... I don't think the DfT is suddenly going to come out and start bringing in all kinds of direction” (Academic 3, 2021).*

Road safety was said to have lost out to higher profile policy areas. Interviewees suggested that two groups squeezed road safety out: those advocating for active travel, modal shift, and decarbonisation, versus those advocating for economic growth (illustrated by a refusal to increase fuel duty), productivity (freely moving traffic), and levelling up. Whilst the high profile nature of these policy areas were debated in relation to safety, the ‘Cinderella’ road safety policy area was essentially side-lined. The irony of road safety being integral to active travel was stated directly.

#### **4.5.2 Policy delay or incremental change**

There were frequent references to the slow progress of road safety policy which builds on the first section of road safety not being seen as a policy problem where “we have taken our eye off the ball in the last ten years” (Academic 3). There was significant frustration from campaigning interviewees who argued that policy had not advanced, but without offering explanations as to why policy change was slow or new policies were delayed. This analysis focused on interviewees who offered tangible views, explanations, or examples of delay.

Reviewing a lengthy involvement in road safety, this interviewee offered explanations on why there had been long periods of delay or incremental change by focusing on the relationship between politicians and campaigners, and asserted they did not understand each other:

*“You get a lot of debate and then you run up against the restriction versus safety issue ... some of the road safety community are just not prepared to recognise the difficulties ... Why isn't it adopted? Well, the reason is because it's political. And also politicians are politicians. You know they will listen to the public, to their voters and also stuff in the papers” (NGO N2, 2021).*

This view is supported in the literature (Irwin, 1987; Hamelin and Moguen-Toursel, 2012).

A different explanation of policy delay related to the use of evidence and the length of time for policy to develop. An example from early in the research period was used to illustrate:

*“There was overwhelming evidence to reduce the alcohol limit, but all the concern was about the impact it would have on rural pubs rather than the impact that might have on lives. Go figure! I don't know the answer to that” (Politician N4).*

The debate and protracted decision-making on seat belts, followed by an extended implementation period was cited as an example of slow incremental change (NGO N6, 2021). References pertaining to interview data about the period from the late 2000s onwards are used in the next section. A relatively new politician struggled to offer an explanation of why KSI's had plateaued at the same time as what he described as effective policy. They said:

*"It's plodding along, it's doing nice, you know it's doing OK. We're not doing anything too outrageous" (Politician N2, 2021).*

This view appeared to be accepting of the approach to road safety from Governments in the 2010's, but they were also appalled at the lack of progress with bringing down KSI statistics. Describing changes in-vehicle safety and improved emergency roadside care, this interviewee suggested there had been little policy change since the late 2000s:

*"I think we'd be seeing many, many more people die on the roads than we do now because they're now just seriously injured, instead of fatally injured. So, I don't think it's grown in profile" (PA L2).*

Similarly, this interviewee suggested improvements were not as a result of policy action:

*"We actually haven't moved on very much in terms of road safety in the last decade or so ... and any improvements, they're very much down to improvements in infrastructure and improvements to kit, vehicles, etc." (PA N5, 2021).*

Commenting specifically on the reduction in police numbers which was a prevalent view in the data, and the resulting consequence on priorities:

*"Since 2011, you shouldn't be surprised that when we went through significant cuts ... roads policing officers disappeared, half of policing crime plans had no mention of road safety. Half of Chief [Constable] colleagues - it's not force priority because that's what they've been told by the Government" (PA N1, 2021).*

There was a lot of criticism of the DfT without analysis or suggestions of the reasons for the criticism, and this was frequently directed in a very general way at 'the government.' This interviewee commented on the impact on speeding specifically:

*"Nothing's happened for a decade, there's this whole vacuum that's appeared ... with the speeds that motor vehicles use in built up areas ... there's this whole sense now that nothing's happening and something substantial has got to change. It's not going to come from the Government because it's threatened. Too many capitalist imperatives for that to happen" (NGO L2).*

There were frequent and critical comments about the effectiveness and quality of the policy outputs during the 2010s from across the interview groups.

*"Look at the 2015 road safety statement, and probably the more recent one. What's interesting about those, whether it's a la carte or not, there's a lot of filler. I'd rather have a six or seven song album of absolute killer tracks than a 10-20 song album with lots of absolute nonsense. It's the same thing here, so I think there was something like 80 or 90 actions in the most recent statement" (Academic 2).*

This policy actor, close to Government was very critical of road safety statements:

*“In terms of the effectiveness of the interventions, I think quite a lot of things listed in the 2015 and 2019 road safety statements weren't massive things. I think we do them anyway and ‘they look good,’ but they're tinkering” (PA N2).*

It was also suggested that there was a cyclical approach to policy development where the *public relations* event of publication of policy documents was more important than the effectiveness of the policy initiatives themselves. In describing an imagined conversation between the Secretary of State with junior Ministers, this interviewee suggested:

*“Where's the road safety To Do List that you're getting on with and it better look like it's sufficiently chunky and that we're getting on with the job” (NGO N3).*

Many others suggested that there was a need for a significant shift in policy, that the ‘low hanging fruit’ had been picked and a step change was needed, and that there was little evidence that this changed approach to policy had happened.

### **4.5.3 Government inaction with attempts to depoliticise**

The data includes examples suggesting central government deflected responsibility from itself to various other agencies or drivers themselves. This academic was very critical of attempts to depoliticise road safety:

*“Central Government has abdicated its responsibility in road safety. Probably ... from the date you started your PhD, there is an absence. And reports from the Transport Select Committee over the years have listed many, many hundreds of recommendations which central Government has failed to take up” (Academic 4).*

In illustrating a similar point, a different interviewee connected personal freedoms and the absence of targets since 2010. They suggested that the politics of road death was influenced too strongly by this approach and a way for government to deflect responsibility:

*“‘We don't need a target’ [decision by Government] says a lot about our political philosophy. People should take responsibility for themselves. We don't need to stamp on freedoms we don't need targets to do this properly” (Academic 2).*

This interviewee used the decision to not continue with targets, a strong theme, as a method of distancing national Government from accountability, relying on localism:

*“Getting rid of targets is a massive issue. I think the economic recession played a massive part in it. The localism agenda has made a massive impact” (Academic 1).*

A local policy actor explained the difficulty in delivering a local ambition to prioritise road safety with practical problems of reduced funding and a distant government. The localism agenda was described as problematic, particularly as it was at the same time as no targets, reduced funding, and little national leadership. Similarly, not having targets was “a convenient excuse for not moving forward on things” (PA L1, 2021) and “shocking and politically motivated and deliberate to remove the spotlight on KSIs” (NGO, L2, 2021).

This interviewee is representative of many who made a direct link between funding reductions in 2010 and not renewing targets impacting on where responsibility should be placed, but draws a different conclusion. Government:

*“Probably didn't even really think about road safety. The lack of stuff going on at a local level due to funding cuts to local authorities, funding cuts not driven by ‘we don't want to do stuff on road safety,’ it was driven by, ‘we want to cut money.’ Just believing that austerity is a good thing” (PA N2).*

A different interviewee close to Government suggested it was inadvertent and directly connected it with the lack of profile of road safety or awareness there was a problem.

The reduction of police numbers to enforce traffic law to “inappropriate levels” (PA N1) further suggested this was symptomatic of the lack of progress with addressing road death. This interviewee described the high cost of increased enforcement as more traffic laws were broken as a distraction of implementing value for money and effective policy change:

*“It's just assumed that we'll just continue and I'm really uncomfortable with this industrial scale of what is currently happening [enforcement]. This current activity, I just don't see the evidence that it is having the desired effect we are seeking and sometimes you have to be prepared to stop” (PA N1).*

The problematic and unclear relationship between central and local government appears regularly in the data. This academic suggested:

*“There is a total disconnect between the two, so there isn't a relationship there, and the relationship between the centre and local government in terms of road safety is now extremely weak because there's very little guidance” (Academic 3).*

This interviewee suggested this was caused by a combination of funding reductions, the removal of targets and a tactical distancing through the localism agenda.

## **4.6 Conclusion**

There are two different findings emerging from the discourse analysis which are described using two approximate time periods. As policymaking can change incrementally or not at all, when limited by institutional stability, and over time, the use of these time periods is indicative rather than indubitable. Assessing policy change using existing models does not adequately capture historical patterns of policy development (Howlett and Cashore, 2009), and this long time period of analysis adds to the understanding of policy stability. There are also difficulties in identifying policy punctuations over time and where these are not evident or difficult to identify, studies have focused on government inaction or action (Givel, 2010).

### **4.6.1 Open windows between 1987 and 2002: multiple streams combined**

From 1987 to around 2002 (fifteen years) road safety was predominantly seen as a policy problem with policy development, acceptable policy solutions, and mainly productive and

broadly non combative political discourse. As suggested by Novao et al. (2009) having the political profile and support is an important aspect in policy development. There were two major policy interventions – ***Next Steps*** (DoT, 1987) and ***Tomorrow's roads*** (DETR, 2000b) which resulted in significant policy formulation and implementation. A significant cross government review in 1986 resulted in the introduction of targets and a focus on child deaths in ***Health of the nation*** (DoH, 1992) which were ground breaking. This period saw the highest proportion (83%) of major road safety debates in the HoC, and the 1989 and 1996 TC reports were broadly supportive of the policy direction. Over this period road deaths reduced from 23 to 11 deaths per billion miles travelled, the most significant decline in the research period. There were three Prime Ministers from the two main political parties, and whilst there was debate and disagreement about specific proposals or particular interests from MPs, road safety ideas circulated in the *primeval soup*, and gained influence, and the political systems generated progress. Overtly party politics was largely absent in the discourse between politicians, and this played a significant part in productive policy development. Bax (2009) identifies the importance of strong and cooperative relationships or coalitions in her Dutch case study on road safety policy development. To illustrate, a Conservative Minister, Robert Atkins suggested: “there is no difference at all between us on the objective that we wish to attain” (Hansard HC Deb., 3 November 1987, c. 643).

The Labour Government from 1997 spent a few years on agenda setting and policy formulation but given this included major policy and research documents, this was suggestive of an acceptance of the policy problem. The two 2000 policy documents offered a major contribution to road safety policy with a clear focus on speed management, targets and specific policy ideas, such as the suggested reduced blood alcohol levels. There was high ambition in ***Tomorrow's roads*** (DfT, 2000), based on new research on speed management (DfT, 2000), and this combined with traffic reduction plans from ***A new deal for transport*** (DfT, 1998) which set a clear policy agenda supported by governance and implementation plans.

During this period, the policy problem was clearly articulated and accepted across the HoC, policy solutions were developed and implemented, and the political discourse was mainly constructive, resulting in broad consensus. The acceptance of the need to change and the setting of a clear policy agenda is one of the findings from Hinchcliff et al. (2011). The prominence of targets from both the Conservative and Labour administrations, and the regular and significant debates generated policy ideas, and the numbers of casualties fell significantly.

The criticisms from the 2002 TC report were the first visible signs the policy context had begun to change. The TC were very critical of slow progress and suggested that road safety had become a lower priority. There was a direct challenge from the Labour TC Chair to the Labour

Prime Minister on whether he was listening to the car lobby more than safety experts, and she called on him to offer leadership to reduce casualties. Academic 4, for example, supported this view and reinforced it with criticisms of the failure to follow through to reduce traffic volumes which they argued contributed to the reduced focus on road safety (Academic 4). Dorling (2010) argues that the dominance of the car is a major contributing factor in road safety not being considered a policy priority. Whilst targets remained a major part of the policy, there are examples of some other areas being watered down, or not implemented: the proposed speed hierarchy was abandoned, and blood alcohol levels were not altered. The influence of the politics of speed on the politics stream is emphasised by Svensson et al. (2014) in a Swedish analysis on attempting to reduce speed limits. The Government was also criticised from across the HoC on what was described as a missed opportunity to address road safety in the transport safety Bill in the debates in 2002 and 2003. For example, the Government planned for a rail crash investigation branch, but declined to include a comparable approach for road safety. After this period there was then a four year gap before a further critical TC report.

Whilst ascribing precise time periods to this analysis is problematic, the contribution of data from documents, TC reports, debates and from across the interview groups, does suggest an observable change in the approach to policy development over this time period.

#### **4.6.2 Closed windows between 2003 and 2021: policy delay and inaction**

From approximately 2003 to 2021 road safety struggled to progress through any of Kingdon's (1995) streams and was not primarily seen as a policy problem as it was seen as too complicated (Belin and Tillgren, 2013) or was crowded out from policy development (Bax et al., 2010). There were a number of policy activities during this period, for example, the Labour Government published: *Safer for everyone* (2009) consultation, and three policy statements in 2011, 2015 and 2019, which were not seen as substantive. Road deaths continued to reduce from ten to five deaths per billion miles by 2012, a slower decline from the previous period, and then remained at about five deaths per billion miles until 2021. This period saw the lowest proportion (17%) of major debates in the HoC which is suggestive rather than instructive of low political visibility. This period straddled five Prime Ministers from the two main political parties (Labour and Conservative, with a Coalition led by the Conservatives in-between), and so, the political party in government does not seem to be a dominant determinant of whether road safety was seen as a policy problem or not. The churn in the political environment described, combined with the resulting churn in Ministerial appointments to the roads brief have had an impact on the importance given to road safety. Langley and Kypri (2006) suggest that *politics can be deadly* in relation to politicians waking up to

pressures to improve road safety, but all political parties appear to have ignored those advocating for bolder road safety policy.

There were gaps in the discourse in this period, where road safety was frequently described as a significant issue but with little evidence it was dealt with as a policy problem. The framing of Britain's road safety record as *one of the best in world* was used to minimise the need for a policy response. The framing of road safety (Kristianssen et al., 2018) (chapter 7) and the factors that were influential, including the length of time for policy to develop (Hyder et al. (2012) (chapter 8) are analysed elsewhere.

#### **4.6.2.1 Problem stream**

There is strong evidence that road safety policy was not a policy problem, had low visibility, and political priority, and *the safest roads in the world* narrative strongly influenced this. It was suggested as "invisible in terms of a policy" (PA L6) and there was weak public demand for change because it was not seen as a problem needing addressing. The impact of coordinated public demand and the acceptance for change by politicians featured strongly in the literature (see Hinchcliff et al., 2011 or Debinski et al., 2014). For example, this interviewee claimed: "a general complacency that's reflected in society out there that we've done it, we've solved all the major problems" (Politician N6) and this was a strong theme suggesting why road safety was not focused upon. Clegg-Smith et al. (2012) identifies the importance of visibility and public demand to securing progress. Politicians themselves were also critical of Parliament generally and both front benches, suggesting road safety was not a high priority.

Policy actors close to Government described the difficulties with raising road safety with Ministers throughout the 2010s, which was exacerbated by the frequent turnover of Ministers. Road safety has been the responsibility of the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State role, and the role frequently includes a wide range of responsibilities. It was suggested that the priority afforded to road safety was in part due to being the lowest Ministerial rank, with a long list of competing priorities, and were frequently influenced by the personal interests of the Secretary of State driving policy, as well as the particular interests of the post holder. Despite this characterisation from those close enough to observe it, and the claim that Machiavellian tactics were needed to bring *road safety into the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, there was optimism of progress in the late 2010's. This was contrasted by criticism from those not close to Government of no progress and frustration there were commitments to act, without evidence.

#### **4.6.2.2 Policy stream**

Policies are proposals for change based on evidence, knowledge, and the degree of interest from policy actors or networks. Kingdon suggests that "the origins of policy may seem a bit

obscure, hard to predict and hard to understand or to structure” (1995, p.200). He also describes policy as inhabiting a *primeval soup* where ideas float around and whether or not they attract attention is unpredictable. This research does not offer conclusions on the origins of policy solutions, but it is clear that many policy ideas have been available throughout this period and previously. Many policy solutions began their evolution prior to 1987, such as interventions on seat belts, speed management and drunk driving, as reviewed in 0. In relation to seat belt policy Irwin (1987) identifies the long periods of time for policy to change. As an example, Sabey (1999) suggests that five interventions had a major impact on casualty reduction and so were seen as effective policy solutions. This thesis suggests that, to a large extent the policy solutions to reduce casualties are known. The policy work on speed management from 2000 and the early adoption of casualty reduction targets are described by many as further illustration of effective policy solutions.

Kingdon (1995) suggests that policy solutions can originate from anywhere and emerge when the time is right, but can disappear just as quickly. A factor identified during the interviews for which there is support in the literature concerns the importance of the relationship between researchers or policy actors, and politicians and the language that is used (Bliss, 2014; Hamelin and Moguen-Toursel, 2012). Throughout this period there were known policy solutions and the obstacle to policy development was not the availability of policy ideas, but whether the policy problem was recognised and there was the political will to implement areas of policy, which were frequently seen as controversial or unacceptable. But which combination provides the most effective and cost effective outcomes remains debated and challenging.

Networks or policy actors can be strong advocates for, or act against policy solutions.

Networks from vehicle lobby groups exerted strong influence against certain road safety policy solutions (Dorling, 2010) and the result was policy delay or inaction. To illustrate, Gwyneth Dunwoody, in 2002, directly challenged the Prime Minister to support road safety rather than the car lobby (TLGRC, 2002a, p.65). Coalitions or safety policy entrepreneurs were less effective at increasing the profile of policy solutions and securing acceptance of the need to change from politicians. Bax (2009) in her case study from The Netherlands finds power imbalances between policy actors influences the ability to introduce policy solutions.

#### **4.6.2.3 Politics stream**

The MSM of analysing policy within political systems assumes continual policy change which exists in a dynamic framework. Within this context, defining firm themes is difficult, but there was strong evidence of difficulties in policy formulation as a result of little impetus and too many constraining factors resulting in policy proposals struggling to get on the agenda. There was evidence of incremental policy change, where decision making was based on gradual

change from existing positions, and influenced by networks and policy actors. Lindblom (1968) suggests that the policy process is an endless search for solutions and decision making is exploratory, and occurs over time. Incremental policy development and inaction are characterised in this second time period, with both those close to government and other policy actors being very critical of this lack of focus and progress. There were issues within each policy stream and an absence of coupling resulting in policy stability. There are three sub-themes which are influential in explaining this analysis within the politics stream.

**Delay, incrementalism, and inaction:** There is consistent evidence from across data sources that road safety was not seen as a priority and the policy response was through slow incremental policy or delay. This is partly evident through the reduced level of discourse when compared to the earlier period. There were long gaps in discourse, for example, five years between 2003 and 2008, and the period after the global financial crash from 2008. It was suggested the rapid declines in KSIs in the 1980s and 1990s was “a slight sense of diminishing returns” (PA N2) and the type of policy change needed later in the period would have had greater resistance from the public, and the reluctance from politicians explains policy inaction. McConnell and Hart (2019) suggest that policy inaction is neglected by policy scientists.

The role of the TC is to critique the approach from government, and the three reports in 2002, 2008 and 2012 all found that the focus was insufficient to adequately address road safety. The 2008 report was particularly critical with its strong title: *Ending the scandal of complacency* (TC, 2008), which concluded there was a scandal of tolerance and called for stronger leadership and bolder policy action. The role of TCs is to criticise governments, and what is interesting in enacting their role, is the comparison with earlier TC reports which offered less censure and more broadly supportive language, contrasting with the strength of the criticism and correspondingly powerful and negative language of later reports.

It was suggested that as road safety was not seen as a policy problem, the consequence was ineffective policy interventions, either by act or omission. The three policy documents published during the 2010s were widely criticised as “tinkering” or questions about the impact (PA N2), or they contained “a lot of filler” (Academic 2). This approach was compounded by the poor relationship between local and central government and magnified by the localism agenda from 2011. All interview groups observed that a distance had been created between national and local government, with reduced national leadership, ineffective policy documents and the resulting “total disconnect” (Academic 3). The importance of an effective relationship between central and local government is a strong theme in the literature and where this does not exist agenda setting and policy implementation are problematic (Gössling, 2017; Lieder, 2018; Bax et al., 2010).

**Networks and a crowded policy field:** The degree of power exerted by different policy networks, actors or entrepreneurs can be influential in connecting the three streams, defined as coupling by Kingdon (1995, p.205), in moving towards policy solutions. An unequal power based relationship was described between the frequently disparate voices of victim groups or road safety professionals, described as “silenced” by Svensson et al. (2014, p.50), and the well-funded car lobbyists and some media: “It's a huge Goliath to fight against, so they [car lobby] very much like to keep road safety in a certain little box and they've been very successful” (Academic 4). Others cited the rowing back of the transport policy aims to reduce vehicle volumes and to reduce speed limits in the Blair Government, as evidence of the power of the car lobby to influence the politics of road death, and which policies develop, and which do not (Dorling, 2010). Speed is used in the literature (Svensson et al., 2014) and in the interview data as an example of where policy ideas to manage speed and speeding more effectively, as in the speed hierarchy from the early 2000s, are influenced more effectively by the car lobby than the road safety community.

The debate about how far individual freedom should be restricted featured. As *freedom vs safety* is a major theme in the case studies (chapter 5 and chapter 6) this is not explored here. However, the relationship and language used between politicians and policy entrepreneurs advocating for restrictions featured in relation to the effectiveness of networks. This lack of understanding between the two groups was advanced as a compounding problem resulting in policy delay “because it's political: politicians are politicians” (NGO N2), suggesting the political context and discourse was a contributory factor in road safety not getting onto the agenda (Irwin, 1987) and frustration politicians were resistant to make the changes being advocated.

In the period after the 2008 financial crash, there were numerous references to a crowded policy field. The aftermath of the financial crash, austerity, Brexit, and the global pandemic contributed to an inability of networks to raise road safety to be seen as a policy problem needing the attention of busy politicians. It was not viewed as a policy problem as it lost out to competing priorities (described by Marsden et al., 2014, in relation to wider transport policy). The frequent change of government (there were five different administrations with four Prime Ministers between 2008 and 2021) was also cited as a factor.

**Depoliticisation:** After the global financial crash and specifically during the Coalition Government there was a period of depoliticisation and devolution. Many interviewees connected a series of political choices as a clear indication that governments, post 2008 relied on Britain as having *some of the safest roads in the world* and comparatively low numbers of people killed or seriously injured, to not focus on road safety. It was suggested this narrative was not the problem as it was accurate, it was the “full stop after that, and that's, you know,

so what?" (PA N5, 2021). The *Strategic Framework* (DfT, 2011) marked a clear policy shift towards localism and an unambiguously stated aim to reduce the financial deficit. The work of Bax et al. (2010) in a Dutch setting concluded that road safety suffered following the move to a devolved governance structure and had to compete with wider transport priorities. Decisions in this period included breaking a twenty-four year chapter of targets, financial cuts causing reductions in DfT and local authority teams, and reductions to research funding, and reductions to roads policing numbers. A speech by Nusrat Ghani, the Minister in 2019 is illustrative of the Government's approach and resulting depoliticisation. In a debate on speeding, she argued that road safety was a top priority and the harm caused by crashes was avoidable and unacceptable. She went on to divert or transfer accountability elsewhere. For example, to the public: *"the public has not yet accepted the danger caused by speeding drivers,"* to police forces: *"an operational matter for the police,"* or to the legal system *"sentencing is a matter for our independent courts"* (Hansard HC Deb., 23 May 2019, c.910-15).

There was evidence of governmental, societal, and discursive depoliticisation (Wood and Flinders, 2014). It has been suggested that central government attempted to transfer different aspects of road safety and there was evidence that drivers and road users were targeted by politicians who suggested that individualised responses were needed to address road safety, described as a collective social response. Finally, the use of language which suggested discursive depoliticisation is evident where road crashes are frequently referred to as *accidents* and therefore elements of fate, rather than a policy problem requiring attention from politicians, and so depoliticised. Depoliticisation is described as a deliberate policy approach by Reardon and Marsden (2019) in relation to wider transport policy.

In summary, there were problems within all three policy streams, and institutional stability prevented change from happening (Cashore and Howlett, 2007). Road safety did not progress within the individual streams, and the streams did not combine effectively to formulate or develop policy. There was significant competition from other policy areas. Road safety was not seen as a policy problem requiring political attention. Policy solutions were seen as unpopular or ineffective, or as vital in reducing casualties. The political stream was characterised by infrequent discourse with little political consensus and a failure to raise road safety up the political agenda. Policy delay, incremental change and depoliticisation resulted as the three policy streams failed to combine, and, after decades of decline, road deaths plateaued.

## Chapter 5

### Case study 2:

#### Rural roads: the invisible policy area

##### 5.1 Introduction

Rural roads carry 44% of all traffic but are where 60% of all deaths and 33% of all casualties occur (DfT, 2019c, p.46). There are many different types of rural roads, often twisting, narrow, with bends, and with poor visibility. These roads have inherent risks associated with their configuration and are the most dangerous road type, accounting for the highest number of road deaths. Rural young car drivers are disproportionately affected and in injury crashes are 37% more likely to be involved than their urban counterparts, and two-thirds more likely to be involved than older drivers (Fosdick, 2012). Ill-judged speed or speeding is a major contributing factor in crashes. There is compelling evidence of a clear relationship between driving speed, crash, and injury risk which is one of the main contributing factors in road deaths (for example, Aarts and van Schagen, 2006; Farmer, 2017) and specifically on rural roads (Lynam, 2007).

The definition of a rural road is clear: major and minor roads outside urban areas, and having a population of less than 10,000 (DfT, 2014). But it is nonspecific as it includes all road types in areas over a 10,000 population: major roads, trunk roads, dual carriageways, single carriageways, and minor roads are all included in this definition. This wide definition and the inaccessibility of some data adds to the challenges of analysis. For example, published data for road deaths does not distinguish between dual or single carriageways in all rural settings. Road usage and the flow of traffic varies significantly with wide differences by location and season, for example, access to rural tourist destinations (DfT, 2020a).

Rural road safety is an area of public policy that receives little attention. The OECD suggests it has taken “the back seat” to improving road safety in urban areas (OECD, 1999). There continues to be a disproportionate risk of death on Britain’s rural roads (DfT, 2022b), a “significant, ongoing problem” internationally (OECD, 1999) and in other countries; for example, Australia (Symmons et al., 2004). There is evidence the safety of rural roads has been debated in the HoC, but the limited discourse mainly occurred within generic road safety debates, and there are long periods without any discourse at all.

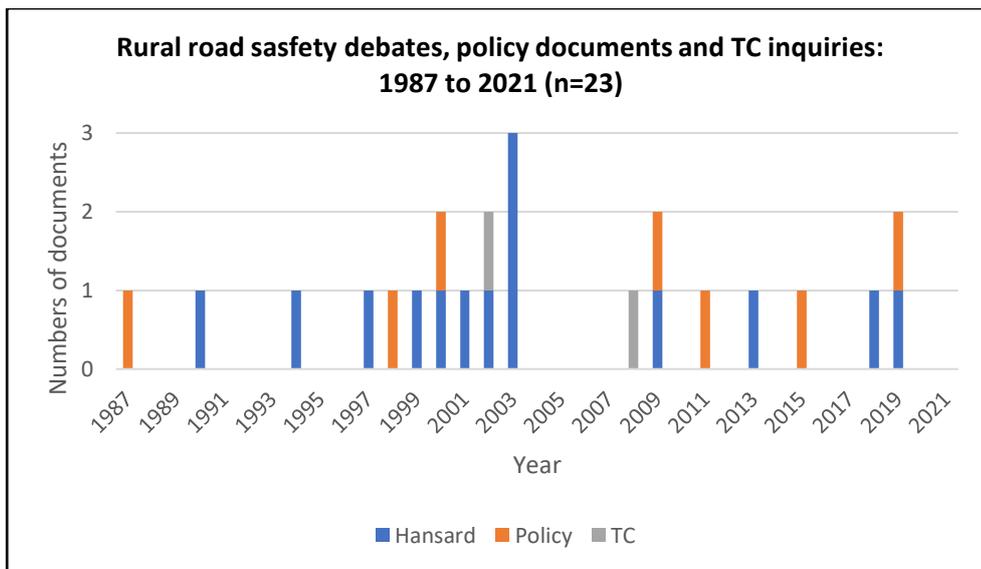
Rural road safety was selected as a case study as it fulfils the selection criteria, namely:

- a clear problem as the highest proportion of deaths are on rural roads (DfT, 2020c)
- rural road safety has been infrequently debated and there are gaps in policy literature

- there is a perceived lack of information and knowledge about rural roads, rural road users and the influencing factors (DfT, 2019c, p.47).

This chapter aims to evaluate the relationship between the scale of the problem and the level of focus by policy participants. This section adds detail to the methodology set out in chapter 3, and the critical discourse analysis consists of (figure 5.1):

- HoC debates on rural road safety and similar descriptions including country lane (14)
- There are no dedicated TC inquiries. However, there are two inquiries in 2002 and 2008 which include references to the increased risk on rural roads (2)
- Government reports (7).



**Figure 5.1: HoC debates, policy documents and TC inquiries including rural road safety**

Each of the Parliamentary processes were analysed in chronological order and grouped by date, and the ruling governing party (shown as blue for Conservative, red for Labour and orange for the Coalition Government). These are listed in table 5.1.

**Table 5.1: Rural roads discourse analysis document summary 1987-2021**

Title of Parliamentary process	Source	Date and Government
<i>Road safety: next steps</i>	Government document	1987: May or July
Road safety	Hansard debate	1990: 16 November
Road safety	Hansard debate	1994: 25 November
Road safety	Hansard debate	1997: 5 November
<i>A new deal for transport: better for everyone</i>	Government document	1998
Country lanes and villages	Hansard debate	1999: 12 May
Road safety	Hansard debate	2000: 11 January
<i>Tomorrow's roads: safer for everyone</i>	Government document	2000
Speed limits	Hansard debate	2001: 26 June
Road safety	Hansard debate	2002: 8 March

<i>Road traffic speed</i>	Transport, Local Government, and the Regions Committee	2002: 13 June
<i>Road traffic speed: Government response</i>	Transport, Local Government, and the Regions Committee	2002: October
Railways and transport safety Bill	Hansard debate	2003: 28 January
Road safety	Hansard written answer	2003: 16 June
Road safety	Hansard debate	2003: 24 June
<i>Ending the scandal of complacency: road safety beyond 2010</i>	Transport Committee	2008: 29 October
<i>Ending the scandal of complacency: road safety beyond 2010: Government response</i> (published in two documents)	Transport Committee	2009: 14 January and 22 April
<i>A safer way: consultation on making Britain's roads the safest in the world</i>	Government document	2009: April
Road safety	Hansard debate	2009: 2 July
<i>Strategic framework for road safety</i>	Government document	2011: May
Speed limits	Hansard debate	2013: 9 January
<i>Working together to build a safer road system: British road safety statement: moving Britain ahead</i>	Government document	2015 December
Rural crime and public services	Hansard debate	2018: 6 June
Excessive speeding and driving bans	Hansard debate	2019: 23 May
<i>The road safety statement 2019: a lifetime of road safety</i>	Government document	2019: July

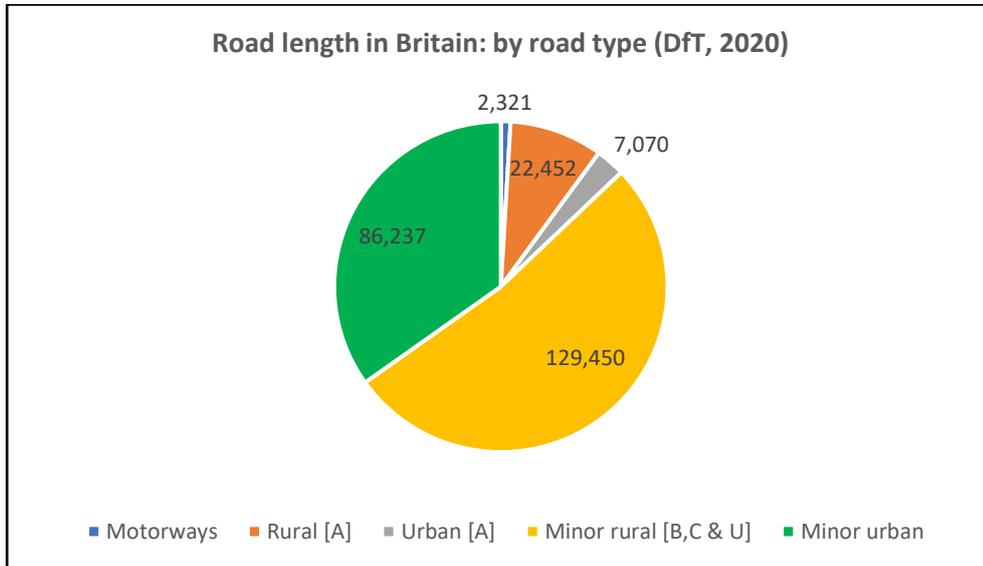
## 5.2 Rural road safety in context

The Government identified rural road safety as a priority policy area in the 2019 *Road safety statement* (2019c). They suggested rural roads accounted for a higher proportion of road deaths and the number of deaths on rural roads had plateaued since 2012. It is important to understand the circumstances in which rural road safety policy is placed and the risk of travelling on rural roads, and a series of metrics are described to explain this context. Later analysis seeks to understand whether rural roads has been seen as a policy problem.

### 5.2.1 Rural road length and volume in context

**Length of British roads:** In 2020 there were a total of 247,530 miles of road: of which 189,700 miles (77%) were in England, 36,800 miles (15%) in Scotland, and 21,000 miles (9%) in Wales. There were 2,600 more miles than a decade earlier in 2010, a 1.1% increase, and 5,000 more miles than in 2000, a 2.1% increase (DfT, 2020a).

**Road length:** There were 151,902 miles of rural road, split by road type: motorway, 'A' (rural and urban) and minor (rural and urban) shown in figure 5.2. Rural roads accounted for the highest proportion (61%), with urban roads making up 38% and motorways 1% (DfT, 2020a).



**Figure 5.2: Road length in Britain: by road type (DfT, 2020a)**

**Vehicle miles travelled:** There is significant variation in vehicle activity on the road network. In 2019, 62% of the motor vehicle miles travelled were on motorways and 'A' roads combined, despite comprising only 13% of the road network by length (figure 5.2).

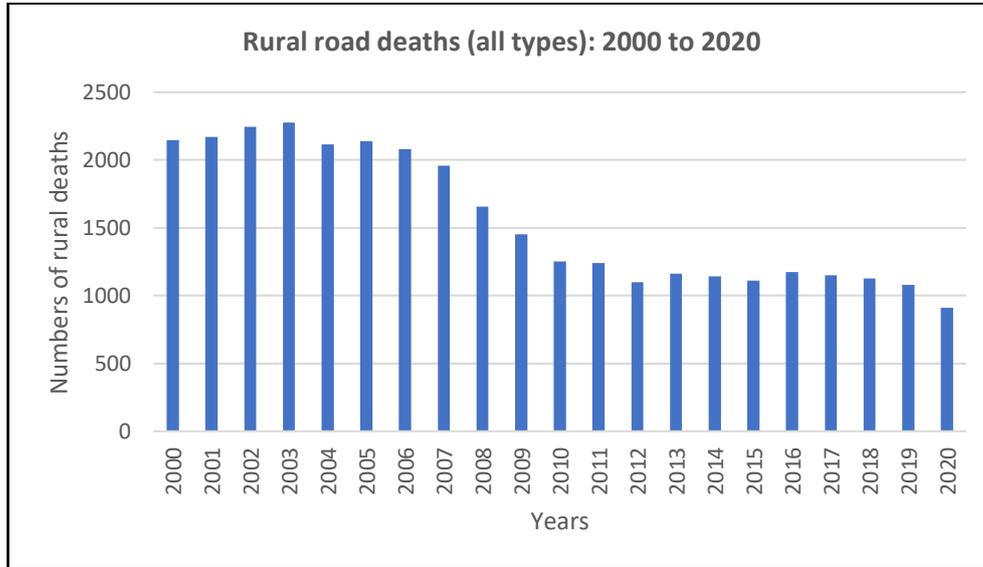
**Table 5.2: Vehicle miles, road length and change since 1994 and 2018 (DfT, 2020a)**

	Billion vehicle miles	Vehicle miles (%)	Length of road (%)	Change since 2018 (increase)	Change since 1994 (increase)
Motorway	70.5	20	1	2.1	60.4
Rural 'A' road	101	28	9	1.4	39.5
Rural minor road	52.6	15	52	2.6	47
Urban 'A' road	49.2	14	3	0.6	0.9
Urban minor road	83.2	23	35	3.2	36.4

In 2019, 43% of motor vehicle miles travelled were on rural roads, accounting for 61% of the road network by length. So, motorways carried the smallest percentage of vehicle miles (20%) on their 1% share of the network, whilst rural roads ('A' and minor combined) carried the highest percentage of vehicle miles (43%) on their 61% share of the network. For rural roads this accounted for 16% more vehicle miles than those travelled on urban roads (table 5.2).

**Changes in traffic volumes** (from table 5.2): with data outside the bracket from 1994 and inside the bracket from 2018. Traffic volumes have increased on all road types with rural roads increasing by 39.5% (1.4%) on 'A' roads and 47% (2.6%) on minor roads. There were much smaller increases on urban roads: 0.9% (0.6%) on 'A' roads and 36% (3.2%) on minor roads.

**Rural road deaths:** The number of deaths on rural roads has continued to decline (DfT, 2021c), with a significant fall between 2006 and 2010 (figure 5.3).



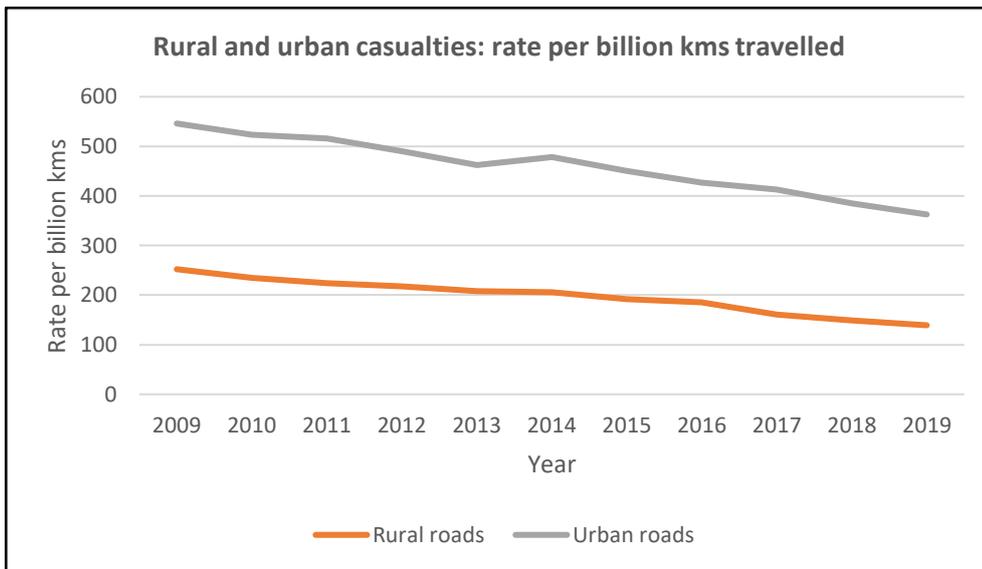
**Figure 5.3: Rural road deaths (all types): 2000 to 2020 (DfT, 2021c)**

Explanations for the fall of 45% are debated, but four factors have been suggested:

- Improved vehicle safety measures
- The 2000 Labour Government's road safety strategy which included targets and an accountability structure to ensure delivery (see 4.4.3.1)
- A focus on speed management, including speed cameras and enforcement
- Post-crash care improved over this period with more effective release and retrieval of crash victims to emergency care.

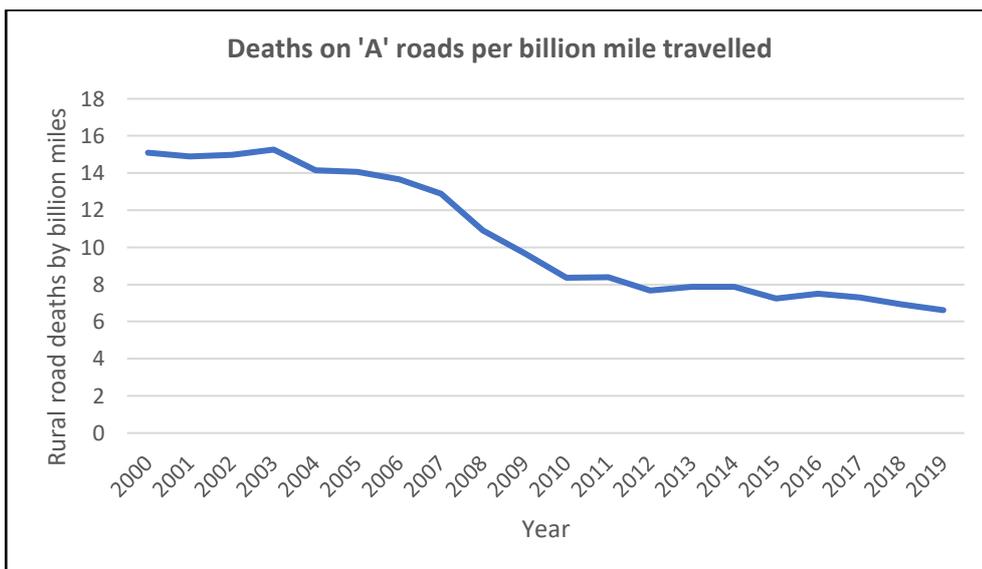
Between 2012 and 2019 the number of deaths had essentially plateaued (figure 5.3).

Whilst the majority of deaths occur on rural roads, for example 57% in 2019, the majority of all casualty types (63% in 2019) occur on urban roads (DfT, 2020) and figure 5.4 shows a data series of casualties per billion kilometres travelled for all casualty types split by urban and rural roads. The number of road casualties has continued to fall over time for both rural and urban road classifications (figure 5.4).



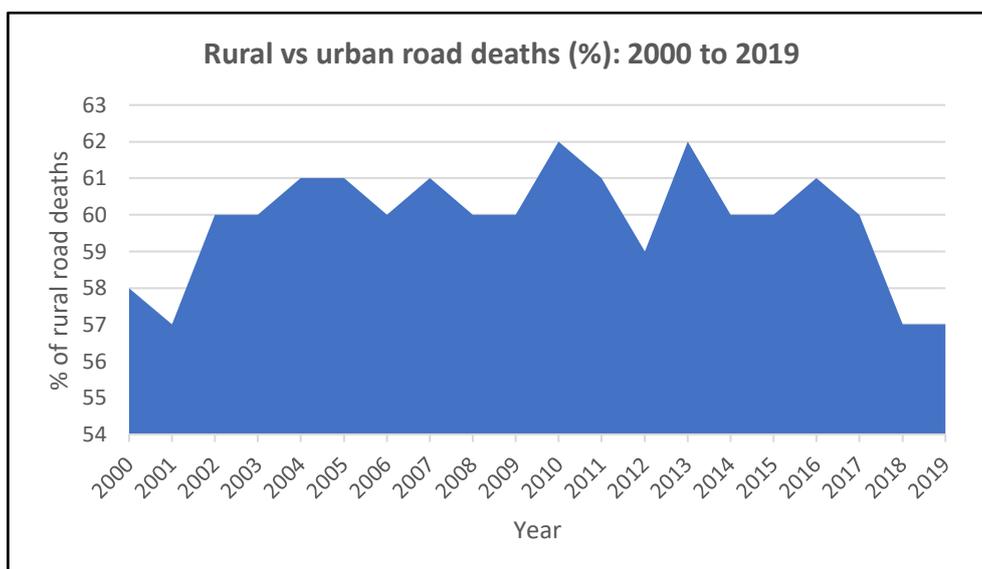
**Figure 5.4: Rural and urban casualties: rate per billion kms travelled (DfT, 2020)**

Figure 5.5 shows that the number of 'A' road deaths has also continued to fall as measured by billion miles travelled, though the rate of decline has slowed over the past ten years.



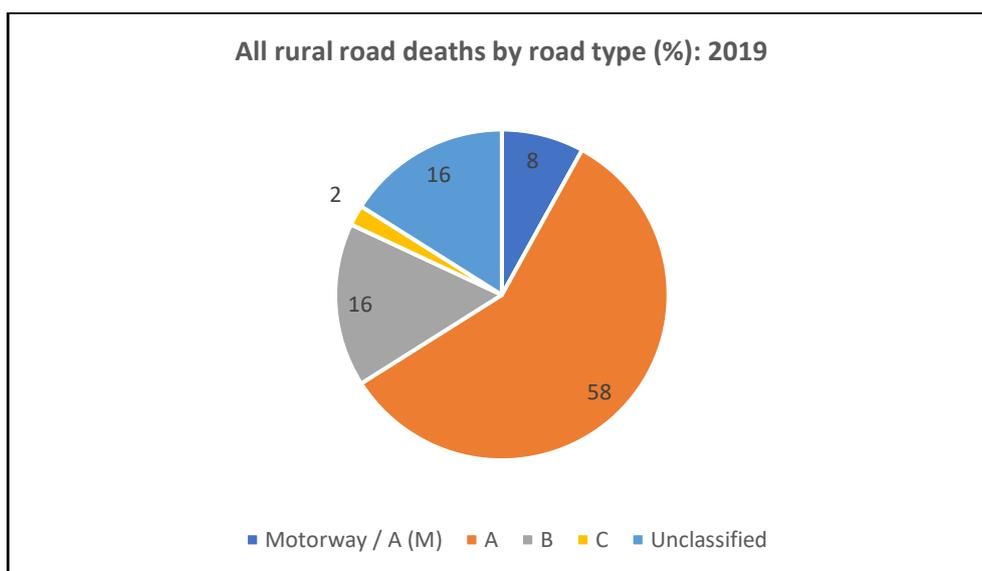
**Figure 5.5: Rural road deaths per billion mile travelled**

Since at least 2000, there is a higher proportion of deaths on rural roads (figure 5.6), when compared to urban roads, with a range between 57% and 62%.



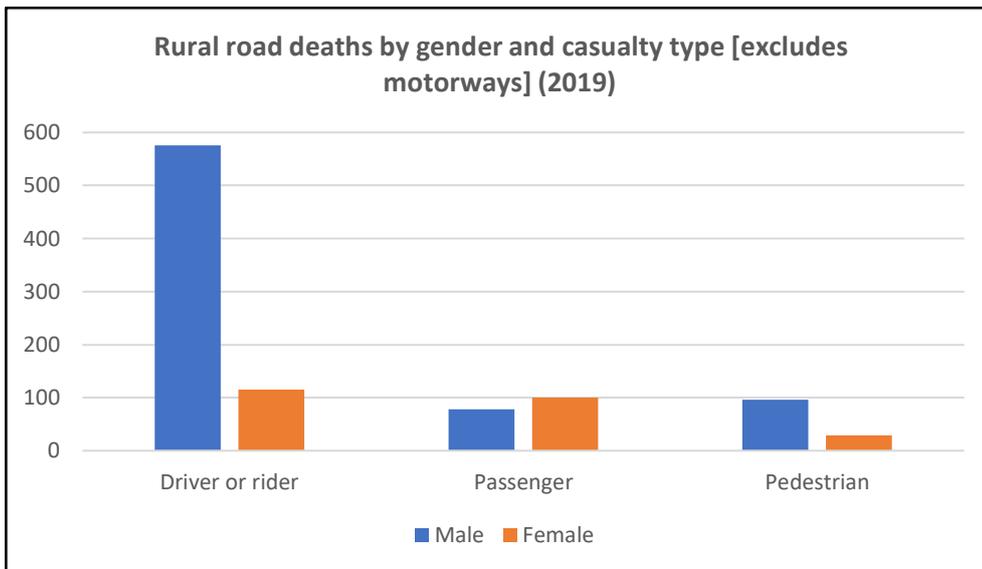
**Figure 5.6: Rural vs urban road deaths: 2000 to 2019 (DfT, 2020)**

If all rural road death data are selected and analysed by road type (figure 5.7), rural 'A' roads account for 58%, whilst motorways, including A(M) roads account for 8%.



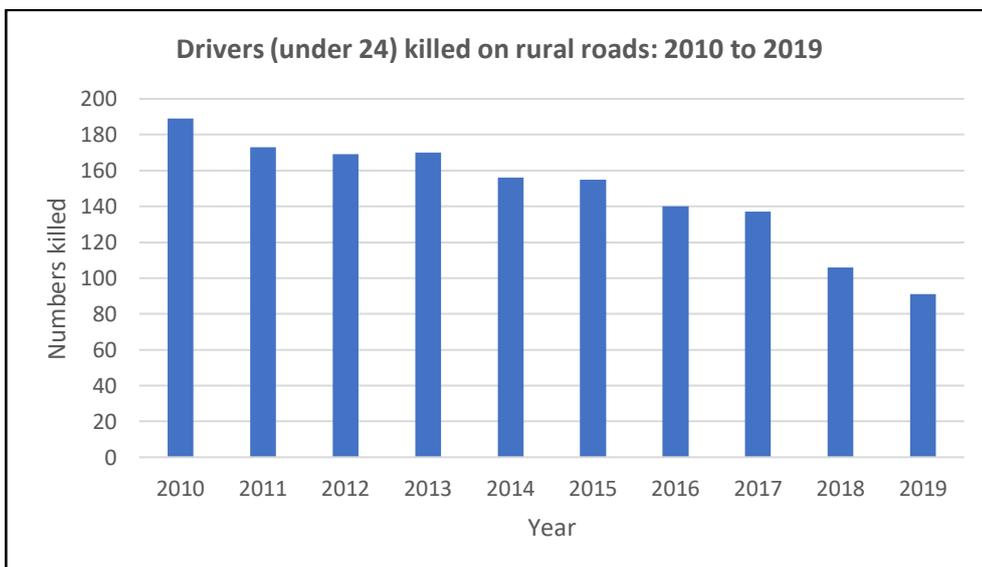
**Figure 5.7: All rural road deaths by road type (%): 2019**

Males made up three quarters of all rural road deaths in 2019 (244 female compared to 750 male deaths) and are disproportionately represented in these data when analysed by road user type (figure 5.8). Male drivers or riders make up 83%, and male pedestrians make up 77%. The exception are female passengers who make up 56% of rural road deaths (Jones, 2016).



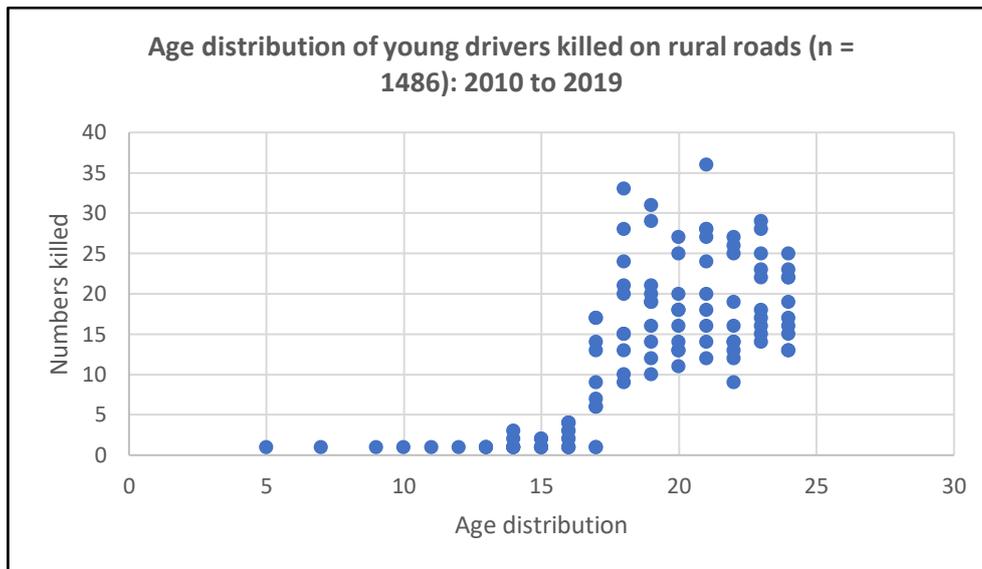
**Figure 5.8: Rural road deaths by gender and casualty 2019 (DfT, 2020)**

Figure 5.9 presents data on young driver deaths on rural roads. These data include all drivers under the age of 24, including illegal drivers. There is a clear downward trend in the absolute numbers of young driver deaths on rural roads, but this age group continues to be overrepresented in the overall data.



**Figure 5.9: Young drivers killed on rural roads (DfT, 2020)**

Figure 5.10 sets out the age distribution by frequency. These data include all drivers under the age of twenty-four, including illegal drivers.



**Figure 5.10 : Age distribution of drivers (under 24) killed on rural roads (DfT, 2020)**

In summary, the majority of all road deaths occur on rural roads, predominantly rural ‘A’ roads, even though this is not where the majority of the traffic is. It is predominantly male and somewhat younger drivers. Whilst rural road safety has improved over time, the reduction in the number of deaths on rural roads has slowed since 2012 and rural roads are still responsible for a disproportionate number of those killed.

### 5.3 Policy options for rural road safety

There has been a limited focus on rural road safety policy in Britain and internationally, so there are gaps in the literature, policy documents, and discourse. There is significant evidence of *what* interventions could be applied to rural roads (see 5.3) such as infrastructure and speed reductions, but there is limited literature on rural road safety policy. In 1999, Hassan identifies the policy problem, writing about OECD countries, suggesting rural road safety:

*“Is a significant, ongoing problem. However, for many years, safety on rural roads has “taken a back seat” to the attention paid to the traffic safety problems in urban areas even though the fatality rate per mile driven is greater” (OECD, 1999).*

This section discusses rural road safety policy literature, starting with British, then international contexts and finally areas from the literature which impact on rural road safety.

#### 5.3.1 British context

Hamilton and Kennedy published: *Rural road safety: a literature review* (2005) for the Scottish Executive with the aim of assessing how the literature applies to Scotland and to provide recommendations for action. They identify three factors in rural road crashes: human factors (including speeding, the use of alcohol, distraction, and seat belt use), environment factors (where crashes are predominantly head on, run-off or at junctions) and vehicle factors. The

report makes recommendations on: awareness and educational campaigns, speed management or reduction, and engineering (e.g., the use of safety barriers). This is an extensive and detailed analysis, but as it is from 2005, the recommendations may need to be re-assessed, but the scale and degree of the policy problem is similar and relevant.

IAM Motoring Trust published *Rural roads: the biggest killer* (2007) which details data analysis of metrics relating to rural road safety. The comprehensive analysis includes in-car KSI's, by age, gender, weather conditions, road type, speed, etc. It was published when, on an average day, nine people were killed on Britain's roads; of which six were killed on rural roads and when two-thirds of these casualties were on 60 or 70 mph speed limit non-motorway roads. The report focuses on data analysis and does not discuss policy solutions, as the aim is to highlight the risk of death and serious injury on rural roads and to stimulate debate. It suggests "without political support and the resources" (2007, p.2) it is not possible to build on the improved safety in vehicles and reduce the speed on rural roads.

In 2007, TRL published *Rural road safety – policy options* (Lynam, 2007) which is a technical appraisal of rural road safety and includes a number of policy solutions. Whilst this is now dated, the issues still persist today, and the proposed policy solutions may be applicable but would need further testing. The report sets out four policy solutions:

- define a network of major roads to operate as high speed roads
- improve enforcement: pointing to the links with speed and seat belt compliance
- infrastructure investment: replacing junctions and pedestrian and cyclist facilities
- defining a network of minor road zones and a 40 mph speed limit.

The report notes change could only be realised with strong national political support, national investment, and publicity supporting implementation by local authorities (Lynam, 2007).

In 2010, a demonstrator project: *Taking on the rural road safety challenge* (DfT, 2010b) reviews case studies from Devon, Lincolnshire, Norfolk, and Northamptonshire. It details a case study from each area which had received funding, and made five conclusions. These are: the need to have a clear strategy; project teams; effective use of data; partnership working; and community involvement. Interventions are primarily in infrastructure and engineering, with 80% of funding on capital projects. The remainder of the funding was on education and enforcement, and in Lincolnshire on reducing speed limits. The project costs were £7.5 million. It is difficult to be certain about the outcomes in the reduction in those killed or seriously injured, or the value for money for the investment across all four areas as the report was published before complete outcome data was available. However, Devon and Lincolnshire report reduced deaths and serious injury. Lincolnshire reported reductions from the National

Speed Limit to 50 mph on certain high risk rural routes resulted in a 75% reduction in those killed or seriously injured, and an overall reduction in collisions (DfT, 2010b).

**Rural road environment policy paper** (ROSPA, 2010) focuses on interventions to the physical environment to improve rural road safety. It identifies three causal factors of crashes: human, environmental and vehicular. The report describes the four demonstrator sites referenced above, focuses heavily on engineering and infrastructure interventions, including speed management, and road design solutions:

*“Engineering the rural road environment may be one of the best ways to bring the rural casualty rates down further. In rural areas, engineering that targets whole routes or wide areas may be the best strategy” (ROSPA, 2010).*

PACTS published a series of reports in 2017 to influence politicians (PACTS, 2017, a, b) with one on safer roads (PACTS, 2017c). There are few references to rural roads other than advocating investment in infrastructure and safer speeds.

Finally, the RAC Foundation’s report on **Tackling High-Risk Regional Roads** (2018) sets out an evaluation and analysis of the benefits of tacking the top fifty most dangerous ‘A’ roads. The capital expenditure was £100 million with projected benefits to prevent more than 1,450 KSIs in the next 20 years and a value of prevention of injuries (20 years) of £550 million.

The criteria for inclusion in this scheme was dangerous ‘A’ roads and so includes different types of roads, including rural roads. Nevertheless, the schemes were positively evaluated, and the report identifies practical solutions with clear implications for politicians and how local and national government could choose to identify and resolve high risk road infrastructure. The disproportionate risk to young drivers of travelling on rural roads is clear from the data (figure 5.9) and Fosdick (2012, p.3) proposes there is a need to understand the rural road risk further, and suggests there is a pressing need to address the levels of risk. Young driver risk is analysed in the second case study (chapter 6).

This section has reviewed a series of disparate reports since 2005 on different aspects of rural road safety. Whilst every endeavour was made to search for all relevant publications, this brief review demonstrates there is little published literature on policy specifically associated with rural roads. The focus has been on literature specific to rural roads, and it is acknowledged that wider safety improvements will have impacted on rural roads: for example, the EuroRAP which aims to reduce death and serious injury through a programme of systematic assessment of risk, identifying the major shortcomings that can be addressed by practical road improvement measures (EuroRAP, 2023). Human, environmental and vehicle factors are consistent themes for policy action. The limited availability of research or reports may be a relevant aspect of this thesis.

### 5.3.2 International context

The OECD published the results of a working group: ***Rural road safety: a global challenge*** (OECD, 1999). Although a copy of the full report was inaccessible, a review by Hassan is available and has been reviewed. The report describes rural road safety as a significant problem, particularly in relation to the higher numbers of road deaths in all OECD countries. It makes recommendations on leadership, the need to develop focused strategies with action plans, and wider partnership working to address the policy problem. This is informed by fifty safety recommendations within the following areas: infrastructure, enforcement, trauma management and the use of technology. The expert group states:

*“Rural road safety has not always received the attention it deserves. However, if the recommendations of the expert group are adopted by the road safety organizations ... and implemented in conjunction with national programs, they can bring about needed changes and save lives” (OECD, 1999).*

TRL analysed the performance of Britain’s roads within an EU context: ***Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of Britain's road safety performance*** (TRL, 2016) which confirms Britain’s consistent position as one of the safest countries in the world. There are few specific references to rural road safety, but there are four factors worth considering:

- (i) 53% of traffic was on rural roads, which accounted for 66% of deaths
- (ii) male deaths on rural roads dominate (range of 74-83%). Britain had the second highest number of female deaths on rural roads after Denmark
- (iii) Britain had the highest proportion of rural road deaths at junctions, except the Netherlands
- (iv) in a comparison of speed limits on rural roads, Britain had the highest national speed limits: 60mph on single or 70mph on dual carriageways; Belgium was the only other EU country with similarly high speed limits (56-75mph). The report suggests: “compared with other countries with similar numbers of road deaths per head, the UK has high rural speed limits” (TRL, 2016, p.25).

### 5.3.3 Ideas from research impacting on rural road safety

This research is not designed to undertake a detailed literature review of the possible technical solutions for rural road safety, but a brief contextual assessment is relevant to the thesis.

There is extensive research on *what* to do to improve road safety, but there is less literature that is specific to rural roads. Research on speed management is a good example where there is extensive literature, but most of it does not study rural roads specifically. This section includes a selective literature search of articles which impact on rural road safety.

The link between speed, crash risk, and the level of injury is clear (for example, Imprialou et al., 2016) and speed policy has been debated over many years (for example, DETR, 2000a), and the World Bank concludes:

*“There is a direct, causal link between speed and safety outcomes. Indeed, there are no other risk factors that have such a substantial and pervasive impact on safety as speed. Speed has an impact on both the likelihood of a crash occurring, and severity of the outcome when crashes do occur” (World Bank, 2021, p.27).*

As far back as 1968, Cohen and Preston (1968) set out a nine point road safety plan focused on speed; in 2002, researchers advocated a series of interventions, including the expansion of 20mph speed limits in Britain (Koornstra et al., 2002); and in 2019 the WHO published a report which aims at saving lives on the world’s roads, where speed management was one major factor (WHO, 2019). There are many other references to speed and crash risk, but only a selected number have been given as examples.

Other examples of research include the impact of speed and health inequalities (Cairns et al., 2015), speed cameras (Corbett, 1995; Corbett, 2000); speed limits in Sweden (Vadeby and Forsman, 2018); effectiveness of 20mph restrictions (Cleland et al., 2020); driving speed and crash risk (Farmer, 2017); relationship between speed, health outcomes and time (Tranter, 2010); civil engineering solutions (Johansson, 2009); campaigns (Hoekstra and Wegman, 2011); human and behavioural factors (Fylan and Stradling, 2014); and smartphone usage whilst driving (Basacik et al., 2012). There are numerous citations on the evaluation of technical or intervention based appraisals. For example, developing crash predictions models in Germany (Moraldi et al., 2020); developing a speed-crash relationship for English rural single carriageways, and proposals for a road hierarchy for rural single-carriageway roads (Taylor et al. 2002); studying rural familiarity as a crash risk due to distraction and dangerous behaviours (Intini, et. al., 2018); and evaluation of cost-effective measures to improve crash and injury risk at rural intersections with a focus on reducing speed by physical interventions (Corben et al., 2005). This is a selection of available literature, but suggests the availability of knowledge on speed management, and the consequences of speed related crashes.

The impact of speed is considered by Castillo-Manzano et al. (2014) in an economic evaluation on the relationship between temporary speed limit changes and the effects of Spanish energy efficiency, and the authors consider the use of speed management policies. They argue speeding is one of the most relevant problems for road safety and, at the same time it is the most resistant to change. Speed management plans are evaluated to study the savings from fuel during periods of rising prices. In relation to speed limits, they argue:

*“The relationship between speed limits and traffic accidents, is a topic widely discussed by researchers, and there seems to be some consensus about “speed kills” (Castillo-Manzano, et al., 2014, p.568).*

An online survey was used to understand an Australian community's attitudes towards current and proposed lower speed limits. It found that most respondents were able to correctly identify the speed limit for urban roads, but the knowledge of rural speed limits was considerably lower. The majority of respondents were in favour of the proposed lower speed limits on rural roads but only about one-third support lower limits on urban roads. In a comprehensive analysis including assessing driver characteristics, driver behaviour, reasons for exceeding speed limits and attitudes to lowering speed limits the authors found which groups could be targeted in speed related interventions and for lowering speed limits. They found that this was particularly evident on rural roads (Lahaussé, et al., 2010).

Yao, Carsten, and Hibberd (2020) examine speed limit credibility and compliance where:

*"Speed is at the core of the road safety problem and speed management is a tool for road safety. Speed limits that are more credible are supposed to encourage drivers to comply with speed limits, with consequent benefits for road safety"*  
(Yao, Carsten, and Hibberd, 2020).

By using a questionnaire, they examine whether speed limits were credible on different road types. As an example, they found a speed limit of 60mph was too high on a rural single carriageway with curves. The research suggests it is possible to determine whether a speed limit is more credible to most motorists, and that drivers' understanding of safe speed could be achieved by policy solutions of infrastructure, engineering, and education.

An Australian study made use of focus groups and a questionnaire, and the research targeted the perceptions of young rural drivers towards speeding and the associated risk. Knight et al. (2013) found that speeding behaviour was viewed as both acceptable and inevitable, particularly in young males. Speeding was found to be perceived as less risky than drink driving. They conclude these perceptions contribute to the crash rates on rural roads and that educational programmes were the policy solution to reduce crash rates.

An editorial by Morling (2015) describes a disproportionate risk to those travelling on rural Australian roads with more than a three times chance of being killed. Whilst many international contexts differ to the British environment, there are some similarities: speeding, drunk driving, infrastructure or design issues, insufficient public transport and the increased risk of encountering wildlife or farm vehicles. Morling (2015) advocated for three interventions: improved investment in infrastructure, including road signs and markings; improved public transport; and targeted education programmes. There may be questions about the effectiveness of policy transfer, but there are important similarities.

In a study by Nagler and Ward (2016) from the US, they set out to test whether the same protective effects of social capital exist on rural roads as urban roads, and what factors explain differential effects. They use 'voter turnout' and 'most people are honest' to evaluate the

degree of social capital. They find there was a higher rate of riskier behaviours on rural roads, and used speeding, seat belt wearing and the use of alcohol whilst driving as factors to test this. They find social capital has a significantly greater protective effect with crash outcomes on urban roads than on rural roads. They suggest policy solutions for rural roads should be targeted directly at improvements in driving behaviour problems, such as speeding, rather than social capital formation. In research that may be difficult to transfer to a different country due to the social capital definitions and cultures, they conclude different approaches are needed for rural and urban improvements to road safety.

### 5.3.4 Rural road safety solutions: discussion

The policy solutions can be summarised within a number of themes: **policy interventions** in relation to a differential designation of rural roads with corresponding reduced speed limits; **human factors** and behaviours in relation to speeding, alcohol use, distraction and the use of seat belts; **vehicle safety** (not specific to road type); **investment** in engineering solutions (for example, barriers and changed junctions); **public support** and community engagement; improved **public transport; education; enforcement; factors** including accountability, leadership, prioritisation, strategy, action plans, resources, project infrastructure and data use; and wider policy solutions to address the heightened risk to **young male drivers**.

These themes are interesting and add to this thesis in understanding the potential policy ideas for rural road safety. They challenge the narrative that there is insufficient knowledge to address rural road safety. However, the policy stream has not in itself advanced rural road safety which is discussed further (5.4). In road safety policymaking there are many problems and many potential policy solutions that could be considered, yet few issues raise to the top of the agenda, and few are implemented (Kingdon, 1995). This review suggests there are policy solutions available which have been considered in a limited way over time. It is not the availability of ideas, but rather the limited debate and evaluation of the resource demands or opportunity costs of implementation, or that they are simply unpopular.

There is a policy stream that has developed and flowed independently of the politics stream, whose members are frequently different policy actors. Within the policy stream itself, as evidenced by the limited discourse and limited literature, rural road safety has not attracted the attention of many communities within the policy stream, including academics. In considering the impact of the limited discourse in the literature, from NGOs, think tanks, and academics, it suggests a low priority even within the road safety policy community or funding organisations. Research and policy activity has been prioritised on urban areas. Policy actors tend to be made up of different communities to those who inhabit the politics stream, and this

may be one of the problems with the development of rural road safety. This may also suggest limited engagement and advocacy from policy entrepreneurs. Analysis of the politics of road death and the extent to which it has entered the politics stream is analysed in the next section.

## 5.4 Politics of rural road safety: an invisible problem?

This section details the chronological results of the CDA in time periods, and is followed by separate interview results which are not chronological. The only Hansard reference relating to the risk of driving on rural roads before the research period was from 1973. This debate relates to road markings on rural roads, said to cause a higher number of crashes, with a plea for interventions. The Secretary of State, Keith Speed (Conservative) simply said: “No Sir!” (Hansard HC Deb., 5 October 1973, c.19). There are other references to rural roads, but not about safety, for example, the damage heavy goods vehicles cause (Hansard HC Deb., 15 March 1905, c.5) or requests for infrastructure spending (Hansard HC., 24 May 1995, c.889).

### 5.4.1 Results and analysis: 1987 to May 1997 (Conservative)

#### 5.4.1.1 Results: January 1987 to May 1997

The first debate is from 1990 on measures to reduce casualties which focuses on raising public awareness and response so that road safety is seen as an issue for society. It focuses on the most vulnerable road users, and on proven cost-effective casualty reduction measures, principally in-vehicle and road engineering (Hansard HC Deb., 16 November 1990, c.808).

The Conservative Minister, Sir Christopher Chope, addresses rural road risk and shares data showing an increase in deaths:

*“Last year there was a significant increase in deaths on our roads [figure 5.11] and particularly among car occupants on rural single carriageway roads and minor rural roads.*

*Many of the accidents on those roads involve no other vehicle and are caused by drivers overestimating their ability to*

*control their cars at speed ... A speed of 60mph is quite unsafe for many country roads, particularly when driving conditions are difficult” (Hansard HC Deb., 16 November 1990, c.819).*

**Fact check:** Road deaths increased by 6.5% from 5052 in 1988 to 5373 in 1989, but started to fall again in 1990 to 5217, and falling below the 1989 high to 4568 in 1991 (DfT, 2020).

**Figure 5.11: Fact check - changes in road deaths between 1988-1991 (DfT, 2020)**

Three contributions are made on the risk to rural road users, all describing speeding. Alex Carlile (Liberal Democrat) is concerned about the risk to elderly people and calls for speed limits through villages (Hansard HC., 16 November 1990, c.836). Peter Pike (Labour) states:

*“There is a theoretical 60mph limit. There may be bends and turns ... but the people who know them hurtle along in the centre of the road at 60mph in the belief that if the limit is 60mph they ought to drive at that speed, whether or not it is safe to do so. We must ensure that people drive at safe speeds” (Hansard HC Deb., 16 November 1990, c.857).*

The final contribution from Anthony Steen (Conservative) about a local policy of straightening roads in Devon which he argues made them less safe (Hansard HC., 16 November 1990, c.859).

In a lengthy debate on road safety in 1994, the risks of driving on rural roads is only briefly referenced (Hansard HC., 25 November 1994). There are two interventions: Joan Walley (Labour) is generally critical of the Government’s approach to road safety delivery:

*“The accident statistics for rural areas are grim ... Those roads were found to be more dangerous and to cause higher casualties than urban ones. Will the Minister tell us what action he proposes to take in rural areas” (Hansard HC Deb., 25 November 1994, c.859).*

Sir Anthony Grant (Conservative) is concerned about dangerous rural roads in his constituency where speeding and infrastructure are problems:

*“They are straight, narrow roads with sudden bends. People come off the motorway at high speed and then endeavour to overtake. Those roads are a death-trap. I agree ...the importance of attempting to reduce road accidents in rural areas. That is one reason why the debate is so important ... successive Governments have not caught up with the motor car phenomenon” (Hansard HC Deb., 25 November 1994, c.861).*

There was no discourse in the remainder of 1994 until November 1997: a gap of three years.

#### **5.4.1.2 Analysis: January 1987 to May 1997**

There is very limited discourse on the risks of driving on rural roads. **Road safety: next steps** (DoT, 1987) is significant for road safety generally, but not for rural road safety. Where there are references, these are focused in general terms on speeding and infrastructure. These infrequent and brief contributions were not significant but were the first time the issue had been raised and demonstrates a lack of focus or priority on rural road safety.

### **5.4.2 Results and analysis: May 1997 to 2003 (Labour)**

#### **5.4.2.1 Results May 1997 to 2003**

In a lengthy debate on road safety, there is a single reference to rural road safety. Virginia Bottomley (Conservative) describes the risks farmers face when rural areas are used as rat runs (Hansard HC Deb., 5 November 1997, c.241) and the increase in risk involved. In closing the debate, Labour Minister, Glenda Jackson makes only general comments in response to the concerns of Virginia Bottomley:

*“These are serious and complex, but vital issues ... road safety is central to our White Paper on integrated transport. The concerns of her constituents are replicated ... That is why the Government are determined to put in place measures that will continue to decrease the number of people who suffer death or injury on our roads” (Hansard HC Deb., 5 November 1997, c.248).*

The scope of the 1998 government document: ***A new deal for transport: better for everyone*** (DfT, 1998) is on the wider transport system. It considers wider transport issues in rural communities, but there is little focus on rural road safety. There is one reference to rural road safety which relates to improving compliance with speed limits (DETR, 1998, p.75).

There is a single intervention: *the country roads and villages* adjournment debate in 1999 by Helen Brinton (Labour). Her proposal is to enable traffic authorities to designate rural roads as ‘quiet lanes’ to give pedestrians, cyclists, and horse riders priority. It includes the provision to set a national speed limit of 40mph on rural roads classified ‘C’ and on all unclassified roads, and 20mph on designated quiet lanes and through villages. She states:

*“It’s measures would improve safety on rural roads, encourage the enjoyment of the countryside and protect its character and distinctiveness from damage by unsuitable traffic and traffic speeds” (Hansard HC Deb., 12 May 1999, c.331).*

In her speech, she quotes 1997 data, where 70% of fatal crashes occur on rural roads, and ten times more people were killed in crashes on rural roads than on motorways.

In a short exchange in a 2000 debate, Helen Brinton raises the same concerns on rural speeding as she had the previous year. She references a MORI poll that shows the majority of motorists support the reduction of speed limits, especially on country lanes (this poll is no longer accessible). She concludes that by reducing speed limits, safety would be improved for pedestrians, cyclists, and the motorist (Hansard HC., 11 January 2000, c.114). The Labour Minister, Beverley Hughes responds with strong support, but no policy action:

*“We recognise that speed is a major road safety and environmental issue in rural areas. It is perhaps the most crucial determinant of overall levels of road safety” (Hansard HC Deb., 11 January 2000, c.114).*

There were no further exchanges on rural roads, but the Minister answers questions by citing the planned road safety strategy which she states would include targets and a focus on vulnerable road users (Hansard HC Deb., 11 January 2000, c.114).

The Labour Government’s report: ***Tomorrow’s roads: safer for everyone*** (DETR, 2000b) and the associated report on speed: ***New directions in speed management: a review of policy*** (DETR, 2000a) are the first major policy statement since 1987. As well as a wide ranging set of road safety policy solutions, it confirms a strong link between vehicle speed and the risk and severity of crashes which is used to underpin the policy solutions. The document identifies the

majority of casualties as car occupants on rural roads, particularly on single carriageways, and it identifies speed management as the main problem. It states:

*“The national speed limit of 60mph remains appropriate for many stretches of high quality rural roads. But it is clear that on some rural single carriageway roads and country lanes, vehicle speeds of 60mph are too fast. At present the law does not distinguish between them” (DETR, 2000a, p.41).*

Policy solutions are focused on the management of speed and include speed reduction measures. Specific interventions are: improved road markings, signage, and road engineering, and targeted interventions at speed-related crash sites. A major initiative is a new speed hierarchy for rural roads to be defined by their function and quality, which aims to combine flexibility at local level with consistency nationally. Improvements from the proposed hierarchy include reducing the speed limit in villages to 30mph and lowering speed limits on country lanes. Local authorities were to set speed limits on rural roads based on the new hierarchy.

In a short, late night debate in 2001 the problem of rural speed limits is raised with a novel approach. Tony McWalter (Labour) suggests stricter road safety enforcement should only be introduced if there is support from the public. He describes the need for credible and supported speed limits in a similar way to Yao et. al. (2020) and suggests there is widescale support for ensuring those caught speeding are prosecuted. He is critical of the Government’s approach to speed management which is in favour of lowering speed limits in most circumstances, but suggests it as:

*“remarkably blasé<sup>2</sup> about the 30mph urban limit, which I believe should be generally lower, and the 60mph limit on rural roads, which ... should be a lot lower” (Hansard HC Deb., 26 June 2001, c.616).*

He cites the risk of death on rural roads as 54%, and motorways as 4% and suggests:

*“If we could break motorists' habit of disrespecting all limits, we could achieve greater compliance which had as their object the reclamation of streets for playing children, when the limit could be as low as five mph; or country lanes for cyclists and equestrians, when the limit could be perhaps 45mph ... and of roads through villages, with a speed limit of 20mph. My quid pro quo for that is something that will probably meet with alarm in some quarters: a much higher limit on motorways when conditions permit” (Hansard HC Deb., 26 June 2001, c.614).*

The Minister, David Jamieson, asserts road safety could not be improved by only changing speed limits: “Sadly, lower limits alone have little effect on the speed of traffic” (Hansard 26 June 2001, c.618), and suggests the problems with rural roads were different:

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<sup>2</sup> In the Hansard transcript, the direct quote was “blas”, which is assumed to be blasé.

*“Few people exceed the speed limit [figure 5.12] ... [they] appear to be set unnaturally high. Generally, the road safety problem in rural areas is people misjudging overtaking manoeuvres and driving well within the speed limit, but at speeds which are too fast to negotiate the junctions and bends. We have left the national speed limit unchanged, but our policy is to encourage local authorities to adopt a targeted approach to gain appropriate vehicle speeds on all rural roads, with lower speed limits where they are necessary” (Hansard HC Deb., 26 June 2001, c.619).*

**Fact check: Speed compliance**

Data from 2011 to 2017 shows the proportion of car drivers compliant with speed limits were:

Motorway = 52%; Single carriageways = 91%; 30mph = 48% and 20 mph = 14%

This is the earliest accessible data and thus it is not possible to make a direct comparison but speeding during these years is not only from a “few people”.

**Figure 5.12: Fact check - speed compliance (cars), 2011-2017 (DfT, 2018)**

Elsewhere in his speech the Minister states that road safety was a Government priority, repeats the downward trend in road casualties and suggests the recent road safety strategy addresses the issues. In what is a contradiction, he also states:

*“I find it remarkable that some people consider that to be unavoidable. Behind those cold statistics are individuals, their families, and friends, all of whom are directly affected. The public rightly demand high levels of safety in other modes of transport, and I believe that we should strive for the same standards on our roads” (Hansard HC Deb., 26 June 2001, c.620).*

He concludes the current approach is correct and local authorities should be encouraged to review and change speed limits, but no further national intervention is necessary.

A 2002 debate focuses on road traffic, speeding and crashes, but includes a short section on rural roads. Unusually, Phil Woolas (Labour assistant whip) answers for the Government. He describes the difference between what had been achieved in improving the safety of urban roads as being twice as good as rural roads, suggesting:

*“Rural roads are different in design and nature from urban roads, which makes it difficult to be consistent in setting speed limits ... and work already put in hand is beginning to pay off as we seek to restore the balance. The make-up of rural roads is such that accidents tend not to be concentrated at specific locations but scattered along sections of road. Given that randomness, it has been more difficult to target problem locations” (Hansard HC Deb., 8 March 2002, c.616).*

He proposes the use of analytical tools to identify where to intervene, engineering and more innovative use of technology. The commitment to develop a rural roads speed hierarchy is repeated, citing a written report from November 2001. This document is no longer accessible.

In 2002, the TLGRC inquiry on **Road traffic speed** (TLGRC, 2002a) is critical of slow progress on road safety. On rural road safety, the TC details a number of examples of the Government’s intention to take action and what the TC saw as a different reality. The report describes high

demand from the public for lower speed limits on rural roads and cites examples of good practice. On plans that 30mph should be the norm in villages, "little had occurred to make this happen" (TLGRC, 2002a, para.87) and it criticises the Government's explanations as "poor excuses for not issuing guidance to local authorities" (TLGRC, 2002a, para.88). The report is critical of the delayed rural road speed hierarchy. The Government's working group conclude a system of different speed limits would be costly financially and in environmental intrusion, and further research was required before "we can properly assess the case for lower rural speed limits" (TLGRC, 2002b, para.92). There are three relevant recommendations: guidance on speed management (para.o); the hierarchy (para.z) and a requirement for local authorities to publish speed management plans (para.vv).

The Government publishes the response in October (TLGRC, 2002b). Recommendations 'o' and 'z' are considered together, and it is argued that existing guidance on speed management, though more than ten years old, is sufficient, but also commits to issue new guidance. It also repeats the changed plan for the hierarchy. Given:

*"The necessary infrastructure and behavioural changes required, the road safety and quality of life benefits would take too long to realise" (DETR, 2002, p.13).*

In making this decision, the problem is initially recognised but this solution is deemed expensive and too slow to achieve outcomes, and the response identifies prioritising infrastructure projects, including traffic calming measures and improving signing in rural areas. Recommendation 'v v' for annual speed management plans is discounted as unnecessary. Local authorities were required to publish casualty reduction targets within Local Transport Plans which the Government considered sufficient. These were published annually during the 2000's but stopped being a requirement towards the end of the decade.

The 2003 debate on the *Railways and Transport Safety Bill* focuses on the action following the Potters Bar train crash in 2002. The debate includes some references to road safety, but there is extensive criticism that road safety did not feature strongly. Dr Andrew Murrison (Conservative) highlighted the gap between what the Government said it would do and what it had done. A lengthy quote from this rural constituency MP. The road safety strategy:

*"Made it clear that primary legislation was required for the rural road hierarchy to be implemented ... the Minister's response ... was somewhat lukewarm ... It is a great pity that Ministers have not acted on the TC's criticism of the Government's lack of urgency in introducing a rural road hierarchy. That criticism was made in June 2001. Here we are in January 2003, yet we have heard nothing beyond blandishments and the promise of things to come ... The grim reaper is particularly fond of inappropriate speed as an immediate way of dispatching people on rural roads, but speed acts in more subtle ways than that. It ... degrades the enjoyment of the countryside ... The Government's failure to incorporate their hierarchy of roads into the Bill, where it would fit very well, is a missed public health opportunity" (Hansard HC Deb., 28 January 2003, c.808).*

The issue of the rural roads speed hierarchy was raised again later in 2003 in a written question from Lembit Opik (Liberal Democrat). The Minister, David Jamieson states:

*“Following the publication of the rural road hierarchy ... we are progressing work to improve safety across our rural road network. This includes the development of a framework to assess what speeds are appropriate together with surveys of what speeds are actually being driven on rural roads” (Hansard HC., 16 June 2003).*

A single intervention from a debate in 2003 on road safety in which Mark Lazarowicz (Labour) advocates for an urban road safety hierarchy and references the rural version. He suggests:

*“There are also accidents involving motorists and a toll of death and injury on rural roads. If the number of people who die ... on the roads were the product of one serious incident on the railways or in the air, there would be an outcry for immediate and instant action. It is time that we treated the death and injury toll on our roads with the same urgency” (Hansard HC Deb., 24 June 2003, c.894).*

There is no debate as the Parliamentary process is to secure a Bill, and he was unsuccessful.

#### **5.4.2.2 Analysis: May 1997 to 2003**

There is limited discourse in the early part of this period, with Government responses using supportive but vague language, and pointing to future, but unspecified policy action. Labour backbenchers are critical of the Labour Government, and suggests it was blasé towards rural road safety. An example on speed limits (Hansard HC Deb., 26 June 2001, c.618), suggests there was an issue, but there was deflection towards local authorities and a decision that no national action was required. This may be explained as displacing responsibility from government, but there is limited evidence for this, or a period of policy formulation and agenda setting. As there were examples of general road safety policy development, despite the criticism, this may be more plausible explanation. This period included two major policy documents, and policy formulation can take long periods of time, but there was limited discourse on rural road safety and whilst it was recognised, the policy issue did not develop.

***Tomorrow's roads*** (DETR, 2000b), which followed this early period, was a significant policy intervention and was the first major work from any Government on speed and speeding. It contained important policy, but these were mostly general road safety interventions, and not focused on rural roads. It was acknowledged there was a disproportionate risk on rural roads, but limited policy solutions resulted. However, there were assumptions that the solutions would apply across the whole road network: for example, through targets. However, there was a major policy initiative to introduce a rural roads hierarchy which had been developed over a number of years. The CDA and sequence of events over this period offered evidence that the policy problem was acknowledged as needing policy change, the hierarchy as the policy solution was initially supported, then delayed and finally abandoned as it was deemed to be too costly in environmental intrusion and financing. The politics stream resulted in a change

from accepting the policy direction, over a number of years, to deciding the consequences were unacceptable. It is worth noting there are many examples of policies from other areas which were implemented even when costs may be seen as prohibited or there are environmental impacts: for example, very high cost and low volume specialist treatments within the health service. There was insufficient political will to make what appear to be controversial, as well as expensive decisions.

The TC were highly critical of slow progress and accused the Government of not prioritising rural road safety (TLGRC, 2002a, para.8). This period of slow progress and weak political will occurred at a time when rural road deaths increased by 6.6% between 2000 and 2003, before the numbers started to reduce from 2004 (TLGRC, 2002a). The TC report discussed rural road safety in more depth than previously, thus affording the issue more attention. This was probably the first significant focus on rural road deaths and identified the high level of public support for the lowering of rural speed limits. However, the Government accepted there was an issue with speed on rural roads but disagreed with the TCs recommendations, offered no alternatives, and the result was further delay, including not progressing the hierarchy.

There was further evidence from the debate on transport safety in 2003 which offered an insight into the relative priority. Opposition MPs were very critical of what was described as the absence of road safety policy solutions despite the relative risk between the rail and road safety. This stark quote from a Conservative MP: "The grim reaper is particularly fond of inappropriate speed as an immediate way of dispatching people on rural roads" (Hansard HC Deb., 28 January 2003, c. 808) illustrates the strength of feeling about the lack of focus. The Labour Minister strongly dismissed the criticism and framed the approach as Britain having the *safest roads in Europe*, a declining rate of road deaths and a Government priority. However, the increase in road deaths in this period were not visible, there were no alternative solutions suggested, and a lack of policy action. There was a clear gap between acknowledging the problem and developing policy to improve the issue, and rural road safety disappeared off the agenda after a brief period of policy attention.

The problem stream did not develop, with the Parliamentary processes failing to generate sufficient attention. There was little movement within the policy stream where solutions could have been brought forward and debated, and the initial potential of the rural roads hierarchy ended when it was abandoned. There was a clear lack of political attention on rural road danger as many areas of policy compete for attention, and rural road safety policy was crowded out by a focus on rail safety. There was evidence that the policy window might open sufficiently to implement new policy, but the political will was not there, and the policy window closed again without policy change.

### 5.4.3 Results and analysis: 2004 to May 2010 (Labour)

#### 5.4.3.1 Results: 2004 to May 2010

There are no further debates including rural road safety between June 2003 and October 2008. After this gap, the TC published: *Ending the scandal of complacency: road safety beyond 2010* (TC, 2008). The inquiry was led by a Labour Chair, Louise Ellman, inquiring on the record of the Labour Government. It is critical of the lack of progress and weak approach to road safety, and describes it as a scandal of tolerance, and calls for a bolder change (TC, 2008, p.38):

*“In terms of casualty reduction ... little or no progress was likely to be achieved by the end of the target period due to a lack of initiatives” (TC, 2008, para.19).*

The TC are critical in two areas of rural road safety: road design and the inability for rural roads to safely carry the volume of traffic. However, there are limited corresponding recommendations to address these issues in the report which made thirty five suggestions.

The TC calls for additional investment in the road network:

*“To take unsuitable traffic out of residential areas and to reduce the serious casualty toll on some rural roads” (TC, 2008, para.53).*

The inquiry comments on the disproportionate number of crashes on rural roads and suggests that “progress with tackling these accidents has been disappointing” (TC, 2008, para.56). It is unsurprising that neither Government response (TC, 2009a; TC, 2009b) reference rural road safety, as the convention is to respond to recommendations. A single comment related to accurate risk information to support local authority changes to speed limits and zones (TC, 2009b, para.5).

Nine years after the 2000 policy document on road safety (DETR, 2000b) the Labour Government publishes a consultation document seeking to make further ambitious improvements to road safety: *A safer way: consultation on making Britain’s roads the safest in the world* (DfT, 2009). This document does not appear to have formed part of any Parliamentary processes, other than very brief references in the HoC (Hansard HC Deb., 14 May 2009, c.1007; Hansard HC Deb., 2 July 2009, c.562). The Government sets out the strategy to reduce the numbers of road deaths which had fallen at a slower rate than serious injuries and identifies seven specific areas of focus. The executive summary leads on strengthening the rural roads, suggestive of a priority area, but this is not followed through, and the commitment to focus on rural roads is left largely unanswered. The policy problem is described:

*“The British road network is relatively safe by international standards. Nevertheless, there are considerable variations of the levels of safety on different parts of the network. Of particular concern are rural roads: over 60% of all deaths occur on rural roads, but they account for just over 40% of traffic” (DfT, 2009, p.8).*

The consultation document presents evidence on the variation in the distribution of road deaths and describes the problem of speeding. The speeds at which drivers travel on rural roads, and particularly on single-carriageways is said to be too high. Specific mention is made of the road environment and the ability of the occupants to withstand crashes, such as run-off crashes, side-impact collisions at junctions and head-on collisions. This results in an excessive number of fatal road crashes (DfT, 2009, p.49). It describes issues with the design of rural single carriageways and different levels of safety, and the need to have the right speed for the road. The policy aim is to reduce casualties, making use of the best evidence. The policy solutions proposed are to refocus the existing mechanisms for speed management which dated from 2000 (DETR, 2000a). This includes maintaining the responsibility for setting speed limits with local authorities with plans to issue new guidelines on lowering speed limits where the evidence directed that solution. (DfT, 2009, p.54). There are three further policy solutions: i) tackle the riskiest routes through better information; ii) improve investment in infrastructure and engineering; and iii) improve accountability of road safety through the publishing annual performance data from highway and police authorities. These proposals lack any specific detail, but consultation documents invariably lack detail.

The July 2009 debate is a follow up to the 2008 TC report and is introduced by its Chair:

*“The Committee was particularly concerned about the increase in deaths among certain groups of people. Although the overall number of casualties is coming down, there are areas of great concern ... there is the situation in rural areas” (Hansard HC Deb., 2 July 2009, c.562).*

There are three references to rural road safety; the first from Eric Martlew (Labour) who identifies the level of risk. He describes the causes of injuries on single-lane carriageways:

*“People go on those roads, get frustrated perhaps by a farm vehicle, a learner driver or an elderly driver and there is dangerous overtaking. Most of the time people get away with it, but if they do not, they end up in a head-on collision. That is how most fatalities happen” (Hansard HC Deb., 2 July 2009, c.566).*

#### **Fact check: Pre-crash manoeuvres**

Analysis using 2000 to 2005 data shows a third of fatal and serious injuries to car occupants on rural roads occur when the car was being driven on a bend and around a half occur on straight roads (with 5% whilst overtaking; 7% whilst turning, and 7% other manoeuvres).

**Figure 5.13: Fact check - pre-crash manoeuvres (IAM Motoring Trust, 2007)**

Overtaking was not the main cause of fatalities as suggested by the MP (figure 5.13).

Robert Goodwill (Conservative) made a neutral statement on speeding and the rejection by Government to a proposal for a new national speed limit of 50mph on rural roads. It is not

clear whether he approves or not. The final reference is from the Labour Minister, Paul Clark who identifies the increased risk when driving on rural roads:

*“To improve safety on rural roads, which see some 60% of all road deaths but only 42% of traffic, we propose to publish maps every year highlighting the main roads with the poorest safety records so that highway authorities can take action with their partners to tackle those routes. We will also encourage them to reduce speed limits on rural single carriageways ... from the current 60mph limit. The level of danger on these roads varies widely ... we want authorities to reduce speed limits on the roads that have the most crashes” (Hansard HC. Deb., 2 July 2009, c.582).*

There are no further references from July 2009 until May 2011, a period in which there was a general election resulting in a new Coalition Government.

#### **5.4.3.2 Analysis 2004 to May 2010**

The absence of discourse between 2003 and 2008 is important. Earlier though limited policy attention had stopped and been replaced with inattention and inaction. Framing Britain as having the *safest roads in Europe*, combined with further reductions in rural road deaths were possible contributors of inaction and a perception that the policy problem did not warrant attention. Policy issues receive attention, or not, based on how they are framed by those involved with policymaking. The critical framing used by the TC of a failure to progress road safety was not the dominant narrative and the Government’s *best in Europe* framing, with declining numbers of death influenced the lack of discourse and policy action. Explanations for the reductions in fatalities was not offered in the documents evaluated.

Policies are solutions or ideas which can be proposed from many different sources and can be relatively independent of the problem stream. The absence of discourse, where the issues were not given attention is consistent with Kingdon’s (1995) MSM where he argues that the development of policy solutions take time. Over this later period rural road deaths continued to reduce within a context of falling overall numbers, but rural road deaths remained disproportionately higher. There was an absence of pressure from policy entrepreneurs and the ideas were not advanced: rural road safety lacked visibility.

The TC report was critical, which is obvious from the title: ***Ending the scandal of complacency*** (TC, 2008). Whilst it acknowledged the reduction in overall casualty numbers it described the scale of the issue and was critical of delay. The report identified a number of areas, including rural road safety where: “progress with tackling these accidents has been disappointing” (TC, 2008, para.56). It did refer to problems with rural road design and traffic volumes but fell short of making recommendations and there was dissonance between the strong language used by the TC and the lack of policy solutions suggested. It is not clear why this is the case and may have been due to a dearth of evidence or a lack of interest from the TC.

The problem was clearly recognised in a number of interventions and there are further criticisms of the lack of progress, but there was little evidence of policy change. The Minister distanced the Government from accountability by identifying dangerous roads as the responsibility of local authorities, and the role that dangerous or speeding drivers had (Hansard HC. Deb., 2 July 2009, c.582). Whilst there was some attention there was only minimal engagement and the policy solutions offered appeared politically unacceptable. Central government rely on the responsibilities which lie with local authorities to address speed limits, which given the local competence this may be appropriate, but there may be a degree of depoliticisation in shifting all responsibility away from central government and not recognising a role.

Policy ideas can come from anywhere and the consultation paper (DfT, 2009) appears to have progressed independently of Parliamentary processes. There was no reference or obvious response to the last critical report from the TC or the criticisms from previous discourse, or the eight years since the last Government intervention. Policy solutions can take considerable time to be accepted and often do not follow logical paths. Kingdon (1995) describes a policy *primeval soup* where ideas can evolve and whirl around. It is difficult to identify the origins of this attention from Government in identifying the issues and suggesting policy solutions, indicating political will and leadership to progress rural road safety, as political ownership was previously absent. The evidence from this period has some contradictions as there was both evidence of delay, as well as policy recognition and the availability of policy solutions, but largely, the streams did not converge, and the politics of rural road safety resulted in inaction.

#### **5.4.4 Results and analysis: May 2010 to May 2015 (Coalition)**

##### **5.4.4.1 Results: May 2010 to May 2015**

The Coalition Government introduces its first policy: *Strategic framework for road safety* (DfT, 2011) but despite rural deaths accounting for 66%, there is no reference to rural road safety. In 2013, Stephen Phillips (Conservative) raises the willingness of local authorities to prioritise reducing speed limits on rural roads. He sets out his argument based on the speed and crash relationship, including the risk of death, based on the speed of the vehicle. In response the Minister, Stephen Hammond, agrees road safety, and particularly on rural roads is a priority. He notes the disproportionate risk on rural roads compared to urban roads and points out that Britain is a world leader in road safety. The main thrust of his response is on localism, confirming the view that local authorities are best placed to determine the speed limit:

*“It is well known that a byword of this Government is our belief in localism. Therefore ... local authorities should have the freedom to make their own decisions*

*about road safety, according to their own local needs, and to develop local solutions” (Hansard HC Deb., 9 January 2013, c.439).*

He argues that local authorities have the ability to change speed limits, and could do so combined with publicity, physical infrastructure, and enforcement by the local police. He states the Government do not believe that speed cameras should be used as the default solution in reducing crashes (Hansard, HC Deb., 9 January 2013, c.440). The Minister quotes 2011 casualty statistics for rural roads, accounting for 66% of road deaths and 82% of car occupant deaths, but under 45% of the distance travelled and concludes:

*“Local authorities have the freedom to make their own decisions so that they develop solutions most appropriate for their local needs. The Government do not intend to make our guidance on setting speed limits mandatory ... We expect local authorities to use and follow the guidance in determining the circumstances for setting local speed limits” (Hansard, HC Deb., 9 January 2013, c.442).*

He does mention the intention to issue revised guidance to local authorities on the setting of speed limits, including on rural roads, but does not accept the need for Government action. There were no further references from January 2013 until December 2015.

#### **5.4.4.2 Analysis: May 2010 to May 2015**

It is possible the consequences of the UK and global financial crash and the general election were likely contributory factors for the absence of discourse on rural road safety between 2010 and 2015. The first opportunity to evaluate the approach from the Coalition Government was the 2011 policy document (DfT, 2011), but there were no references to rural roads even though deaths accounted for 66% of all road deaths at that time. There was a much stronger emphasis of localism and the approach enabling local government to have control of delivering road safety improvements was not new, as this was the same approach adopted by previous Governments. But there was a marked shift towards a much lighter touch towards national policy, described as having less “bureaucracy, targets and regulation” (DfT, 2011, p.5). The result was less direction and national leadership, and a weaker approach to accountability than previously, including not adopting new targets. The effectiveness of this approach was challenged (Hansard HC Deb., 9 January 2013) but calls for action were rejected. This was further evidence of a gap between the commitment to respond nationally, with a repeat of the *world leader* framing, and a reliance on devolved governance, shifting responsibility to local authorities. There was an absence of political appetite to address the disproportionate risk of death on rural roads in local and national settings and a failure of all three streams to develop.

## 5.4.5 Results and analysis: May 2015 to December 2021 (Conservative)

### 5.4.5.1 Results: May 2015 to December 2021

The Conservative Government's first policy document: *Working together to build a safer road system* (DfT, 2015) does not mention the disproportionate risk to users of rural roads. It did set a policy direction for road safety more widely as "a matter of national importance" (DfT, 2015, p.4), but in terms of rural road safety there is no policy. There are two very minor references to rural road safety, but this lack of discourse is evidence of the lack of priority given.

Rural road safety is raised in the 2018 rural crime debate. Matt Worman (Conservative) describes the impact on victims and the cost to the police (Hansard HC Deb., 6 June 2018, c.396), and Sue Hayman (Labour) shares her concern on the "serious issue" of rural road safety, particularly in villages (Hansard HC Deb., 6 June 2018, c.406). The main contribution is from Susan Elan Jones (Labour) who raises the problem of speeding on rural roads:

*"Many of us are very concerned about the extent of speeding now. We need a major clampdown on speeding and, yes, a justice system that is prepared to be serious in its use of driving bans something that is not happening to the right degree today" (Hansard HC Deb., 6 June 2018, c.389).*

She calls for proper speeding bans, additional funding for roads policing, and suggests it is "time we took the issue of speeding seriously" (Hansard HC Deb., 6 June 2018, c.390). A Minister, David Rutley, responds:

*"It is true that we have some of the safest roads in the world, but we need to do more, and we need to innovate to find ways to reduce speed on these often very difficult roads. We found ways to do that on one of the most notorious roads, the Cat and Fiddle road [Figure 5.14]... where we significantly reduced traffic accidents as a result" (Hansard HC Deb., 6 June 2018, c.411).*

#### **Fact check: A537 (cat and fiddle road)**

The A537, known as the widow maker, saw an increase, not a decrease, in KSI between 2002 and 2006 (35) and 2007 and 2011 (44). This road was selected as one of the most dangerous roads and granted capital funding in 2018. The scheme was due to be completed in 2021 (RAC Foundation, 2018), after the date of this speech.

**Figure 5.14: Fact check for A537 [cat and fiddle] (Dangerous roads, Nd.)**

The Minister is incorrect that casualties had "significantly reduced" as they had increased, and the solution was a capital scheme due to be completed after this answer was given.

The final discourse is an adjournment debate by Susan Elan Jones on excessive speeding and driving bans, where there are references to the risk of driving on rural roads:

*"The need for tougher action to tackle speeding offences; and the need to explore how technology can be used to improve road safety and reduce the number of unnecessary deaths" (Hansard HC Deb., 23 May 2019, c.909).*

The focus of her speech is on speeding which she describes as one of the most serious problems accounting for 20% of all fatal crashes. She calls for an increase in road's policing, particularly on rural roads, questions the 60mph speed limit on rural single carriageways and notes the different view the public have to speeding as compared to drink driving. She suggests this perception needs to change:

*“Unfortunately, the public has not yet accepted the danger caused by speeding drivers in the same way as the danger caused by drink-drivers” (c.910).*

The Conservative Minister, Nusrat Ghani responds that road safety is:

*“A top priority for the Government. Road deaths are a tragedy for all affected, and injuries can cause suffering and life-changing misfortune. Much of that harm is avoidable, and it is not an inevitable consequence of road transport. All available research shows a link between excessive speed and the risk of collisions. Increased compliance with speed limits, as part of a wider package of road safety measures, will play a significant role in reducing the number of collisions on our roads (c.913).*

She strongly supports the need for improvements and accepts there is an issue, but deflects all responsibility away from Government (c.914). Concerning police enforcement:

*“The enforcement of speed limits is an operational matter for the police. Policing ... is divided into territorial forces, with the Westminster Government setting policing policy. It is for chief police officers to decide how to prioritise enforcement in accordance with their local priorities and demand” (c.914).*

She continues with the same approach in responding to the call for a review of driving offences and driving bans, the Minister states that sentencing:

*“Is a matter for our independent courts and is based on the facts of each case. A driving ban, the length of which is at the discretion of the judge” (c.915).*

In response to concerns about the national speed limit, she welcomes a focus on speeding:

*“The Government announced their intention to publish the refreshed road safety statement and the two-year road safety action plan later this year, to address four priority user groups: young people, rural road users, motorcyclists, and older vulnerable users” (c.915).*

There was no acknowledgement of a policy problem at the national level, and so no policy solutions are offered for any of the concerns raised, and the Minister concludes:

*“I emphasise that we are determined to improve safety on our roads for all road users, and to see to it that offenders receive the justice that they deserve” (c.916).*

Her final comment was that she was sure the new Minister would take this issue seriously.

**The road safety statement 2019: a lifetime of road safety** (DfT, 2019c) is a well-structured and focused policy document. It contains a section on rural road safety which is identified as one of four priorities for Government. It identifies the problem on rural roads:

*“The highest number of fatalities on our roads occur on rural roads, particularly among young car drivers aged 17-24. These roads carry 44% of all traffic but are where 33% of all casualties and 60% of all fatalities occur” (DfT, 2019c, p.46).*

The report points to two areas of ongoing work, having previously identified rural road risk and the danger presented by twisting and unpredictable configuration. First, an existing policy solution is capital funding for the top fifty most dangerous roads and second, a campaign targeted at rural roads, particularly on young drivers. It identifies the lack of specialist information and knowledge about rural roads, rural road users, and the factors which influence the level of risk of death or injury, and proposes a working group: Rural Road Users Advisory Panel. Preliminary areas of work for the group are identified as:

- easier and quicker local improvements on country roads and to traffic signs
- rural speeding and speed limits
- rural safety enforcement.

In March 2021, this new group had not been established. Following a request for information, the DfT stated that the work on establishing the group was planned, but had been delayed due to the global pandemic. Work was planned to begin from March 2021 (DfT, 2021a).

Subsequently the DfT decided not to establish this group, and to review how best to progress rural road safety in the context of wider policy development or through the work of the proposed Road Safety Investigation Branch.

#### **5.4.5.2 Analysis: May 2015 to December 2021**

The 2015 statement identified the disproportionate risk of death from travelling on rural roads but offered no narrative of the problem or policy solutions. In contrast, the 2019 statement identified rural road safety as one of four Government priorities, giving high profile attention, after a long period of inattention and delay. The level of debate in the HoC was limited and conducted to by a small number of backbench MPs who focused on speeding, speed management, enforcement, and sentencing (Hansard HC Deb., 23 May 2019). The approach from the Government follows a similar pattern as previously seen. The policy issues were identified within a framing of Britain having some of the safest roads in the world, and an acknowledgement of the consequences of road death or serious injury, followed by no new policy solutions. The answer was that accountability was with local organisations (devolved government, the police, the judiciary, or drivers) and that no further action was needed at the national level. For example, the Minister gave no specific answers in the adjournment debate and deflected accountability away from central government which was governmental depoliticisation. There was little evidence of any of the three streams developing despite the 2019 document identifying rural road safety as a policy problem, and it was crowded out by competing policy areas.

## 5.5 Interview results

The approach to conducting interviews is set out in 3.4.1 and the single question on rural road safety is: *there is a disproportionate risk of driving on rural roads which accounts for 60% of fatal crashes: why does rural road safety attract little attention in Parliament?* (11). Thirty five interviews were conducted, and twelve interviewees declined to answer this question, citing limited knowledge or experience. The interview data is presented within themes developed from the literature search (chapter 2) and the findings from the interviews.

### 5.5.1 Invisible problem?

There was little evidence of understanding rural road safety, in contrast to urban roads. Whilst there was a small minority of interviewees from the NGO and academic groups with knowledge of rural roads, the level of knowledge or interest was limited. Thirty four percent of interviewees selected not to engage with the rural road safety question. As evidence, data on the limited knowledge of the risk of death on rural roads and the poorly understood definition of what constitutes a rural road are explored below:

**Knowledge of the risk of death on rural roads was limited:** The interview question includes information on the disproportionate risk of death on rural roads and despite this, it was clear there was a lack of awareness or knowledge about these risks. The main theme was a deficit in the knowledge and experience, both from the interviewees themselves and it was suggested this was the case in the wider public. The relative risk of traveling on rural roads, with examples of vulnerable road users and the disproportionate risk of death, and the perceived risk between different road types, does feature in the data.

A strong theme was the low profile (from the public and politically), low priority, and limited discourse. The greater focus and higher visibility on other road types, it was suggested, was on the motorway network, the strategic road network, or urban roads:

*“Rural roads are for me a very significant issue because we focus a lot of our policy attention on the strategic road network and on the faster roads” (PA N2).*

It was suggested the way the media report road danger compounded this view, with motorway travel, particularly smart motorways, framed as dangerous whilst other roads safer: an inverse relationship between the level of concern and the level of death or serious injury:

*“There is an assumption by drivers, since I’m not on a motorway, I’m safer and we know that’s not the case. Arguably, motorway driving is far safer than driving along a country road” (PA L7, 2021).*

This interviewee commented on the lack of focus on rural roads in the public discourse, the consequence of which masks the risks of driving on rural roads:

*"We focus a lot of our policy attention on the strategic road network, on the faster roads. And that's right, and there's a lot of commentary around smart motorways and you get a death on a motorway and it's all over the press and it's talked about and there are inquiries. But the deaths that we experience ... are on the rural roads. That's where people die" (PA N1).*

The main theme was poor understanding or awareness of the risk of driving on rural roads, but there was knowledge from a minority of interviewees. These responses include examples of speed and infrastructure, including the configuration of rural roads as a contributing factor in the level of risk, and the behaviour of those using the roads:

*"It is the two things that make rural roads dangerous. One is they have bends in them. And the other is people drive as if they don't" (NGO N3).*

Commenting on experience of driving on rural roads more frequently during the pandemic:

*"I have encountered people coming towards me on quiet narrow rural roads who patently thought they owned them and that nobody else would be there, otherwise why would I be in a bush ... trying to get out of their way? And the reason that they're dangerous is that people appear to think ... they see the white sign with the black stripe, and they think you can do 60 down here. No, what the sign meant was you can't possibly do more than 60, but within that, drive at a sensible speed recognising that you can't see around the corner because none of us can ... there could be your daughter on a bicycle, your son on a horse, or a bloke driving a tractor with a trailer that's as wide as the lane" (NGO N1, 2021).*

The lack of personal confidence of driving on rural roads was raised:

*"Every time I drive on a rural road, I can't believe the speed limit is really 60. This is nuts, it terrifies me: the thought of cycling on rural roads, ugh!" (Politician N3).*

The interview data is informative, as discussed above, but the number of interviewees who chose not to answer the question is important. Combined there was a strong theme that there was a poor level of understanding of rural roads.

**Poor understanding of the definition of a rural road:** This was a theme from those who declined as well as those who answered the rural roads question. Those who declined, cited limited or no experience, felt more comfortable discussing urban roads and / or did not know the definition. For the majority of those who engaged, there was a high degree of ignorance of the definition, and again, a preference to discuss urban roads. For those with knowledge, there was concern the definition was vague as it included all roads in population areas less than 10,000 people; and whilst the definition question wasn't asked, few demonstrated knowledge of the definition. Two interviewees with significant experience suggest:

*"People aren't even quite sure what the definition of a [rural] road is. Is it as a dual carriageway, a strategic road network road, or is it a little windy country lane?" (NGO N2). And: "We use the term rural roads to mean practically anything that isn't the motorway or Oxford Street" (NGO N3).*

This interviewee suggested the consequence of how policy was designed and implemented was impacted by the rural road definition:

*“One of the biggest problems is that when setting things like speed limits, what has been done nationally is to set speed limits based on perfect conditions. The idea that if it's a rural road and it's not a dual carriageway, 60 mile an hour is an appropriate limit” (NGO N7, 2021).*

Whilst there was poor knowledge on the precise definition, there was consensus that this lack of awareness and understanding of the current definition was unhelpful. Work from the 2000s to develop a rural roads speed hierarchy was referenced as an effective way of more clearly designating the types of roads, their capabilities, and the appropriate speed, again suggesting the current definition was not fit for purpose (Academic 3). Whilst there was some evidence on the knowledge of the risks associated with travelling on rural roads, the dominant theme was a lack of awareness and knowledge of these risks and policy ideas. There was no reference of any networks or coalitions, and policy entrepreneurs prioritised other aspects of road safety, with urban roads referenced most frequently. The interviewees suggested the lack of visibility was replicated more widely, both with politicians and the public.

### **5.5.2 Limited public demand for change**

There was evidence of limited demand for change from the public as described by all interview groups. For example, all politicians commented that rural road safety did not appear in their post bags, and this theme was replicated within the policy actor group. This is connected with the first theme suggesting it to be an invisible problem. Defining any policy problem and the associated level of discourse is important in developing a clear policy agenda and progressing policy action. There were few specific examples of where there was demand for change, and the lack of visibility and concern led directly to the lack of demand for change.

The responsibility of local authorities to review speed limits on rural roads and the lack of public demand for reductions was referenced from a national and local perspective:

*“Giving local authorities responsibility ... is not working because they don't have the money and won't take the hard political decisions. And haven't got the money to do infrastructure and putting speed cameras is seen as politically unacceptable in many cases, so they're stuck. It does need a national initiative” (NGO N2).*

An example from a local policy actor:

*“There's a political dimension to it and I just think it's issues around road safety or just a lot more, I think probably visibility ... it's felt more intensively in urban areas ... There can be some horrendous casualties, and accidents happen on rural roads, and I think probably the other thing is the frequency of those as well. You probably receive these more frequently ... in urban areas ... but the consequences are just as harmful or even worse sometimes in rural areas” (PA L4).*

The lack of priority given to rural roads, when compared to urban roads is cited, for example:

*“We don't spend a lot of our time on [rural roads], we spend more of our time on dealing with residential issues, in built up areas of antisocial behaviour, it's still casualty led [by] data and I dare say if one of those roads did pop up on my radar, we would have a look at it” (PA L3, 2021).*

An explanation of the lack of discourse on rural roads was offered, with the assertion that many of those involved were young drivers and their passengers, and so the age of the driver was used to describe the crash, rather than the type of road.

*“Young people dying in cars is pretty emotive and they might be dying in cars on rural roads. But the issue will be the media go with the kind of emotional issue and not the rural road. It will be that they were a young person who died in a car. So I guess it's easier to focus on young people” (PA N3).*

The data was strong in suggesting a lack of awareness or knowledge of rural road safety leading to limited demand for change from the public or politicians, as described by all interview groups, but there are few precise examples cited.

### 5.5.3 Inaccessible or controversial policy solutions

**The road safety statement 2019** (DfT, 2019c) identifies the lack of specialist information and knowledge about rural road safety as a problem in developing policy solutions. This view, in part, appears in the interview data, but there are some interesting contradictions. This section considers a perceived lack of knowledge about available solutions and also that those ideas which are known are considered unpopular or controversial.

**Perceived lack of knowledge of solutions:** Aligned with the findings on rural road safety as an invisible problem (5.5.1) and limited public demand for change (5.5.2), the lack of immediately available and acceptable policy solutions, and the high degree of complexity was apparent in all interview groups. On a lack of knowledge, for example, it was suggested as a problem:

*“People don't know what to do about it. I think that's the critical thing. What do we do about rural roads?” (Academic 4). Or: “The reason, I think is because we don't know what to do ... Instead of a white disc with a black stripe on it, what we could do at the start of every genuine rural road is put a sign up that says don't be such a f\*\*g idiot, slow down. It's probably what we should do” (NGO N3).*

On complexity:

*“It might be because it's just such an enormous problem to tackle” (NGO N5). Or: “I guess the problem is a lot more difficult to solve” (PA N3).*

The lack of simplicity was emphasised by the following interviewee who went on to advocate for a data driven and *Safe System* approach:

*“There's no simple answers and ... the thing with the young drivers and rural roads, there's no single solution, and it's what suite of solutions are appropriate at what point in time for what groups. Who are the ones that we need to address as a priority, and I think this is part of the problem” (PA N5).*

The discourse included frequent references to speed limits and addressing speeding, and the need for investment on infrastructure, but there was a strong theme that solutions were complicated or unknown. Lynam (2007) is one example of literature which disputes these views. This was a contradictory finding as on the one hand speed management and adapting

the roads themselves were suggested as solutions, but due to factors such as the length of rural roads and the dispersed nature of crashes, solutions were difficult to secure. An example:

*“It's not simple. And that's why it doesn't get as much attention because it's more about a more fundamental approach to transport” (NGO N1).*

There was evidence suggesting rural road safety was seen as too complicated and so resulted in inaction. Solutions were available but seen as unpopular or controversial. These factors regularly apply to other areas of policy which manage to address them, but there was no coalescing around any particular solution(s) as they floated in Kingdon's (1995) policy soup.

**Unpopular or controversial policy solutions:** There were many references to potential policy solutions relating to speed reduction, driver restrictions, or the investment in, and cost of infrastructure. In exploring how these solutions could be implemented with the interviewees, there was a strong view politicians were reluctant to take action (see Gössling, 2017 for a German study). There was a strong belief that solutions restricting drivers would be unpopular or controversial and so were not taken forward. The discourse on the abandoned rural roads hierarchy from the 2000s and discourse about speed management were used as examples.

Reflecting on the rural roads hierarchy from the 2000s and the influence on politicians (this interviewee was involved with the hierarchy):

*“The national speed limit for the rural road network should be 50 unless the roads conformed to a higher road safety standard ... They could qualify for 60 if they improved the 50 mile an hour road ... The Secretary of State ... he'd been got at by the car lobby and he decided that it was going to cost too much in time to reduce the speed limit from 60 to 50” (Academic 3).*

She went on to suggest that the modelling which showed reduced travel times was heavily weighted towards productivity. The difficulties with restrictive solutions was evident:

*“The policy intervention that probably has the biggest bang for its buck in terms of casualty reduction rates would be to change the default speed limit down from 60 on single carriageway 'A' roads to an assumed 50 and way more enforcement. I think that will be seen as quite politically unpopular” (NGO N2).* Or:

*“Sometimes people are concerned to clamp down too hard on drivers because they don't want to be perceived as anti-driver ... but I can't help thinking that there could be more people calling it out if it was seen as advantageous politically across all parties, across all areas” (PA N4, 2021).*

Whilst only a small number of quotes are used, this was a strong theme from all interview groups and suggests why evidence based solutions are not adopted. There was a lack of visibility, and there were strong objections to calls for a reduced national speed limit, resulting in a mismatch in power between the two positions. The strong imbalance in the politics stream between coalitions is a strong finding in the Swedish work from Svennson et al. (2014).

### 5.5.4 Lack of political will

This was a clear theme suggesting a lack of political will for change, and whilst the role of policy entrepreneurs did not feature strongly, the criticism of political leadership was influential in the lack of political will. Two areas are considered: freedom vs safety, and dispersed accountability.

**Freedom vs safety:** There was a debate about the balance between the level of restrictions that could be tolerated or ensuring freedom through minimum driver restrictions. It was suggested there was a greater need for unrestricted mobility in rural communities because of the rural geography, the dominance of private transport and weaker public transport. The next quote is typical, by combining the low priority afforded to rural road safety, the lack of availability of public transport and young drivers, resulted in little progress:

*“Young people, 17-18 are driving cars when potentially young people in cities ... don't get the driving license until 25 ... because the public transport is good enough. So we as legislators and planners should absolutely factor in road deaths when we're talking about public transport” (Politician L2, 2021).*

An explanation for the reluctance to introduce restrictions was the need to maintain mobility:

*“There is even more pressure to worry about freedoms in rural communities because it's everyone in a rural community who will be impacted by whatever you do. It's even more likely to be a personal freedom issue for rural communities than it is for a specific group of people who live in all kinds of places” (Academic 2).*

A further theme relating to the ability of young drivers to travel, and the reluctance to restrict their access and freedom:

*“There is an acceptance in some rural communities that young drivers need to be out in a car because of work or whatever. So, it's the norm” (PA L7).*

This politician is unable to explain the lack of attention or focus:

*“It's quite surprising to me really, that it isn't discussed more. And yet some of those who have the most libertarian attitudes in relation to driving on rural roads seem to be those who represent rural constituencies” (Politician N4).*

The discourse is influenced by the balance between safety and freedom, and the role that restrictions would have in improving rural road safety. Potential policy solutions have not been implemented for fear of controversy and the freedom arguments dominate.

**Depoliticisation:** This theme focused on the relationship between national and local government. Local authorities have the power to reduce speed limits, but not the resources or political will to make changes. National governments have devolved responsibility to locally accountable politicians and rely on this responsibility being held at a devolved level of governance. Local politicians suggest the lack of funding and guidance from national Government was the cause of little progress or inaction. For example:

*“There has been politically a lack of a guidance to them [local authorities] on what the hell to do about rural roads and so that pervades the academic evidence and some of the policy thinkers, particularly on rural areas ... We do know you get high levels of deaths and serious injuries, not least by young drivers, but not young drivers alone, but otherwise it's left in the wilderness” (Academic 4).*

Where responsibility was held, and the corresponding governance structures were themes which particularly focused on the ability or willingness to reduce speed limits, with a circular blame approach resulting in inaction. A strong view was that national policy seeks improvements in all road types, but urban and strategic roads network (SRN) were prioritised for funding, and so national funding priorities direct local authority priorities:

*“It's largely the distribution of money. I suspect more money goes into urban areas than it does to rural areas” (Academic 5, 2021).*

There was discourse on the relative benefits of the devolved responsibility for managing speed limits with strong support for the need to maintain local responsibility, but with access to resources, national guidance, and direction:

*“The problem we have is a rural road has to be taken on its own merit ... you need to understand the geographical makeup of the road to start making those decisions. Should Whitehall be telling us what all rural road speeds should be at? I'm not sure that's necessary” (PA L3).*

Governance of road management was used to illustrate the connection between accountability, funding and the low priority given to rural roads:

*“By getting rid of [rural] roads, they [National Highways] were helping manage their networks safety. But of course, morally what they were doing is utterly repugnant, because what ... they said: we've got these really sh\*t roads, [and] all the money ... We're going to give these roads that are really not very good to local authorities that have no money, so we've offloaded the problem” (Academic 2).*

The lack of profile and political will was a strong finding, where the policy problem was rarely recognised and so not progressed: some interviewees described a lack of leadership. This was attributed to a lack of knowledge, a lack of awareness, and depoliticisation. The controversial nature and cost of potential policy solutions was relevant. In discourse on what action could be taken, there was an argument the responsibility lies with local authorities, and central government offer limited resources, and no guidance, and whilst the argument continued, there was limited action. Local authority interviewees suggested depoliticisation, whilst others pointed to where devolved responsibility were held. Rural road risk was recognised as an issue, but all main actors describe inaction or inadequate effort. The focus was on the negative aspects of policy ideas: cost, unpopular or complex, and not the ability to save lives and reduce serious injury: Elvik (2002) describes the conflict between economic benefits versus individual benefits and whilst his study does not relate to rural roads, it is relevant.

## 5.6 Rural road safety conclusion

Rural road safety is not seen as a sufficiently important issue to warrant policy action and has been crowded out by competing policy areas (OECD, 1999). There were short periods when the problem was recognised, the profile raised, and politicians were more attentive. For example: the rural roads speed hierarchy discourse in the early 2000s; the demonstration sites research which reported in 2010; and the 2019 policy statement which identified rural roads as a priority, together with the capital funding for addressing the top fifty most dangerous roads (see RAC Foundation, 2017). But these examples of discourse do not constitute strong progress towards policy development as there was limited policy action, and the policy solution chosen in the 2010's was capital investment in a limited number of road schemes. Policy issues receive attention based on how they are defined. This involves a process of issue framing, activity, interest by policy entrepreneurs, and competition to choose policy problems over others (Kingdon, 1995). Rural road safety, as with many policy areas can be messy and complex. There was a failure in all three streams to elevate the numbers of those killed or seriously injured on rural roads to be identified as a policy problem important enough to attract attention from the public and politicians: an invisible policy problem.

### 5.6.1 Problem stream

It is acknowledged that rural roads account for the highest number of deaths on Britain's roads, particularly among young, male car drivers, and their passengers. These roads carry an average of 44% of all traffic but are where an average of 60% of all road deaths occur (DfT, 2020a). Despite the scale of this problem, there was limited public or media interest in addressing the issue, there was an inverted perception of which roads were most risky, with media attention in the 2010's focused on smart motorways, and politicians did not prioritise rural road safety. This can be attributed, in part, to the difficulty in setting a clear agenda. There was ignorance of the rural road definition and not framing it as a problem, and attention focused on strategic, motorway and urban road networks, with rural roads losing out.

Having a clear policy problem and agenda is important. Where there is a lack of information, imprecision, or ambiguity, this can cause uncertainty leading to inaction as politicians are not clear what the problem is, or what policy solutions are available, and so, policy windows remain closed. This was the case for rural road safety as the perceived lack of knowledge and the poorly understood nonspecific technical definition led to an invisible policy problem. However, there is some available and consistent evidence in the literature suggesting policy solutions. There was a lack of demand from the public for action, or knowledge of rural roads from politicians, policy actors and academics. There was also evidence of venue shifting where

national organisations suggest that rural roads are the responsibility of local organisations. Local organisations accept they have some responsibility but call for resources and guidance from government (Lieder, 2018), and inadequate capital funding for improving unsafe roads was identified. So, even if there had been a recognition of the problem, the problem stream did not develop to consider legitimate policy solutions.

### 5.6.2 Policy stream

Strongly positioning policy issues to compete with other problems and raising them to the top of the policy agenda is a major accomplishment (Kingdon, 1995). This can be achieved by demonstrating well thought out solutions already exists. The apparent absence of clear or acceptable policy solutions on rural roads, around which networks of actors cluster was problematic. Speed management was a major theme and Yao, Carsten and Hibberd (2020) concentrate on the need for speed restrictions to be credible and as speed management had been controversial, policy actors appeared not have focused on new speed limits being credible. A perception of limited specialist knowledge and research in this area, together with a framing that presents potential solutions as complicated and expensive detract from the progress of policy solutions and the identification of resources (Belin and Tillgren, 2013). This framing was a major theme by the Government in 2019 which set out to prioritise rural roads:

*“There is still a lack of information about rural roads, rural road users and the factors that put them at risk of death or injury. This requires us to develop specialist expertise and knowledge” (DfT, 2019c, p47).*

The literature review demonstrated there were potential policy solutions available in infrastructure, speed management, education, and enforcement (OECD, 1999; Hamilton and Kennedy, 2005; Morling, 2015). This is reinforced by some interviewees. But the lack of profile and priority, and the limited literature compounds the view from the DfT and elsewhere, that there was insufficient knowledge and evidence available to address rural road safety. The disproportionate numbers of deaths on rural roads had been a recognised issue for many years, and it is worthy of note that the DfT suggest there was a lack of evidence, but they have not commissioned research to fill the knowledge gap.

An alternative view is that STATS19 data provides the detail of all rural road crashes and the factors involved, and the problem was not a lack of information, but that the available policy solutions which remain unpopular or unaffordable. The discourse on the abandoned rural roads hierarchy from the 2000s which was initially viewed as an acceptable policy solution, but over time became viewed as politically unpopular and uneconomic, is illustrative of the challenges made against potential solutions.

### 5.6.3 Politics stream

Rural road safety has not attracted sufficient political will or support (Lynam, 2007; IAM Motoring Trust, 2007) to ladle it out of the policy soup. The attention and investment has been on urban roads (Academic 5), and rural road safety had “taken the back seat” (OECD, 1999). The limited engagement and knowledge from interviewees reinforces this perception. This research found three main areas in the politics stream:

**Depoliticisation:** The accountability for the management of British roads lies with many organisations at different levels and types of government. Wood and Flinders (2014) offer a depoliticisation framework in which to analyse deflecting accountability for policy, and political attempts to transfer responsibility. Over time, the approach to infrastructure funding and proposals to reduce the national speed limit on ‘A’ road single carriageways illustrated what are overly complex governance structures or systems that enable a ‘pass the parcel’ approach to resolving problems, leading to depoliticization of the problem. Kingdon’s work as cited by John describes how organisations can “try to move or dump problems” (2012, p159) and this is cited (for example, Academic 2). National governments from both parties have, over time, encouraged local authorities to address speed limits but declined to reduce national speed limits, offer detailed guidelines, or provide appropriate resources. It was suggested local authorities lack the resources and political will to reduce speed limits on rural roads and have used political capital to introduce 20mph limits. Nagler and Ward (2016), in a US study suggest that greater social capital is used on urban roads, with a greater protective effect, than on rural roads. There was evidence that national governments have used dispersed accountability through to the police and judiciary as ways to deflect national accountability. Also, there was evidence of victim or driver blaming that was suggestive of attempts to shift the responsibility for crashes from politicians to the individual driver or road user. Driver behaviour, overestimating their competence or illegal actions such as drink or drugged driving, and speeding are cited. The role played by depoliticisation in policymaking was compounded by limited local and national strategies or plans which prioritised rural safety.

The changing relationship between national and local accountability with implementing policy, with a significant further shift towards localism in 2011, is part of the discourse. This may be, when combined with the reductions to local authority funding, why rural road safety was not advanced as a priority at either level of governance (see Lieder, 2018, on effective local and national relationships). This confirms the lack of political priority from all levels of government and localism could have been used as a useful explanation to deflect responsibility to local authorities, and local authorities elsewhere, including to road users.

**Freedom vs safety:** Policy choices have been influenced by the balance between safety and freedom, and the role that restrictions have on improving safety, such as speed limits. There was a clear connection with young driver risk in this area (chapter 6) with a greater emphasis on the dominance of private mobility due to the weaker provisions to public transport. Potential policy solutions such as technology, GDL or the reduction of the national speed limit on 'A' road single carriageways have not been implemented for fear of controversy, and it was suggested that the freedom argument dominated. Available policy solutions were inaccessible as politicians fear unpopularity for implementing policy solutions seen as overly restrictive. The lack of visible public demand for change contributed to the lack of policy action (Clegg-Smith et al., 2014) and this was the case from both Conservative and Labour Governments.

**Lack of political will:** Rural road safety attracted limited attention from politicians, policy actors and academics. The perceived lack of knowledge, the lack of profile and a perception the road safety problem was on 'other' roads influenced the awareness and willingness of politicians to act. Potential policy solutions were seen as unpalatable, "politically unpopular" (PA N2), "perceived as anti-driver" (PA N4, 2021), or too costly. Politicians do not have time to devote to detailed policy work, so cancelling plans from 2019 to establish a group to prioritise rural road safety was illustrative of low political will or priority (NGO N3). It would have enabled civil servants to consult with researchers, interest groups, think tanks and other policy specialists to consider ideas and produce policy solutions, and address the Government's perceived lack of available knowledge. Limited discourse was indicative of low political will. The policy agenda is always congested, and the perceived complexity, lack of knowledge, and unpopularity, and demands for resources for potential solutions have undermined serious consideration, and contributed significantly on the lack of political will to act.

There was a failure of Government, politicians, policy actors, the media, academia, and the public to focus on rural road safety. Whilst there are no clear linear relationship between the three streams, a policy window is normally triggered by the coupling of streams through a change within a stream and with rural road safety all three streams have failed to elevate the problem or potential solutions, and it remained crowded out from developing to policy action. There were no obvious policy entrepreneurs, little awareness of a policy problem from the public or the media, and no coalition calling for change. The discourse recognised there was an issue on rural roads, but accepted inadequate activity and inaction. The policy activity, however limited, concentrated on the perception that policy solutions to address the risk of travelling on rural roads were unknown, complicated, expensive, or unpopular, which enabled politicians to avoid policy action as it remained invisible. The result was the policy window remained firmly shut.

## Chapter 6

### Case study 3:

#### The revolving door of young driver safety policy

##### 6.1 Introduction

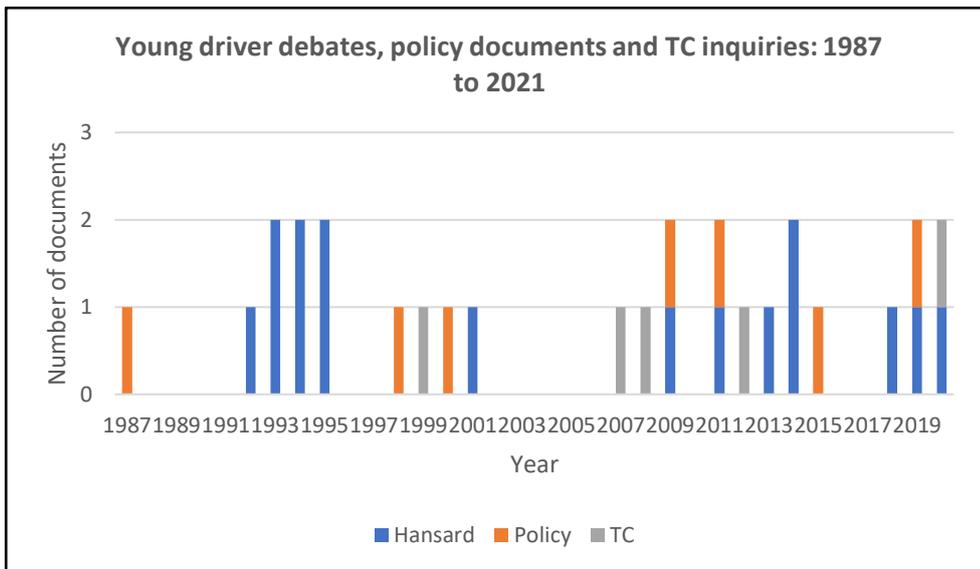
Young drivers (aged 17-24) are significantly and have consistently been over represented in injury crashes due to a complex combination of neurological, biological, and behavioural factors. Despite decades of policy discourse and periodic policy interventions which have focused primarily on learning and testing and campaigns, the problem persists, and young drivers remain disproportionately over represented in casualty data (DfT, 2022b), though the overall number continues to fall.

Young driver safety was selected for a case study as it fulfils the selection criteria (page **Error! Bookmark not defined.**). There is a clear problem due to the higher risk associated with young drivers (DfT, 2021c); young driver safety has regularly been debated by politicians over a long period of time, and there are gaps in the policy literature. Young driver safety policy offers a novel case study to analyse the policymaking process in a complex area and the GDL was selected as an evidence based (discussed in 6.3), but seemingly controversial policy solution.

GDL implementation is the responsibility of the UK national government. The arrangements in Northern Ireland are different and they have developed their own version of GDL which was due to commence in November 2021. This did not happen, and there is no available revised date for implementation. So, this case study is focused only on Britain, and excludes Northern Ireland. In Britain, there remains a debate about the efficacy of the evidence associated with policy solutions, such as GDL, and learning and testing. If GDL were selected as a policy solution, there are perceived negative impacts on social and economic activity and concern about unintended consequences. The case study seeks to understand the level of focus on young driver safety over time by critically analysing policy based discourse.

This section adds further detail to the overall methodology set out in chapter 3. The data sources for this case study are (figure 6.1):

- HoC debates on young driver safety or similar descriptions (16)
- The TC completed three inquiries on young or novice drivers in 1999, 2007 and 2021. In addition, there are two inquiries in 2008 and 2012 which include young driver safety (each has a Government response, but these have been grouped in pairs and shown as one process step (5)
- Government reports (7).



**Figure 6.1: Documents on young driver safety: 1987-2021**

Each of the Parliamentary processes were analysed in chronological order, and grouped by date and the ruling governing party (shown as blue for Conservative, red for Labour and orange for the Coalition Government). These are listed in table 6.1.

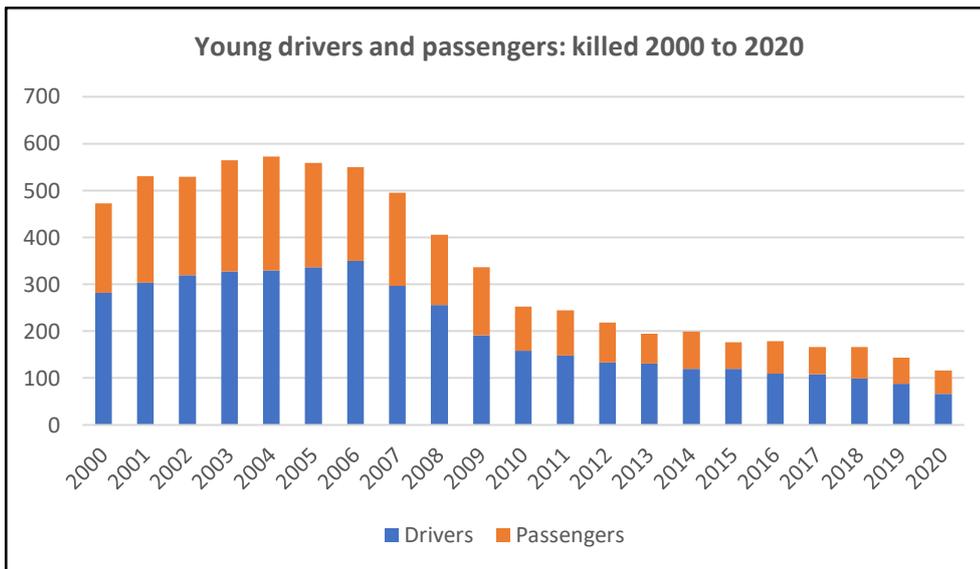
**Table 6.1: Young drivers discourse analysis documents summary 1987-2021**

Title of Parliamentary process	Source	Year. Gvt. party
<i>Road safety: next steps</i>	Government document	1987: May or July
Road safety	Hansard debate	1992: 15 May
Newly Qualified Drivers	Hansard debate	1993: 26 January
Newly Qualified Drivers Bill	Hansard debate	1993: 23 March
Newly Qualified Drivers	Hansard debate	1994: 12 April
Road safety	Hansard debate	1994: 25 Nov.
Road Traffic New Drivers	Hansard debate	1995: 3 February
Road Traffic New Drivers Bill	Hansard debate	1995: 28 April
<i>A new deal for transport: better for everyone</i>	Government document	1998
<i>Young and newly qualified drivers: standards and training</i>	Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee	1999
<i>Young &amp; newly qualified drivers: Government's response</i>	Environment, Transport and Regional Affairs Committee	2000
<i>Tomorrow's roads: safer for everyone</i>	Government document	2000
Newly Qualified Drivers	Hansard debate	2001: 19 October
<i>Novice drivers</i>	Transport Committee	2007: July
<i>Novice drivers: Government response</i>	Transport Committee	2007: October
<i>Ending the scandal of complacency: road safety beyond 2010</i>	Transport Committee	2008: October
<i>Ending the scandal of complacency: road safety: Government response</i>	Transport Committee	2009: Jan. and July

<i>A safer way: consultation on making Britain's roads the safest in the world</i>	Government document	2009: April
Road safety	Hansard debate	2009: 2 July
<i>Strategic framework for road safety</i>	Government document	2011: May
Cost of Motor Insurance	Hansard debate	2011:8 November
<i>Road safety report</i>	Transport Committee	2012: July
<i>Road safety: Government response</i>	Transport Committee	2012: October
<i>GDL Bill [points of order]</i>	Hansard debate	2013: June
Dangerous Driving	Hansard debate	2014: 27 January
Young Drivers (Safety)	Hansard debate	2014: 26 February
<i>Working together to build a safer road system. road safety statement</i>	Government document	2015: December
Road Safety	Hansard debate	2018:5 November
Excessive speeding	Hansard debate	2019: 23 May
<i>Road safety inquiry (not completed)</i>	Transport Committee	2019
<i>The road safety statement 2019: a lifetime of road safety</i>	Government document	2019: July
Topical question [young drivers]	Hansard debate	2020: 22 October
<i>Young and novice drivers report</i>	Transport Committee	2021: February
<i>Young and novice drivers: Government's response.</i>	Transport Committee	2021: May

## 6.2 The numbers are falling so where is the problem?

In Britain, the numbers of young drivers killed in road crashes continues to fall, but 17-24-year-olds who make up only 7% of licence holders (RACF, 2020) are involved in 20% of serious and fatal crash injuries (DfT, 2012b). This group are more than twice as likely to be involved in a crash as those aged 25-39 (DfT, 2022b), and deaths fell from 99 (2018), to 88 (2019) to 66 (2020) for car drivers. This downward trend also applies to the death of the passengers of young car drivers, where the numbers fell from 67 deaths (2018), 55 (2019), to 50 (2020) (DfT, 2022b). This downward direction has continued over the past 20 years, but the rate of reduction has slowed in the last decade (figure 6.2). Children and older people's casualties saw a greater reduction than the young people age group (DfT, 2022b).



**Figure 6.2: Numbers of young driver and passengers killed: 2000 to 2020 (DfT, 2021c)**

The increased risk associated with young drivers is identified in a HoC debate in 1937:

*“In view of ... accidents in which young drivers are involved, and also in view of the possibility that in many cases the young driver of 17 has not had the experience of responsibility which is really necessary?” (Hansard HC Deb., 3 May 1937, c.791).*

Road safety today is clearly very different to the last century, especially when compared to 1937, and no direct comparisons are drawn, other than to identify the long period since the first reference. Although the numbers of road crashes involving young drivers continues to decrease, young driver crashes are still a leading cause of road death (DfT, 2021c). Deaths from land transport in England and Wales are the second highest cause of death between the ages of 10 and 24 (ONS, 2014), and the young driver group continues to be disproportionately represented in crashes and so, remain at greater risk. Some argue that road death and serious injury represents a significant public health problem (Christie, 2018).

This increased level of risk has been regularly identified over the period of the research and one example is: **Road safety research report No. 87: learning to drive: the evidence** (DfT, 2008). It identifies young drivers exhibit a range of unsafe driving attitudes and behaviours, including speeding, and drink and drug driving. It finds that they are overrepresented in road crashes which result in death or injury, and in near misses (DfT, 2008). Globally, road crash injury is the eighth leading cause of death in all age groups and the highest cause of death for those aged 5 to 29. The WHO have signalled the need for a shift in the current young people’s health agenda in relation to road safety which they argue has been largely neglected (WHO, 2018).

The casualty rate per billion miles travelled for car passengers aged 17-24 is twice the rate for car passengers aged 85+ and on average, 17-24 year olds drive half as many miles as all drivers.

Young car drivers and car passengers are more likely to be injured in a road crash than older car drivers and passengers (DfT, 2021c). Twisk and Stacey (2007) in a European study, found that the crash risk of an 18 year old newly qualified driver is around six times higher than that of their parents and three times higher than a newly qualified driver aged over 35. This is important in understanding how different policy actors frame the risk to young drivers and whether it is seen as a policy problem or not.

There has been a decline in the population in this age group following an increase until 2011, and this “decreasing trend may partly explain the downwards trend in fatalities and KSIs seen” (DfT, 2019c). The demographic impact is predicted to change in future as some forecasts suggest a 25% increase by 2030 in young adults (Economist, 2021). The forecast increase, combined with the backlog of delayed driving tests (BBC, 2022) may impact on the number of young people driving on Britain’s roads and impact on the casualty statistics, but this is balanced against a decline in young people seeking driving tests (Guardian, 2021).

### **6.2.1 Why the increased risk to young drivers?**

The increased risk for young people in crash involvement is due to a number of factors, including inexperience, characteristics associated with youth, driving in risky conditions and the interaction between these three factors. Characteristics of youth include an appetite for strong sensations and excitement, sensation seeking, sometimes poor judgement and decision making, and strong peer influences (Williams, 2006; Williams et al., 2012; Hatfield et al., 2014). Poor impulse control, problems with attention, low risk awareness, ‘showing off’ and risk taking predict risky driving (Dahlen, et al., 2005; Begg & Langley, 2004; Teff and Grabowski, 2012; Fylan and Stradling, 2014; TRL, 2013).

There is evidence brain development is at a stage where controls on risk taking are not fully in place (Waller, 2003). With incomplete inhibitory systems, there is evidence of a heightened sensitivity to rewards, including the need for social acceptance, which can mean risk-taking or impulsive behaviour (Griffin, 2017). Gender is an additional factor where young males are consistently overrepresented in all crash data from all jurisdictions (Jones, 2016; DfT, 2021c). Young drivers are more at risk because they fail to anticipate the potential consequences of their risky actions (Kinnear et al., 2013). They also underestimate the complexity of the skills needed for the task of driving, overestimate their capability, or both, which results in the driver having a smaller safety margin than they believe (Fuller, 2005; Hatfield et al, 2014). An Australian study examines the attitudes of young drivers on rural roads and finds speeding behaviour is viewed as both acceptable and inevitable, and these behaviours contribute to high crash rates on rural roads (Knight et al., 2012).

A study by Roman et al. (2015) aims to identify changes in driving behaviour to help understand the decrease in crash risk over the first months of driving. This supports much of the evidence cited above and is worth considering further. They find male gender and a younger age are predictors of the higher levels of aberrant driver behaviour. They find that in teenage years there is a combination of factors which come together to explain the levels of risk: the inability of the young brain to tackle the complex task of driving, the propensity for sensation seeking, and the lack of development of the self-regulatory abilities to manage risky behaviour. They find driving requires the recruitment of several cognitive functions, including working memory, attention control, planning and inhibitory control. They conclude there is a need for interventions such as GDL or forms of supervised driving to improve safety (p.68). What is striking from the literature is a consistency in the results from the studies over time, and in the evaluation of factors which contribute to higher risk. The main findings from research have been built upon over time and evaluated in literature reviews (Russell et al., 2004). Whilst there are a variety of study designs and from different legal environments, there is a high degree of agreement on the factors which increase the risk to young drivers.

This section argues there is a clear risk to young drivers and those affected by their driving as described in the literature and demonstrated in STATS19 data. The additional risk posed by young drivers is uncontested as a problem. Whether this is recognised by politicians sufficiently to be put on the agenda is explored further in 6.4.

### **6.3 British GDL policy and the path to nowhere**

GDL is a policy solution which has been implemented in other jurisdictions but has not been implemented in Britain and continues to attract controversy (RAC, 2022). GDL was developed following a study in North Carolina in 1971 where the overrepresentation of young drivers in crashes at night, and when young passengers were present was identified, and solutions were based on educational principles (Waller, 2003). Whilst many saw the benefits of such a system, it experienced a number of obstacles. Toronto was almost the first to adopt the system in 1976, but ultimately New Zealand was the first in 1984. In addition, regions or States in Australia, Canada, Sweden, the USA, and other jurisdictions have a form of a GDL.

GDL's aim is to better manage the risk associated with young drivers. It is a system which aims to increase young driver safety and improve driving skills by requiring a staged progression from initial learning through to unrestricted solo driving. It adds an intermediate stage between learning and the full license. There are different types of GDL (TRL, 2002), including minimum learning periods, restrictions to unsupervised driving such as a night time curfew or restricting the numbers of passengers, restricted engine size, or an automatic disqualification if

the GDL is breached (Hinchcliff, et al., 2011). Restrictions to licensing focuses on high risk areas which have been demonstrated to have the greatest potential to reduce crashes (USA – Preusser et al., 1998; McKnight and Peck; 2002; Rice, et al., 2003. Australia – Walker et al., 2017). There is overrepresentation in crashes from factors of inexperience (McCartt et al., 2009; Cassarino and Murphy, 2018), age (McCartt et al., 2009; Cassarino and Murphy, 2018; Senserrick et al, 2021), and gender (Shope, 2006; Jones, 2016). These are exacerbated by a number of circumstances: driving at night (Rice et al., 2003; Begg and Langley, 2004; Williams and Preusser, 1998), driving with young passengers (Preueer et al., 1998; Williams, 2006), at high speed (Twisk and Stacey, 2007), under the influence of alcohol or drugs (Williams, 2006), and not wearing seat belts (Twisk and Stacey, 2007). There is compelling evidence that by addressing the high risk behaviour of young drivers, crash rates can be reduced for all crash types (TRL, 2002, p.31). The Cochrane review drew consistent conclusions from an analysis of thirty-five studies from 21 GDL schemes (Russell et al., 2004). As each of the twenty-one schemes has different combinations of measures, the review was not able to measure the overall size of the effect.

British studies have quantified the reduced crash risk and the resulting cost savings, with variation in the results. The TRL's review of novice drivers found strong evidence for the introduction of GDL, supported by modelling work which estimated, conservatively, that GDL would prevent 4,471 casualties and save £224 million each year (TRL, 2013). An RAC Foundation study estimates the introduction of GDL would prevent more than 400 deaths and serious injuries annually and save the economy £200 million through crash prevention (RACF, 2020). A further study found, with a 50% compliance of a comprehensive GDL (night restrictions and no 15–24 year-old passengers) would prevent 114 deaths and 872 serious casualties each year (Jones et al., 2012). Whilst these studies present different data on the casualty reductions and cost savings, all predict a positive outcome from GDL.

Even when there is good evidence that an intervention has been effective in another country, predicting the likely benefits in Britain are difficult. This is mainly because there are differences in the licensing, learning, and testing approaches. Despite the uncertainty of whether policy transfer would be effective, TRL suggest:

*“A serious case can be made for introducing some elements of GDL, or graduated learning systems in Britain” (TRL, 2002: 30).*

Whilst driver education, training and media campaigns are consistently found to be popular with the driving public (Scott Parker, et al., 2011), there is little evidence that just education and training are effective in reducing crashes and death rates of young drivers (Mayhew, 2007; Scott Parker et al., 2011). One example of improved education and skills training which has

been presented as an alternative to GDL, is off road skid-control training. Studies evaluating skid control programmes indicate these interventions could have the opposite effect to improving safety as they ignore the evidence of age-related contributory factors on behaviour. Young drivers who take part in skid training programmes, especially males, have more crashes than those without this training, and it is suggested this is due to overconfidence and show-off behaviour (Glad, 1988; Jones, 1993, cited in Williams, 2006: i6). Findings from the analysis of driving intentions shows drivers who did not receive simulator based lessons, demonstrate safer driving intentions (Rosenbloom and Eldror, 2014).

The negative impact on the social mobility of young people, particularly in rural areas is often cited as a reason not to adopt GDL with little published evidence to support this argument. In a critical examination of driver licensing in New Zealand, the authors made a number of conclusions (Begg and Langley, 2009). The young age, independent of experience, is a major determinant of risk, and arguments seeking to maintain the status quo in New Zealand were based on either no evidence or misinformation. In relation to rural environments, young drivers may be slightly disadvantaged by GDL restrictions, but the authors found that this was where the greatest gains in crash reduction were made. Other evidence has found that the implications for access to employment, education or social activities is minimal (Brookland and Begg, 2011; Williams et al., 2002). Williams et al. (2002) report that young drivers adopt different strategies for mobility to get around night time or passenger restrictions, thus reducing the impact of restrictions.

In a single study, the economic or social impact of restrictions on young drivers in low income groups is found to increase the disadvantage to young people accessing employment, services, or social activities (Aubrey and Langford, 2014). They argue GDL may have an impact on equity and social disadvantage. Aubrey and Langford (2013) conclude, in considering policy interventions that restrict young drivers, the potential impact across the social gradient should be considered. They acknowledge limitations to their study due to selection and size. The perception there could be negative education and economic impacts on young people was raised by the TC (2021) and in new research to answer these concerns it was found that “serious adverse impacts are not seen or expected” (RACF, 2022).

Studies focused on inequality in young people show for those with a lower socio-economic status, there is a positive association with crash risk and the severity of injury (Males, 2009; Hanna et al., 2012). Similarly, a study of young Swedish drivers found those with basic education levels were five times more likely to be involved in a crash with a fatality or serious injury in contrast to those in higher education (Hasselberg et al., 2005).

Dissenters to the introduction of GDL point to the anecdotal difficulties of enforcement. Experience from the jurisdictions cited is that only relying on police enforcement is indeed problematic, but where there is a combination of effective communication, securing the positive support of parents and ensuring there is general road safety enforcement by police, parents successfully take on the primary role of enforcer (Foss and Goodwin, 2003, p.83). Evidence suggests that achieving the right balance between the freedom of the young driver and securing optimal safety is important. Black box technology potentially adds to enforcement and is being evaluated by *Driver 2020* (DfT, 2019a). The enforcement of GLD can be enhanced by implementing and modifying protective restrictions that are as strong as possible whilst remaining reasonable in the eyes of parents and young drivers.

Findings from a European study analysing the scale of the problem, and GDL as a solution, conclude a strategic approach is needed, with clear communication, close cooperation with stakeholders, and political leadership (Twisk and Stacey, 2007, p.256). An Australian study making use of Kingdon's (1995) MSM supports these conclusions (Hinchcliff et al., 2011). They set out to identify the main factors influencing novice driver policy agenda setting and conclude GDL policy initiatives are only implemented when sufficient political support is identified through community demand for action, and public acceptance of GDL policies.

The evaluation of the literature on GDL, both in terms of young driver safety and the potential for GDL as a policy solution, finds these are compelling in studies, reviews, and evidence published over decades from many different jurisdictions (Pilkinton et al., 2014). GDL has been shown to be effective at reducing risk, and reducing death and serious injury from a number of different countries. The benefit of GDL has also been shown to have a positive financial impact. A number of studies focus on those characteristics that impact on young driver safety and behaviour. The impact that inexperience has on the levels of risk has been demonstrated, as has the higher risk to male drivers. There is also evidence that the characteristics of youth increases risk – such as thrill seeking and showing off to peers. Finally, studies of higher risk circumstances offer compelling evidence of the positive impact of restriction to night-time driving, carrying young passengers, alcohol consumption, and speed. The limited studies exploring the barriers and disbenefits to GDL suggest there are some issues of social disadvantage to be considered but that these can be managed. Given that many GDL schemes are in operation, any barriers are clearly not insurmountable.

### **6.3.1 Would GDL be accepted in Britain?**

The influence of public opinion and the responsiveness of politicians are important in public policy. Whether the public are able to influence politicians towards specific policy areas which

need attention or to reduce policy activity because there is satisfaction, are key elements of analysis (John, 2012, p36). This section reviews limited published British survey data on perspectives of GDL.

General road safety does not attract significant public concern. In the 2020 *National Travel Survey*, 55% were concerned with road safety and 45% were not concerned (DfT, 2020b). This helps set the context for public opinion on young driver safety and GDL as a possible solution. There is variation in the degree of support for GDL. The RAC Foundation (2014b) conducted a large-scale representative sample of 2,010 British adults aged 16 or above. The survey shows the public perceive a problem with young drivers and road safety, and were generally in favour of the introduction of GDL: 83% state young drivers involved in road crashes was *a very big* or *fairly big* problem, and over two thirds (68%) said they supported the introduction of GDL. In those who did not perceive road safety to be a problem, support for GDL was 61%. Those who opposed the introduction of GDL is 32%. In those aged under 24, there was 41% support for GDL, a much lower level of support from the wider adult sample group. When asked about two of the specific elements of GDL: restrictions on passengers and driving after midnight, the same survey found strong support or support to some degree from 66% and 61% respectively. The sample were asked about whether politicians should give more attention to the issue of road safety and 71% agreed or strongly agreed (RAC Foundation, 2014b).

Some young people recognise the weaknesses of the current driving licence system for preparing them to drive safely and independently, and want an overhaul of the current system (Co-operative Insurance, 2013). In this report a third of young drivers felt unprepared to drive alone after passing their test, and almost two-thirds avoid certain situations or manoeuvres due to the lack of confidence in their driving ability. Other detail:

- favour a minimum learning period - 64%
- a crash they were involved in could have been avoided with more experience - 24%
- not ready for night-time driving - 29%
- considered themselves to be unprepared to drive at all – 14%.

This survey has less rigor due to targeting Co-operative customers and a smaller sample size.

In international studies, Williams et al. (2002) review parental and teenager support of GDL over time in the US. They conclude that GDL is accepted favourably by teenagers and their parents. Parents were strongly in favour and teenagers approve of licensing changes, with teenagers strongly supporting the restrictions to night time driving, but only a third support restrictions to carrying passengers. Most teenagers are able to achieve activities they want despite the changes; almost three-quarters said they were not affected much by either the night-time or passenger restriction. A longitudinal New Zealand study shows, regardless of the

gender of the young driver, the majority of parents are strongly supportive of GDL and do not believe restrictions inconvenience travel arrangements. The study concludes targeting interventions to improve young drivers and parents' understanding of the reasons for GDL, improve attitudes and thereby contribute to a reduction in risky driver behaviours and crash risk amongst young adults (Brookland and Begg, 2011, p.113). These studies, along with one from New Zealand (Begg et al., 1995) and the USA (Foss and Goodwin, 2003) in jurisdictions that have introduced GDL align with high parental support for GDL. An issue raised by a number of politicians in Britain is the effectiveness of policy transfer and these results should take this into account. The analysis has concentrated on GDL as a possible solution to young driver safety and includes a review of the attitudes to GDL. The next section moves to the final stream and analyses the politics of the young driver safety.

## **6.4 Young driver safety: delay, inaction, and incremental change**

This section analyses the discourse and policy response to young driver safety between 1987 and 2021, and focuses on GDL as a possible policy solution. It is structured chronologically, with CDA from debates, policy documents and TC inquiries, grouped by the political party in government. Interview data is analysed separately as this is not chronological, and finally, conclusions made.

### **6.4.1 Results and analysis: 1987 to May 1997 (Conservative)**

#### **6.4.1.1 Results: January 1987 to May 1997**

In *Road safety: next steps* (DoT, 1987) there is a single reference to the risk to young drivers relating to drink driving. This wider policy area is identified as a high priority, but there is no proposal to reduce blood alcohol levels. Instead, the policy direction is to review international evidence. The first reference to the risk associated with young drivers is in March 1992. Toby Jessel (Conservative) quotes data on the disproportionate risk of injury to young drivers. He identifies that 17% of licence holders were under 25, but account for 27% of crashes (Hansard HC Deb., 15 May 1992, c.870).

The first debates on newly qualified drivers were between January 1993 and April 1995. The first debate is on a proposed Bill from Simon Burns (Conservative). In his speech, he recognises the increase in risk to new drivers and notes this is due to inexperience resulting in increased crash risk and death. He proposes two elements: first, restricting the engine size and second:

*“As they pass the driving test inexperienced drivers are given the same privileges and rights as someone who passed the test more than 20 years ago and has gained experience and maturity for driving over that time. That is a mistake. My*

*Bill would require all newly qualified drivers to display a P plate for up to 24 months after passing the test" (Hansard HC Deb., 26 January 1993, c.885).*

In a short debate, the Government Minister, Sir Peter Bottomley, accepts the issue but asks: "the House to reject the motion" (Hansard HC Deb., 26 January 1993, c.886) because of the lack of evidence of its effectiveness. The Bill is brought back in March of the same year with much of the previous debate being repeated. In addition, there are references to the impact that advertising fast cars has on the behaviour of young drivers, the need for education, and objections to restricting the engine size of cars due to limiting choice. The Bill did not pass, primarily due to Parliamentary time. Simon Burns adds after accepting the Bill failed:

*"If it raises awareness ... if it goes some way towards improving road safety in the United Kingdom and if it raises a serious debate about road safety and provokes discussion of ways to improve the safety of newly qualified drivers, others on our roads and innocent pedestrians, who may be seriously affected through injury or death, it will be worthwhile" (Hansard HC Deb., 26 March 1993, c.1403).*

A number of speeches recognise the lack of evidence for 'P' plates and call for more evidence and further debate. A number of interventions indicate delay or distraction, for example, personal or unrelated driving stories and the Bill was not supported.

This debate also includes the first discovered reference to GDL with support for a version framed in terms of driver restrictions, rather than by name. Lady Olga Maitland (Conservative):

*"We should be discussing the introduction of suitable restriction as in New Zealand a ban on carrying passengers so that teenagers do not show off, or not allowing driving at night. We should be considering elements to discipline newly qualified car drivers ... Most offences are caused by teenage boy racers and the time has come to stop them racing and showing off. If we can clip their wings, we shall do a great service ... because fatalities in the 16-19 age group is disproportionate to all other age groups" (Hansard HC Deb., 26 March 1993, c.1407-10).*

In April 1994, the debate on newly qualified drivers proposes to introduce a probationary period together with a 'P' plate. Sir David Amess (Conservative) sets out the increased risk to new drivers, including casualty statistics and suggests:

*"It is difficult to find adequate words to describe the horror that confronts our policemen every day ... when they call to tell relatives that their loved ones have been injured, maimed or, worse still, killed" (Hansard HC Deb., 12 April 1994, c.30).*

Recognising the reluctance to act on the safety of newly qualified drivers, he closes his speech:

*"It is not my intention to spoil the joy of a family when one of its members passes the driving test; rather, it is to prevent the chilling knock on the door when a policeman arrives with tragic news" (Hansard HC Deb., 12 April 1994, c.32).*

In a lengthy and considered response, Sir Peter Bottomley, replies citing the lack of evidence:

*"There is no substantial body of evidence that having a probationary or restricted plates on the back or front of a car makes any difference" (Hansard HC Deb., 12 April 1994, c.32).*

The Bill did not proceed. Sir Peter Bottomley closes the debate with a very clear statement:

*"I advise the House, and I certainly advise the DoT, to pay no attention to the measure. It is not the way forward. There are many other effective means of cutting the number of casualties" (Hansard HC Deb., 12 April 1994, c.33).*

In this intervention, Sir Peter does not mention what the alternative policy interventions are. In November 1994, a debate on road safety includes reference to young drivers. Steve Norris, the Minister focuses on increased risk:

*"Some, particularly young males, are over-confident or naturally inclined to show off and take risks. Others are just plainly irresponsible, and they deliberately break the law, and they know that they are putting lives at risk. ... We need to put the message across that, as drivers, they will have to take on some adult responsibilities for the safety of themselves, their passengers, and all other road users. However, it is no use preaching or talking down to that age group" (Hansard HC Deb. 25 November 1994, c.850)*

There are other speeches which focus on the levels of risk, the driving test, and the links with other crimes, but this debate includes no policy solutions or proposals.

The chronology shifts to 1995 to *Road traffic: new drivers* debates in February and April. The Bill includes seven clauses including the introduction of a two year probationary period, an ability to revoke the driving licence if six penalty points are reached and the need for a repeat test if certain circumstances are met. Dr Michael Clark, (Conservative) supports this approach:

*"They will not make it any harder to qualify as a driver in the first place, but they will make it harder for people to keep their licences if they misbehave ... Act as a powerful deterrent for drivers who are tempted to break the law or who drive without consideration for others" (Hansard HC Deb., 3 February 1995, c.1343).*

The debate sets out the scale of death or serious injury, particularly to males, and the lack of experience as a major contributory factor. Pierse Merchant (Conservative) suggests:

*"If the number of people killed on the roads were killed in any other way there would be a national scandal. What if a series of jumbo jets crashed every year, leading to the equivalent number of deaths, or a catastrophe occurred regularly in industry? If rail accident deaths reached anything near the number of road deaths, there would be an outcry" (Hansard HC Deb., 3 February 1995, c.1347).*

In a supportive cross party debate, the only apparent detraction is in terms of the proposals not going far enough, and questions on the degree to which the casualty numbers could be reduced. Andrew Miller (Labour) suggests that we:

*"Must carry on working hard ... to find the right set of rules and regulations which will bring that figure down to zero" (Hansard HC Deb., 3 February 1995, c.1354).*

The Bill went to a third reading in April and is passed with support from across the HoC. In the debate an MP shares a personal story of a fatal road crash, where he was the surviving passenger. This impacted on the tone of the debate. This is Eric Pickles (Conservative) who supports the Bill, and in doing so advocates for social change towards road safety: Those:

*"who have been convicted of drunken driving have one thing in common: they feel a deep sense of shame. That is what I mean by the change in social attitude. We*

*need to ensure that, if newly qualified drivers fail within the specified period, they feel shame and embarrassment” (Hansard HC Deb., 28 April 1995, c.1143).*

To potential dissenters, he suggests that young drivers should consider the impact of crashes:

*“It is better to feel it in their pockets for the rest of their lives than to hold their head in shame because they have killed someone through inexperience” (Hansard HC Deb., 28 April 1995, c.1143).*

The Minister for Transport, Steve Norris, supports the Bill and in concluding, suggests:

*“Despite the tremendous interest, which was equal on both sides of the House, and the complexity of the amendments that were tabled. I commend the Bill to the House” (Hansard HC Deb., 28 April 1995, c.1154).*

The Road Traffic Act (1995) passes. There is no discourse during the rest of 1995 until 1998.

#### **6.4.1.2 Analysis: 1987 to May 1997**

The disproportionate risk of death or injury, and the lack of experience of young drivers was a strong theme, although in limited discourse. There were no obvious voices of dissent about the scale or nature of the issue. There were examples of emotive language, such as a “national scandal” (Hansard HC., 3 February 1995: c.1347 [Pierse Merchant]), and there was a recognition of the degree of risk and a need for action. There were various policy solutions suggested, with proposals to introduce ‘P’ plates dominating the earlier debates. Although this policy solution was dismissed due to the lack of effectiveness, there was evidence of productive discussions about other policy solutions. Probationary interventions, such as retesting following six penalty points was supported in 1995 after a series of discussions on which solutions would be acceptable. There was some evidence of attempts to distract from action, with the sharing of personal stories, or delay, with calls for more research or debates, resulting in earlier debates running out of time. However, the 1995 policy solutions were an important contribution to young driver safety. Public policy literature describes lengthy periods of time for public policy to develop. The time to advance the probationary policy solutions from the initial speeches in March 1992 to agreement in February 1995 was an example of where this had occurred.

There was evidence the policy problem was acknowledged, followed by debates on potential policy solutions, and combined with support from across the HoC, and there was political agreement for a package of interventions in 1995. The political support was enhanced by explicit Government approval for these interventions and any attempt for further obfuscation or delay were minimal, though this took more than three years to progress. The relationship between the policy problem and policy solutions is important (Kingdon, 1995) and the political climate towards the end of this period contributed to the progression of a series of supportive interventions. Whilst there was limited discourse, a policy window opened, and policy change took place.

## 6.4.2 Results and analysis: May 1997 to December 2002 (Labour)

### 6.4.2.1 Results: May 1997 to December 2002

*A new deal for transport: better for everyone* is introduced as a radical plan for the future of transport (DTER, 1998). It includes limited references to road safety policy, and where these are mentioned mainly commits to future, unspecified policy. There is one reference to the involvement of novice drivers in a fifth of all crashes, and a single policy action to:

*“Look at how to improve the safety of novice drivers ... and at measures to reduce speed related accidents” (DTER, 1998, p.75).*

In October 1999, the TC undertook an inquiry: **Young and newly qualified drivers: standards and training** (ETRASC, 1999). The scope is on the increased risk to young drivers and a number of the elements of GDL are referenced. The aim is to identify the extent of the problem; the reasons for lower safety standards; the driving test; the Road Traffic Act of 1995, and post driving test training. Proposals include: changing attitudes; tackling unlicensed driving; minimum hours of tuition; motorway tuition; compulsory post-test training; probationary schemes and a minimum period of learning. The report begins with describing Britain as “one of the best in the world” (ETRASC, 1999, para. 1), a frequent framing explored in chapter 7.

The inquiry, chaired by Gwyneth Dunwoody (Labour) sets out the risk to young drivers:

*“The safety record ... compares unfavourably to that of older, more experienced drivers ... Although the 17-24 year old age group hold only 11% of licences, they are involved in 25% of accidents each year in which someone is killed or seriously injured” (ETRASC, 1999, para.4).*

The report suggests there are three main inter-linked factors:

- lower levels of technical competence
- inexperience with resulting lesser road sense
- attitude, which is more frequently irresponsible and inclined to taking risks.

The inquiry comments on the relationship between driver testing and the level of experience:

*“Although the driving test is effective in preventing technically incompetent drivers from taking to the roads unsupervised ... no test can properly address the main reasons why young and newly qualified drivers have such a poor safety record: their relative inexperience and their immature attitude” (ETRASC, 1999, para. 20).*

The inquiry took evidence on interventions on how to change the attitudes to driving, and suggests this would have the most impact on improving safety standards. These include: the introduction of road safety in the school curriculum; changing irresponsible marketing of cars to promoting road safety; and working with media. On the last factor, it uses strong language:

*“The media as a whole has portrayed driving in an irresponsible way. Very many films and television programmes feature car chases and ... suggest that there is virtue in driving too quickly. Driving programmes such as Top Gear appear*

*obsessed with acceleration and speed: their producers should remember that such macho posturing might be acceptable on private roads but not on crowded streets” (ETRASC, 1999, para.40).*

It considers potential policy solutions, but these are not recommended. For example, setting a minimum period of professional tuition, and compulsory post-test training, but these are deemed too expensive, unenforceable, and “draconian” (ETRASC, 1999, para.50). Mandating motorway driving is dismissed due to the inaccessibility to motorways for parts of the country. The report recommends a period of six and twelve months between obtaining a probationary licence and taking a test, to:

*“Improve the safety standards of young and newly qualified drivers by encouraging more practice of their skills prior to their driving test, and by making them more mature and thus less reckless” (ETRASC, 1999, c.56).*

The Government response is broadly supportive or neutral towards the TC’s inquiry:

*“Government agrees with the Committee’s findings, although we would suggest that for young new drivers ... it is attitude rather than a lack of technical competence that is the key factor in explaining their relatively high accident rates. Inexperience is a common factor for all new drivers” (ETRAC, 2000, c.3).*

The inquiry makes nineteen recommendations, and the Government accepts one: introducing hazard testing into the driving test. There is no action for the majority of the recommendations (47%) and a commitment for research, consultation, or further consideration for 42%.

Much of the language used in both the report and the Government’s response is non-specific.

An example using the merits of a probationary period seeking to avoid post-test restrictions:

*“We believe the best way to improve new driver safety is to encourage learners to get more experience before they pass their test, rather than by placing restrictions on them after they have qualified” (ETRAC, 2000, c.7).*

There are examples of supportive language with further research as the policy response:

*“Our objective is to establish a more structured approach to pre-test learning which will ensure new drivers have a broader and more extensive experience of driving conditions before they take their test. We will be consulting on various measures to achieve the necessary level of driving experience” (ETRAC, 2000, c.8).*

**Tomorrow’s roads: safer for everyone** (DETR, 2000b) identifies the increased risk to novice drivers. It aims to: “instil in young people the right attitudes towards road safety and safe driving” (DfT, 2000, p.17). The focus is to encourage different behaviours and to improve the pre-test learning period and testing. An example:

*“A full driving licence has been increasingly seen, particularly by young men, as a rite of passage to adulthood: part of personal independence and mobility. The link with social responsibilities towards fellow citizens, particularly those who are more vulnerable, has not been emphasised enough” (DfT, 2000, p.18).*

The policy solution is to continue and expand a programme of school based education with an initiative called Drive, where teaching targets teenagers. The policy solutions are described within headings on: improving the structure to learning, improving tuition and changes to testing. GDL is not referenced in the document.

The newly qualified drivers debate (Hansard HC., 19 October 2001) frames a discussion about safety vs freedom between an opposition MP (Sir David Amess, Conservative) and the Minister (David Jamieson, Labour), and another MP (Labour) spoke briefly in support of improving road safety. In a wide ranging debate, the risks to young drivers are described, the consequences on families and those impacted by crashes, and the arguments and benefits for GDL. Sir David Amess offers a view about the profile of road safety:

*“The portion of time given to road safety [in the HoC] is inadequate, given the number of deaths and injuries that I have described, especially compared with the amount of time that is spent on talking about drug or alcohol abuse” (Hansard HC Deb., 19 October 2001, c.1410).*

He adds there is a gap between the discourse which is universally supportive of road safety victims and what could be implemented to improve road safety. He states:

*“I simply use that example [death of a constituent] to show that, although the majority of adults ... understand the sense in what I have been advocating, a number of hon. Members on both sides of the House would oppose such legislation” (Hansard HC Deb., 19 October 2001, c.1411).*

The main theme in his speech is to advocate for improved road safety and he supports the introduction of some elements of GDL:

*“They [GDL] aim to provide a staged progression from initial licensing to unrestricted solo driving. He suggested that, like learners, newly qualified drivers should be accompanied by more experienced older drivers. I sympathise with that, but the hon. Gentleman alluded to the practical difficulties that it would involve” (Hansard HC Deb., 19 October 2001, c.1414).*

The Minister, in what is a contradictory response, strongly agrees with the need to improve the safety for young drivers, references *Vision Zero* as a potential route to improvement, and uses a historical comparison with the difficulty of gaining support for restrictive measures:

*“Not everyone will share the same views ... debates back in the 1960s about whether drink-driving laws or laws on the wearing of seat belts constituted an infringement of civil liberties. I remember the ludicrous arguments that we heard ... Today, no one questions those things: we have experienced a change of culture and of attitude which is welcome ... Nothing that can be said in the House today will bring back a child lost in appalling and tragic circumstances; but I hope my comments demonstrate that the issue of safety, and particularly that of young drivers, is at the forefront of the Government's mind” (Hansard HC Deb., 19 October 2001, c.1416).*

Whilst making supportive comments, he backs away from supporting any of the specific policy solutions debated.

There is no further discourse for the remainder of 2001 until July 2007.

#### 6.4.2.2 Analysis: May 1997 to December 2002

After a further gap in discourse of more than four years, the TC inquiry addressed the risks to young drivers, a significant policy process step as the first inquiry to do so. The risk to young drivers was clearly set out but many of the areas discussed were dismissed and not recommended. This approach is evidence of the difficulty in moving from defining the problem to introducing politically acceptable policy solutions when they may be complex, unpopular, or uneconomic. The acceptance of hazard testing was the exception in this example. The policy problem was acknowledged and defined as in need of policy action, but the contention about policy solutions resulted in little action. There are three themes: First, externalising the responsibility for the problem to both the young drivers themselves, and strong targeting towards car advertisers, and TV and film makers. Second, financial, or economic considerations were prioritised over safety benefits when increases to regulation are considered and dismissed. Third, the selective use of evidence: used not to progress with 'P' plates citing the lack of evidence, though learning and testing solutions were advanced without clear evidence. There was evidence the inquiry was effective in highlighting the policy problem, but it stepped back from seeking intervention from Government, and advocated mainly process or research action. There was a gap between the clear articulation of the risks to young drivers, and the lack of substantive policy solutions. This may be an indication that the responsibility was not with Government or a means to further delay policy change.

Further evidence of the disconnect between the policy problem and potential policy solutions was found in the debate on GDL from 2001, which debated the balance between safety and mobility. There was consensus of the scale of the problem between the two main political parties, but there was disagreement about the direction of policy. Backbench Conservative MPs advocated for GDL, described the gap between words and action, and identified the reluctance of the HoC to take action. The Labour Government argued for the need to balance the competing demands of safety and "civil liberties" (Hansard HC Deb., 19 October 2001, c.1416). The Minister was strongly supportive of the need to address the risk to young drivers, but did not introduce new policy, demonstrating a lack of political appetite for change.

The TC inquiry and *Tomorrow's roads* (DETR, 2000b) presented politicians with opportunities to prioritise young driver risk. The preference was to focus on limited learning and testing solutions rather than implementing restrictive policy solutions, as the Labour Government suggested: "rather than by placing restrictions on them after they have qualified" (DETR, 2000b, c.7). However, hazard testing was a significant policy intervention. Arguments presented included a lack of evidence, the burden of cost, uneconomic, or deflecting accountability to young drivers themselves, car manufacturers or the media. There was a

disconnect between the recognition of an issue but failure to acknowledge there was a policy problem needing attention. There was little political will to implement restrictive policy solutions for fear of negatively impacting on the mobility and freedom of young drivers, and the three streams did not develop.

### **6.4.3 Results and analysis: January 2003 to May 2010 (Labour)**

#### **6.4.3.1 Results: January 2003 to May 2010**

In 2007, after an almost seven year gap in discourse, the TC produced the report: *Novice drivers* (TC, 2007a). It begins with an unequivocal statement on the lack of progress. They:

*“Are among the most vulnerable drivers on our roads. It is eight years since the ... Committee published its report on young and newly qualified drivers. In that time, there has been little progress in tackling the problem of road deaths and injuries ... This is in stark contrast to the success there has been in reducing road casualties across the population as a whole. Because of this lack of progress, we decided to revisit the subject and examine the potential for more radical measures which would be more effective in reducing casualties” (TC, 2007a, paras.1&2).*

The report makes forty-eight recommendations in nine areas: vulnerable young drivers; learning, including a minimum learning period; attitudes to driving; the driving test; GDL; education; the insurance industry; and penalties. The report acknowledges the increase in risk to novice drivers and the scale of deaths and injuries from inexperience, as well as the victims. It suggests the “regulatory regime is failing” (TC, 2007a: para.3) and describes the problem:

*“The Department’s own evidence demonstrates that nearly 38,800 people are killed or injured each year in crashes involving at least one driver with less than two years’ post-test experience and nearly 5,000 of these are deaths or serious injuries” (TC, 2007a, para.9).*

The report includes a passage reviewing the balance of risk between human life and health, and economic factors, such as employment and education:

*“In addressing the novice driver casualty problem, it is necessary to make an informed choice about the balance to be made between driving entitlement, risk, and costs: both economic and social” (TC, 2007a, para.41).*

The report emphasises the need to debate the risks before making decisions about the costs to young drivers. It frames the debate as questions: how much personal mobility should be exchanged for how many deaths and injuries related to young driver risk? At what point does the risk of preventable deaths and injury become excessive? These questions are posed but not addressed. The Minister shares his view on GDL before the TC concludes its work. We:

*“Decided not to pursue restrictions as part of a GDL, because ‘we see the reform of driver training and testing as an alternative approach which addresses the underlying causes of the concerns.’ Yet research commissioned by the DfT had already concluded that: ‘There is little research evidence that increased formal*

*driver training improves safety.’ Whilst we share the Minister’s hope that a reformed ... framework will instil a more responsible approach to driving; there exists little evidence that this will be adequate. It is a fact that novice drivers face a very considerably inflated crash risk when driving late at night, with passengers, and after consuming even small amounts of alcohol. Over-confidence and inexperience result in poor driving choices and ultimately crashes and casualties” (TC, 2007a, para.91).*

The report claims to have drawn on evidence and suggests the DfT should follow equally strong evidence if recommendations should be diluted. This approach is particularly evident in the section on GDL which discusses night-time restrictions, passengers restrictions, alcohol limits, limiting the size of the car’s engine, and enforcement difficulties.

The TC’s recommendations are consistent with the evidence on GDL (6.3):

*“Taking into account the international evidence, we recommend that restrictions be introduced for newly qualified drivers. These restrictions should be framed in a way least likely to impinge on novice drivers when the risks of collision are lower: Novice drivers should be prohibited from carrying any passengers aged 10–20 years, between the hours of 11pm. and 5am; and, the permitted blood alcohol concentration should be reduced from 0.8g/l to zero (or 0.2g/l) for novice drivers. All these decisions about the detail of novice driver restrictions under a GDL system should be robustly grounded in the evidence of their casualty prevention potential. As an initial proposal, we suggest that the restrictions for novice drivers should apply for 12 months after passing the test” (TC, 2007a, para.114).*

The report is critical of the lack of progress in addressing young driver safety and states the measures implemented had made only a marginal impact:

*“We ... urge the Department to be bold in adopting measures which will have a real impact on reducing these deaths and serious injuries” (TC, 2007a, para.160).*

The Committee’s report concludes:

*“We hope to see evidence that the Department is true to its word and that bold measures will be given proper consideration. The appalling collision rate of novice drivers clearly demonstrates that the problem must not be ignored. ‘Do nothing’ is not an option” (TC, 2007a, p.50).*

The Government’s response set out a commitment to address young driver safety as a priority:

*“The Government fully shares the Committee’s concern about serious collisions involving young drivers, and about the over representation of young drivers in casualty accidents” (TC, 2007b, para.1).*

There are ten areas highlighted in relation to GDL, but the report is written in a way that includes both statements and recommendations. The consequence of this style enables the Government to simply offer a comment. As an example:

*“Considering the potential of GDL, we hope that the Government will be led by the evidence, and not by a blind hope that more and more effective driver training will be adequate to prevent the large numbers [of] casualties” (TC, 2007a, para.1).*

The response is to simply state: “The Government is fully committed to making proposals based on evidence” (TC, 2007b, para.1). The lack of precise recommendations enables the Government to make observational responses, rather than commit to policy action. On describing the challenges of enforcing GDL, the Government is able to simply agree that enforcement is difficult.

The report identifies ten areas which did not result in policy action. The Government’s response did, however, include five areas where further work, consultation or review is accepted. These are: secure further evidence on GDL, including restricting passengers; review the benefits of reduced blood alcohol levels; and seek evidence on the enforcement challenges of GDL. Whilst the Government’s response commits to undertake further work in these areas, the following statement towards the end of the GDL section indicates a clear view:

*“The Government has previously decided against introducing additional legal restrictions on newly qualified drivers partly out of concern about the practicality of enforcing the kind of restrictions proposed. The main aim of such restrictions appears to be to restrain the behaviour of bad drivers; the Committee recognises that they should avoid unintended and undesirable effects, which may arise for many responsible new drivers” (TC, 2007b, para.32).*

In 2008, the TC inquiry: ***Ending the scandal of complacency: road safety beyond 2010*** (TC, 2008) discusses young driver safety. This TC is chaired by Louise Ellman (Labour), and follows a similar structure to the 2007 ***Novice drivers*** inquiry (TC, 2007a).

The report details the level of risk to young drivers and notes a particular concern about male drivers, and those impacted by young drivers. It states young men are disproportionately more involved in the most serious traffic offences and quotes data from 2014: of 384 guilty of causing death or serious injury, 25% are male drivers under the age of 21, and 33% of those found guilty of dangerous driving are males under 21. The report states:

*“The safety of young and novice drivers is of great concern ... This [Learning to Drive] proposes additional steps prior to fully qualifying as a driver but does not accept any of the restrictions on young drivers, such as a ban on carrying passengers that we recommended ... The proposals place a great deal of faith in improved training overcoming what some witnesses see as genetically programmed ‘caveman tendencies’ in young men” (TC, 2008, para.68).*

The report adds: “We do not wish to stigmatise young drivers” (TC, 2008, para.72) and recognises factors which contribute to increased risk. It references the lack of experience of young drivers; a high proportion driving older and less safe cars (see Oviedo-Trespalacios and Scott-Parker, 2019); and they drive more at night, and with distracting passengers.

The report is critical of the policy approach and for not accepting recommendations from the ***Novice drivers*** report (TC, 1999), and language includes: “unconvinced” (TC, 2008: para.74),

and “great concern” (para.24) about the lack of action. Despite the criticism, it makes only two recommendations. The first is to reduce blood alcohol levels for young drivers. A second:

*“The proposals in Learning to Drive are steps in the right direction, but we are not confident that they will be sufficient to arrest the carnage of young drivers on our roads. We recommend that the Government takes bolder and more urgent steps to cut the number of crashes involving young drivers, particularly young men. We urge that it reconsiders its response to our recommendations in **Novice drivers** regarding a GDL scheme and, in particular, restrictions on young drivers carrying teenage passengers between the hours of 11pm and 5am” (TC, 2008, para.75).*

There are two Government responses in January and April 2009 dealing with different recommendations (TC, 2009a; 2009b). GDL is not included in either response, the references to young drivers are minimal and the implementation of a lower alcohol limit for novice drivers is ignored. The Government had already held a public consultation in the previous year on improving drink driving policy which did not include the recommendation, other than to state:

*“We will give a view on the drink-drive questions in the compliance consultation, in light of the responses, in the final road safety strategy which we expect to publish later in 2009” (TC, 2009b, p.3).*

The Government frames reduced alcohol levels as a restriction to young drivers rather than supporting them to drive more safely which is the approach taken by the TC. It dismisses any further restrictions as it does not want to place limits on all young drivers and suggests the problem is with the minority who are high risk drivers, and the solution is learning and testing for all. Placing restrictions on high risk environments is also dismissed as young drivers should be exposed in order to increase their experience. The response briefly refers to concern that education and employment activities should not be impeded. It:

*“Considers the needs of all young drivers, the majority of whom want to drive safely and responsibly, whereas restrictions are aimed at a minority who behave badly but would have many adverse effects for the responsible majority such as restricting access to education and evening jobs” (TC, 2009b, para.10).*

Proposed restrictions to carrying passengers is not included in the Government’s response.

In a debate in July 2009, speeches express disappointment that recommendations from the TC report were not accepted. It is worth noting the debate took place with only a few members present. As Eric Martlew (Labour) points out:

*“If I wanted to be glib, I would say that it is slightly ironic that we are talking about ending the scandal of complacency to an almost empty Chamber. The reality is that since the day we were born, we have got used to the idea that people get killed in road accidents ... People are complacent, and they believe this is not a party political matter, that the Government are doing a good job and that accident and death figures are going in the right direction ... If we were having a debate about knife crime, there would be many more Members in the Chamber, even though the number of people killed by knife crime is a fraction of the number killed on the roads” (Hansard HC Deb., 2 July 2009: c.565).*

Louise Ellman (Labour) introduces her contribution:

*“The Government acknowledged the severity of this problem, but we were disappointed that they did not feel able to accept some of our recommendations ... We also advocated GDL and a wider experience of driving before a test could be passed” (Hansard HC Deb., 2 July 2009: c.563).*

There is further criticism of the lack of action from the Government. Eric Martlew states:

*“I am disappointed ... by the Governments response to the problem of novice drivers ... I am worried about novice drivers going out late at night ... and they fly around at 11 o'clock at night without having had any experience of driving in the dark ... The car comes off the road, hits a tree and young lives are destroyed. Some of the young people might not die but they will be badly injured. The Government copped out over the question of a curfew. I know that that would be difficult to enforce, but I believe that the parents would have enforced it ... I hope that the Government will look at that matter again.” (Hansard HC Deb., 2 July 2009, c.567).*

In April 2009, the Government publishes ***A safer way: a consultation on making Britain's roads the safest in the world*** (DfT, 2009). Young drivers did not form part of the 'headline' challenges. However, young drivers is identified as a key challenge, with a clear description of the problem, and a slowing in the rate of reduction of casualties compared to other road users:

*“The younger adult age groups are disproportionately likely to die on the roads, with the 16–29 age group accounting for over a third of all deaths. Road collisions account for around 30% of all deaths of 15–19 year olds and around 17% of all deaths of 20–29 year olds” (DfT, 2009, p.25).*

The document proposes: (i) to reduce the number of road deaths and serious injuries to children and young people (aged 0–17) by at least 50%, and (ii) to develop educational materials for the school curriculum, but there is no detail. The initial priority list excludes young people, and the design of the document may be why there is a lack of direct interventions to address young driver risk. There is no mention of GDL or any interventions on pre-driving learning or testing, and no mention of the two TC reports. There is no further discourse in the remainder of 2009 until May 2011.

#### **6.4.3.2 Analysis: January 2003 to May 2010**

Road safety is a small policy area on which to have two TC inquiries and on the same policy issue, which is unusual, which indicatives a recognition of the need for policy change. There was a consistency of approach adopted in the two TC reports which was repeated in the 2009 debate. There was harmonised acknowledgement there was a disproportionate number of young drivers and their passengers killed or seriously injured, and strong and emotive language was used by the TCs, including *scandal* and *complacency* to describe the lack of progress, but the Government “fully shares the Committee's concern” (TC, 2007b, para.1), and the policy problem was recognised.

There was discourse on a variety of factors which influenced young driver safety and potential policy solutions, but there was a disconnect between acknowledging the policy problem and agreeing on politically acceptable solutions. Both reports advocated for GDL based on strong evidence of effectiveness. The Labour Government disagreed that GDL should be part of any policy solution and preferred learning and testing options. In expressing concern about legislative changes and explaining the reluctance to take action, the Government raised the challenge of enforcement, the potential of penalising safe and sensible drivers with blanket regulation (despite using this same approach to other areas of road safety), and alleged damage to the economic or social prospects of young drivers. The Government were concerned the freedom of all young drivers would be negatively impacted by restrictive changes aimed at the minority of dangerous drivers. It suggested these changes were unnecessary and would be counterproductive. There was an optimism bias from Government which favoured training and testing, despite warnings from the TC, and the level of evidence from the inquiry reports on GDL was not matched by the Government's responses.

The political stream led to some policy action, but as favoured policy solutions lacked evidence, a policy window for evidence based solutions such as GDL was not opened, and the political discourse focused on alternative policy solutions. The debate was not along party political lines as the majority of the discourse supporting GDL was from backbenchers from all parties, dominated by Labour MPs, and the TC, with two Labour Chairs calling for bold action, with the Government against GDL and in support of learning and testing to minimise economic or social disbenefit.

The long periods of time for policy solutions to be progressed, or not progressed was a further theme. There were long gaps in the discourse on young driver risk, as well as some incremental change and a lack of progress with GDL. There was a seven year gap where there was no discourse on young driver safety and so no focus or recognition of the policy problem. The discourse on policy ideas framed the debate as a choice between safety and freedom in which politicians preferred solutions which did not restrict young drivers. There was acknowledgement of the policy problem, but policy solutions were contested and whilst there was incremental change, the policy window for GDL did not open.

#### **6.4.4 Results and analysis: May 2010 to May 2015 (Coalition)**

##### **6.4.4.1 Results: May 2010 to May 2015**

The Coalition Government publishes its road safety policy: *Strategic framework for road safety* in May (DfT, 2011) and sets out a different approach to improving road safety. It begins with stating road deaths are a tragedy, but: "Britain has a road safety record that is the envy of

the world” (DfT, 2011, p.5) and argues the Government is not complacent. In relation to the risk to young drivers, it begins:

*“Road deaths are a tragedy for all affected, while injuries can cause suffering, economic loss, and life changing misfortune. Road collisions are the leading cause of death for young adults aged 15-24 and they account for over a quarter of deaths in the 15-19 age group” (DfT, 2011, p.6).*

This description of the issue associated with young drivers has little follow through to policy solutions. Instead there are references to more general policy areas. The strong language in the introductory statement does not lead to proposals for policy change. There is, however, focus on the different approaches to the education and testing of novice drivers and a section on the connection between the recession and young driver deaths. It states the reduction in the numbers of deaths of young drivers may have been associated with changes in behaviour, with less young people, driving less, or more carefully, as a result of recession.

There is a dedicated section on learning to drive, including data identifying the increased and disproportionate crash risk:

*“Despite improvements in recent years, novice ... drivers ... are still disproportionately represented in the accident record. This results in higher insurance costs for all drivers and particularly young drivers” (DfT, 2011, p.51).*

Policy ideas include the development of the testing regime and improving driving standards. There are no references to increased risk to young drivers in high risk circumstances and no interventions to address the inexperience of young drivers. GDL is not referenced. A notable policy theme in this statement is the drive to localism which is analysed in section 4.4.4.1.

In a debate about the cost of motor insurance in 2011, there are numerous references to the impact of the high costs to young drivers and the lack of effective competition within the insurance industry. Whilst there are contributors which draw a direct correlation between the high cost of insurance resulting from high risk young drivers, these are in the minority (Hansard HC Deb., 8 November 2011). There are a number of references to the risk to young drivers and the connection between the issue and the potential of GDL as a policy solution. Louise Ellman (Labour), states reasons for:

*“The high premiums faced by young people, and in particular young males, is the high accident rates among them. The accident rates for young males are 10 times higher than those for older people ... [the TC made] ... recommendations, including changing attitudes and enforcing a GDL scheme, but we are still waiting for the Government” (Hansard HC Deb., 8 November 2011, c.220).*

Support for GDL came from John McDonnell (Labour), and Roger Williams (Liberal Democrat) said:

*“There should be no driving for young newly qualified drivers between 11 pm and 6 am, unless for work purposes. There should be zero tolerance of alcohol, and no*

*driving on motorways. This is not a radical plan” (Hansard HC Deb., 8 November 2011, c.229).*

There are few speeches objecting to policy ideas and few overt criticism of GDL. However, explicit voices of dissent came from Northern Ireland parties. Margaret Richie (SDLP) suggests:

*“The broader context is that the economy is suffering, with record numbers of young people out of work. That is exacerbated by people’s use of motor vehicles being restricted” (Hansard HC Deb., 8 November 2011, c.244).*

In addition, Sammy Wilson (DUP) states:

*“To tell them they cannot go out at night or have their friends in the car is not fair, especially when most young people drive responsibly and do not race around the roads causing accidents” (Hansard HC Deb., 8 November 2011, c.245).*

The 2012 TC inquiry: **Road safety** (TC, 2012a) identifies concern about young driver risk where crashes are the largest cause of death:

*“We have found particular issues in casualty rates for young drivers and cyclists. Road accidents are the leading cause of death for young people aged 16-24. Despite assurances that the issue of young driver road safety is a priority, we are not convinced that this is reflected in the road safety strategy” (TC, 2012a, p.3).*

This criticism continues:

*“The Government has failed to grasp the nettle in this area. Despite having told us that action to improve young driver road safety would be given significant importance, the strategy does not deliver this. The Government should be taking more radical action to address this situation” (TC, 2012a, para.55).*

GDL is included in the evidence submitted to the Committee, including, for example, restrictions to night driving and not carrying similar aged passengers, but these do not feature in the Committee’s report. However, the report states that GDL was recommended by the ABI and Brake, and had been included in the recommendations of previous TC inquiries. The report reflects the alternative view of the Minister in giving evidence:

*“Mr Penning told us that he was “looking very much” at such measures [GDL]. However, he was “not convinced about the evidence on graduated testing” and believed existing post-test training “has not worked.” In particular, he noted that young people seeking employment opportunities could potentially be disadvantaged by restrictions on their freedom to drive” (TC, 2012a, para.28).*

The TC reports: “we remain concerned that there is no clear strategy for young drivers” (TC, 2012a: para.29) and recommends a review of driver training to identify which interventions are likely to be most effective. In considering the young driver element of the report the Government frames their response by noting casualties in the 17-24 age group are declining more slowly than all age groups combined and:

*“Whilst our young drivers are amongst the safest in the world, we are not complacent and further improving the safety of young drivers remains a road safety priority” (TC, 2012a, p.3).*

The Government response disagrees an inquiry into driver training is needed and focuses on insurance and technology as the route for reducing young driver risk:

*“Government wants to see these improvements ... reflected in their insurance premiums. Through telematics, or in car technology, insurers now have a real time data feed, which allows them to see an individual’s driving behaviour ... Research so far, has shown that use of telematics can significantly reduce crash rates, and levels of risky driving behaviours. We welcome the increasing number of insurers who are making use of this technology” (TC, 2012b, p.3).*

The Government did not publish evidence on how these interventions reduce casualties.

In 2013, Justin Tomlinson (Conservative) introduces a Bill for GDL with cross party support which did not progress (GDL scheme Bill, 2013), and there is a commitment to deliver a Green Paper on young drivers with the Minister, Robert Goodwill, writing:

*“The safety of young people on our roads is very important to us. Too many young people die, too often. But we are wrestling with how to make things safer while not unduly restricting the freedom of our young people. We want young people to be able to get to work and training, to education and to leisure activities, and we want them to do so safely. We are finding this a difficult balance, with passionate voices on both sides” (Hansard HC Deb., 18 December 2013).*

The January 2014 debate on dangerous driving focuses on penalties and the law associated with causing death by dangerous driving, and GDL is referenced. There are a number of contributions, for example, Julie Hilling (Labour):

*“This is not just about increasing penalties but about enforcing the law and educating young people about the consequences of road accidents. We need to look at GDL for young people” (Hansard HD Deb., 27 January 2014, c.716).*

James Duddridge (Conservative) reflects some of the wider trade-offs, and speaks in favour of GDL schemes from other countries, but notes the risks of young people being left stranded.

Two months later there is a motion on young driver risk and a call to introduce GDL (Hansard HC., 26 February 2014). Stephen Phillips (Conservative), details the death of young constituent whilst a passenger being driven by an 18 year old:

*“How can driving be made safer? What lessons can we learn from other jurisdictions where young drivers cannot simply pass their test and enjoy the same access to the road network as those who have been driving for years? How can we minimise the chance of other families having to suffer what the Challen family have been through?” (Hansard HC Deb., 26 February 2014, c.379).*

In a very well informed speech, the MP covers the statistics associated with young drivers’ death and injury, the disproportionate risk, and inexperience as a major contributory factor. In advocating for GDL, he references an issue of particular concern to his constituents, that of the risk associated with the young driver’s car carrying similar aged passengers. In a long speech he challenges the Government’s record:

*“Neither this Government nor their predecessors have taken the action necessary to ensure the safety of young drivers on our roads, as well as that of those who travel with them and other road users. Why? I do not know. I want to hear tonight that the Minister and the DfT will take a fresh look at the issue before more young lives are wiped out in an unnecessary and untimely fashion ... I accept there is a balance to be struck with social and work mobility ... the fact remains that we have to do something. I ... have been extremely concerned that the DfT has delayed its Green Paper on young driver safety, apparently indefinitely. Let me make it clear ... not only is that not good enough, but he needs to tell the House why that decision has been taken and, frankly, either reverse it or face the consequences of not doing so, and what that will mean for death and serious injury to young drivers in the future” (Hansard HC Deb., 26 February 2014, c.380).*

In response, the Minister, Robert Goodwill states his support for the debate on the “important subject,” that politicians “cannot be complacent” and further improvements are needed as the deaths are preventable (Hansard HC., 26 February 2014:382). He suggests Britain’s roads are amongst the safest in the world and the death rates in 2013 is the lowest since national records began in 1926. In answering the specific challenges, he cites the need to balance the voices advocating GDL with the voices advocating for the freedom of young drivers:

*“There are many voices calling for a GDL to be ... introduced ... We recognise there is significant evidence to suggest that a GDL regime would have a beneficial effect ... However, against that we need to weigh carefully the implications for the freedom of our young people” (Hansard HC Deb., 26 February 2014, c.384).*

The Minister describes the focus for Government is on testing, the affordability of insurance premiums and advances in telematics. In concluding, he references the length of time young driver risk has been discussed:

*“We are worried about the safety of our young people. It is simply not right that a young woman in Britain today is most likely to be killed while being driven by her boyfriend. The safety record of our young and inexperienced drivers has long been a topic of discussion ... I hope [this] illustrate our determination ... to improve road safety throughout our country” (Hansard HC Deb., 26 February 2014, c.386).*

In the same debate, the Government repeats the commitment to bring forward proposals in a Green Paper to address young driver risk. However, the commitment was not honoured (Jones, et al., 2015) as the same Minister states the focus is on technological solutions such as telematics, because they offer great potential to get “the right balance between safety and freedom” (Hansard HC., 26 February 2014: 348). No explanation was found as to why the Green paper on young driver risk was abandoned.

#### **6.4.4.2 Analysis: May 2010 to May 2015**

The disproportionate risk to young drivers was part of the discourse and there was an acceptance from some there was a policy problem. Policy ideas were narrow in scope, and where there was progress, these related to learning and testing, and optimism towards technological solutions and the insurance industry. The political discourse was limited and

related to the difficulties of politicians to countenance restrictions on young drivers. Some interventions appear to distract from young driver risk, suggesting it was not a policy problem. For example, the Government, in their response to the 2012 TC report and in debates, referenced the reduction in casualty numbers, and “young drivers are amongst the safest in the world” (TC, 2012b: para.3) thus questioning the need for policy action. There was evidence of a disconnection of the policy problem from the proposed policy solutions and the 2013 GDL Bill failed. The Government’s response to the 2012 TC report displaced responsibility to irresponsible or dangerous drivers, driver training, and the insurance industry (TC, 2012b). In depoliticising the issue, it enabled the Government not to introduce legislation.

The lack of action on young driver safety by different Governments was cited and had “long been a topic of discussion” (Hansard HC., 26 February 2014: c.386) and evidence of delay from Stephen Phillips in 2014. Policy inaction was also described in more specific terms. For example, a back bench Labour MP, Louise Ellman: “we are still waiting for the Government to respond” (Hansard HC., 8 November 2011: c.220) on GDL; “the Government has failed to grasp the nettle in this area” (TC, 2012a: para:55) or from the same report: “we remain concerned there is no clear strategy for young drivers” (TC, 2012a, para.29).

In this period the level of evidence needed for GDL policy solutions was differential to the level required for learning and testing policy solutions. Government optimistically focused on learning, testing, insurance, and technology where the evidence is weaker and not on legislative change where the evidence is strong. Calls to commission research on driver training to inform policy decisions (TC, 2012b) were dismissed, leaving the Government’s own challenges unanswered. Government acknowledged there was a significant body of evidence on GDL, but was unconvinced, citing economic disadvantage of restricting the freedoms of young drivers (Hansard HC Deb., 18 December 2013, c.550) and decided it was an unsuitable policy solution. In each example the level of evidence offered was limited or non-existent, in contrast to significant peer reviewed evidence offered on GDL as a policy solution.

The balance between freedom and safety featured strongly, with strong voices on both sides. One group favoured legislative restrictions because of the impact of the disproportionate risk to young drivers, whilst others argued for “the freedom of our young people” (Hansard HC., 26 February 2014: c.384 – Robert Goodwill, Conservative). Debates focused on where to strike the balance between freedom and safety, and this framing set the policy options as a choice. Government advocated for an evaluation of the economic consequences to young drivers, but did not commission any research. There were two clear themes. First, the freedom of young people to drive for economic or educational benefit was the dominant frame and as a consequence some death or injury appeared to be acceptable. The second was the level of

death or injury was unnecessarily high and proportionate interventions to improve the safety of young drivers was worth the restrictions to freedom.

The risks to young drivers was recognised as a problem but there was debate about the political acceptability of available policy solutions, and there was an exposition of the challenges and controversy of GDL as a policy solution. Other problems were introduced as a false flag diversion. Disconnecting the policy problem from unpopular but effective policy solutions was the result. There was an optimism bias that learning, testing, technology, or insurance was the solution, and this was a stronger part of the discourse than previously. The political stream appeared stuck as the debate on balancing freedom and safety was not resolved, and different groups advocated for very different policy solutions. The policy stream flowed in different directions and coupling failed to happen, despite optimism the policy windows would open: they did not.

#### **6.4.5 Results and analysis: May 2015 to December 2021 (Conservative)**

##### **6.4.5.1 Results: May 2015 to December 2021**

In December 2015, the Government publishes *Working together to build a safer road system: British road safety statement: moving Britain ahead* (DfT, 2015). It begins with a familiar framing, describing Britain as one of safest countries in the world, an area of national importance and priority for Government.

Fifteen areas are prioritised but the risk to young drivers is not one of them. However, there are some brief references: for example, the statement commits to commissioning research to identify interventions for learner and novice drivers because:

*“There is currently a lack of evidence on the comparative effectiveness of driver education and training programmes. In recognising that young drivers face elevated collision risks” (DfT, 2015, p.17).*

In a section headed *reducing casualties by supporting positive choices*, non-legislative methods for addressing road safety are prioritised. The statement focuses on innovations in technology, marketing strategies and better understanding of driver psychology for reducing road casualties. GDL is described as an unfavoured legislative method:

*“Ten years ago, there were fewer options for reducing the elevated collision risk within the young driver population. Many foreign Governments placed legislative GDL restrictions on their young people. These options include restricting driving to the hours of daylight or not allowing the carriage of passengers, for months or even years after passing tests” (DfT, 2015, p.12).*

The use of technology through telematics-related insurance policies to monitor and financially reward safe driving behaviour through lower premiums is the preferred policy solution:

*“Technology is now emerging that can manage novice driver risk in a more bespoke way without restricting the freedoms of all of our young people. In short, there are modern and sophisticated non-legislative alternatives that treat each young driver as an individual with their own distinct risk profile” (DfT, 2015, p.12).*

Another priority focuses on better learning and testing. Areas such as improving driving skills, learning in different weather, lighting, and road conditions, and improving the testing for novice drivers are suggested. This approach is combined with a plan to increase the number of novice drivers passing their test first time.

The HoC debates road safety in November 2018 which includes three references to young driver safety: the negative influence that car advertisements have on young drivers; a call for better education programmes; and Judith Cummins (Labour) advocates GDL:

*“There is clear evidence that GDL would make our roads safer, by reducing the number of young people involved in car accidents” (Hansard HC Deb., 5 November 2018, c.1332).*

In a debate on excessive speeding, Susan Ellan Jones (Labour) cites young drivers:

*“Despite making up only 7% of drivers, young people ... represent nearly 20% of people killed or seriously injured in car crashes. Those statistics show that we need more action to keep younger drivers safe. There is also a serious case for a GDL” (Hansard HC Deb., 23 May 2019, c.712).*

**The road safety statement 2019: a lifetime of road safety** (DfT, 2019c) is published in July. It contains a section on young driver risk, including GDL. The introduction describes the problem and those factors which impact on young driver safety:

*“Once children reach young adulthood with greater mobility and freedom, their exposure to risk, coupled with an under-developed capacity to judge danger and consequence, and a higher susceptibility to acting on impulse and peer pressure, makes their early years behind the wheel the riskiest. Young drivers and passengers are overrepresented in crash and casualty statistics, but as passengers, they also have great potential to influence driver behaviour” (DfT, 2019c, p.15).*

The report describes two areas of policy at the implementation stage:

- research by TRL looking at different ways to make young drivers safer, more confident, and more skilful as new drivers. **Driver 2020** (DfT, 2019a) is a three-year project designed to help learner and novice drivers. Recruiting 14,000 people assigned to one of five different interventions designed to improve driving behaviour, including: training, education, and technology-based approaches. The research has been significantly impacted by the global pandemic and is delayed
- identifying the main areas to improve novice drivers' knowledge, skills, and experience to help improve road safety with increased learner driver's practice on driving on rural roads, driving independently, and driving in the dark.

In the most comprehensive discussion of GDL in the policy documents analysed, the Government states:

*“Our goal is to discover more and conduct research on what effect different forms of GDL would have in the UK to help young people deal with any restrictions, and keep them, their passengers and other road users safe” (DfT, 2019c, p.18).*

The focus is on learning and practice to acquire competencies; research to explore the potential of a GDL scheme; research to explore the social and economic consequences of introducing GDL; and a plan to improve the quality of driver instruction and driving test.

In October 2020, the TC conducts an inquiry on **Young and novice drivers** (TC, 2020) with a new Chair, Huw Merriman (Conservative). The focus of the inquiry is on the disproportionate risk to young drivers and to scrutinise the Government’s actions in reducing risk. In evidence to the TC inquiry, there are sixty-seven separate pieces of written evidence, of which six responses express opposition to GDL (less than 9%) and 91% are supportive or partially supportive of GDL.

In evidence, the Minister, Baroness Vere of Norbiton, demonstrates her opposition to GDL. She states: “at this moment we are not progressing work on GDL” (TC, 2020, q.256) and:

*“Road safety is a very difficult subject, in that every situation is unique. The type of driver is extremely diverse, and at this time we are not taking a blanket approach to a very diverse set of people” (TC, 2020, q.264).*

In October, the same month as the Minister’s appearance in the TC, a member of the TC asks a question in the HoC. Both the question and answer are quoted at length as an important illustration of the debate about GDL. Lilian Greenwood (Labour) asks. The:

*“2019 ... statement recognised the evidence that restrictions on new novice driver’s post-test driving have proved very effective at improving the safety of young drivers. The Government promised to commission research to explore the social and economic consequences of introducing GDL ... The Government have abandoned [this] work. What does that say about the commitment of the Government to tackling the tragic and avoidable road crashes that claimed the lives of 99 young drivers in 2018?” (Hansard HC Deb., 22 October 2020, c.1225).*

Grant Shapps, the Secretary of State replies:

*“The hon. Lady ... is absolutely right about the number of incidents that take place among young drivers ... There is a decision for society to make as to whether it wishes to restrict the ability of young people to be able to drive their cars after, for example, 10 o’clock at night to drive back from a library or to be able to work, because GDL would restrict those rights ... She is right to say that we have looked very carefully at this issue and come to the conclusion that there are other ways, through things such as black boxes in cars, that will provide safety without restricting freedom” (Hansard HC Deb., 22 October 2020, c.1225).*

The Government suggest the research on social and economic impacts is not necessary and is not a priority in a restricted research budget, despite the previous commitment.

In March 2021, the resulting TC report *Road safety: young and novice drivers* (TC, 2021a) does not recommend GDL. There are nine recommendations (table 6.2). The report sets out an analysis of the problem including the higher levels of risk, unchanged trends in the number of deaths of drivers, passengers, and other road users, and the reducing number of young people driving. It comments on the casualty statistics from 2005 and 2019 and states the number of young drivers killed or seriously injured had reduced by 52%: “However, this progress has now stalled” (TC, 2021a, p.3). It states:

*“Deaths and serious injuries, many of which were entirely avoidable, have a devastating impact on the bereaved, their families and loved ones, and those who support the seriously injured, some of whom have life-changing injuries. In addition to the human cost, these serious crashes also have a significant economic cost” (TC, 2021a, p.8).*

The report includes evidence on psychological factors, including brain development and maturity; and behavioural factors such as inexperience, risky behaviour, speeding, drink driving and the use of mobile phones whilst driving. Other areas described are: male drivers, rural roads, night time driving, telematics, and learning and testing. The report comments:

*“We are concerned that the current learning process does not fully equip learner drivers with sufficient experience of driving a vehicle in a range of different situations” (TC, 2021, p.31).*

The report sets out a lengthy summary of evidence in favour and against GDL:

*“There is evidence that GDL can be effective in reducing crash rates, there are also concerns over the impact such restrictions could have upon the social and economic opportunities ... The Department has made clear it does not currently support the introduction of a GDL system” (TC, 2021a, p.30).*

The inquiry heard evidence from “many witnesses” (TC, 2021a, p.23) including road crash victims, NGOs, the ABI, the RAC Foundation, TRL, where evidence is cited in support of GDL.

Evidence against includes 13 out of 14 young drivers, the AA and BIBA. The report states:

*“There is also not a clear mandate for the introduction of GDL restrictions as opinion remains divided on its implementation among young people who would be most affected by its introduction. Of the fourteen young people who participated directly with us at our engagement event, all but one opposed night-time and passenger restrictions for new drivers” (TC, 2021a, p.4).*

An earlier survey demonstrates overall support from parents and young people for GDL (RACF, 2014b), but this is not cited by the TC.

TRL questions the effectiveness of the focus on learning and testing to improve young driver safety. In its written evidence, TRL states:

*“Driver education and training is not effective at reducing young and novice driver collisions. It is not just that there is an absence of evidence; there is evidence of an absence of effectiveness at the public health level” (TC, 2021a, p.21).*

In May 2021, the Government's response is published (TC, 2021b) stating:

*“Road safety is a priority for the DfT, and we share the Committee's desire to improve safety for all road users” (TC, 2021, p.1b).*

Of the nine recommendations the following responses are given (table 6.2). There are two new (2 and 6), two previously put forward (1 and 7) and five others (3, 4, 5, 8 and 9) which call for further information or updates from existing work.

**Table 6.2: Government response to TC recommendations (TC, 2021b)**

<b>Recommendations from the 2021 Transport Committee Inquiry*</b>	
1.	Commission study of crash rates for older novice drivers (2) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Not necessary</i></li> </ul>
2.	Commission study on the effectiveness of intensive driving courses (3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>There is insufficient evidence, but resources not available</i></li> </ul>
3.	Update on <i>Driver 2020</i> in 2021 (6) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Yes, but not until spring 2022</i></li> </ul>
4.	Detail on the Rural Roads Working Group (8) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>This was first delayed; then announced to commence in the summer of 2021. It was then cancelled.</i></li> </ul>
5.	Publish evaluation criteria for the modular learning pilot (10) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Published</i></li> </ul>
6.	Develop the theory test to include night driving and carrying passengers (11) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The current approach is adequate</i></li> </ul>
7.	Resume social and economic impact research (12) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Government “will not be commissioning any research into the social and economic consequences of GDL” (p.6)</i></li> </ul>
8.	Publish the interim findings from the NI GDL implementation (13) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Yes, but as it was delayed, not yet.</i></li> </ul>
9.	Update research findings into the effectiveness of telematic technology (15) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Yes, but not until spring 2022</i></li> </ul>
<i>(*Brackets detail the recommendation number in the report)</i>	

GDL is a major theme in the TC's inquiry, and the Government decides:

*“Statistics from other countries ... show that it is not comparable nor necessary ... We are also conscious that any move to place any form of restrictions on young and novice drivers would be detrimental to their education and employment prospects, as well as the potential to negatively affect their social and mental health ... These effects would also be felt more severely in rural or socio-economically challenged areas ... To this end, the DfT has no plans to conduct research on or implement any form of a GDL at this time” (TC, 2021b, p.6).*

Progress in implementing the recommendations has been impacted by the global pandemic. *Driver 2020* (DfT, 2019a) has been delayed (recommendations 3 and 9), the rural roads working group (recommendation 4) was first delayed and subsequently abandoned, and the implementation of GDL in Northern Ireland has also slipped (recommendation 8).

There is no further discourse after May 2021 to the end of 2021.

#### 6.4.5.2 Analysis: May 2015 to December 2021

There were two main sources of data from which discourse on young drivers was analysed: the 2019 policy statement and the 2020 TC inquiry. There was little discourse from other Parliamentary interventions and as an example of the lack of attention, young driver safety was not included in fifteen priorities in the 2015 policy statement, and two interventions supporting GDL from Labour MPs do not shift the discourse. However, in the limited references, there was a preference for learning and testing solutions, and later on technological and insurance based solutions without strong evidence to support the policy direction. TRL (TC, 2021a, p.21) find that learning and testing have marginal positive benefit. These are prioritised over legislative changes which have a strong evidence base, and GDL was described as an unfavourable policy solution which would damage the economic and social freedoms of young drivers. Population based policy solutions are not favoured and an approach based on “individual(s) with their own risk profile” (DfT, 2015, p12) was preferred. This is despite many examples of population based interventions across British policy, including in other areas of road safety.

There was a focus on young driver safety in the 2019 policy statement and the 2021 TC inquiry, and the issue was seen as a policy area which required attention. A number of different policy solutions were discussed, and young driver safety was perceived as a difficult area of policy, with debate about different types of solutions. The framing of legislative policy solutions as problematic, and favouring learning and testing solutions was the approach in the discourse.

Where there is imprecision and ambiguity, perceptions can change, and politicians are open to change their views. In a political environment where the evidence is seen as debateable and so insufficient to remove uncertainty, persuasion, and argument, not facts, are used to address ambiguity. There was strong evidence where the evidence was disputed and there were a number of opposing ‘ideas’ suggested. Whilst the evidence for legislative change is strong compared to alternative solutions, such as technology or testing where the evidence is weak, the framing of the policy solutions as disputed led to a reluctance of politicians to accept new policy solutions. Those advocating GDL focused their arguments on a *safety* frame supported by strong evidence, whilst those opposing GDL came from a *mobility* frame where there was reluctance to restrict the freedom of young drivers based on disputed evidence. As the 2021 TC membership was in disagreement, the political discourse and environment caused a result of delay whilst further work was commissioned or completed.

The role of powerful policy participants influenced the TC inquiry. Unusually, the Minister was unambiguous and very direct in her opposition to GDL. She was reluctant to introduce population based solutions when the problem was perceived to be with small numbers of

dangerous drivers, and concern that restrictions would damage the economic prospects of young people. This was in direct conflict with many existing blanket policies. The decision to rescind research on the potential economic and social impact of GDL could be described as a political decision to avoid the risk of conclusions that did not fit the Government framing. She was also optimistic the *Driver 2020* research (DfT, 2019a) would generate policy solutions to address young driver safety.

Some policy actors including the tiny sample of young drivers themselves from the 2021 TC focus group, NGOs and an academic who gave evidence to the TC (the minority) aligned with the views of the Government. Other actors, such as road safety campaigners, different academics, and NGOs (the majority) attempted to advocate for policy solutions with strong evidence. As these were framed as unpopular and ambiguous in the report, policy solutions were delayed. Kingdon (1995) calls this kicking the problem down the road in his adaptation of the garbage can model. The model seeks to understand how choices are made and how policy streams may come together, and it appears the TC and the Government 'dump' the solutions or at least are content to wait for the *Driver 2020* (DfT, 2019a) research to conclude. *Driver 2020* (DfT, 2019a) was an example of the length of time incremental policy development takes to advance solutions. The need for additional evidence on driver training was identified by the 2012 TC and declined by the Government. A plan to commission new research on interventions to support young driver safety was included in the 2015 policy statement, and referenced in the 2019 policy statement as work in progress. The research itself was delayed as a result of the pandemic, but, if the proposed date of publication of 2023 materialises, this would have been more than a decade from the initial 'idea' to the research findings.

The disproportionate risk to young drivers and those impacted was identified as a problem requiring attention, though the ongoing reduction in the numbers of deaths and serious injuries appeared to deflect from the urgency of action. Whilst there was evidence of two significant policy interventions, and seemingly, the opening of the policy window, the framing of available policy solutions as disputed or ambiguous resulted in further delay whilst research concluded. The policy approach was strongly influenced by the Minister and Secretary of State, and was within a wider context of little Parliamentary discourse or interest from policy entrepreneurs or MPs. The result was that those advocating for maintaining the freedom of young drivers with learning, testing or technological solutions dominated, rather than those proposing restrictions to maximise safety and the introduction of GDL. All three streams struggled to develop, and the result was inaction and delay.

## 6.5 Interview results

The approach to conducting interviews is set out in 3.4.1 and the single question is: *since 1987, there have been three TC reports and six dedicated HoC debates on young drivers. Do you think this area is a policy problem? If so, why has little progress been made in reducing casualties? (10)*. The interview data is presented within themes developed from the literature search (chapter 2) and the findings from the interviews. Interview data includes a wide range of views but there are some consistencies within and between the interview groups. The TC inquiry report (TC, 2021a) on young and novice drivers was published shortly before the interviews took place, and this report features heavily in the data.

### 6.5.1 Is there a policy problem?

There was a wide range of perspectives on the attitudes towards young drivers which has a bearing on how or whether young driver safety was seen as a policy problem. The majority seek to draw a distinction between safe drivers who are young and the young drivers who take risks or drive dangerously, and the resulting difficulties in initiating effective policy solutions.

There are participants who are critical of young male drivers, for example:

*“The problem is, it’s not so much the novice, it’s the young bit and it’s young men. So, we find young women novice drivers to be really careful, ultra-careful. But like young men in a lot of things, you give him something and they take the p\*\*s out of it. So, there’s that big macho stuff around driving around in fast cars” (PA L2).*

There are fatalistic views which compare road safety to other areas where safety risks have been identified for young males and solutions are difficult to find, and the workplace and agriculture are cited, as well as risk to young drivers in other parts of the world:

*“We do have a young driver problem, but so does the rest of the world” (Academic 3).*

A group are concerned with what was seen as an inappropriate and disproportionate focus on the young age group, demonstrated by this NGO member:

*“I generally get a bit annoyed when we demonize young people ... and I think this [GDL] probably could be a good example of it” (NGO, L1).*

And in contrast there are arguments that young driver risk is infrequently discussed and so cannot be a policy problem worthy of action. This interviewee suggests the problem has reduced with time, and so not a priority for policy action: *“It’s not as problematic anymore, as it was” (PA N2).*

The main cohort suggested the disproportionate risks to young drivers and the consequences of their driving was a major problem, and there are many quotes detailing the implications on the victims, families, and wider society, without distinguishing

between a problem and a policy problem. One interview asks: *“Do we have a policy problem? I am not sure, but we do have an injury risk problem” (Academic 2).*

Interviewees expressed views on the high degree of complexity influencing how the policy area is seen (for example, Academic 1; PA N4) and appeared to conflate the problem and policy streams. They suggested, as there were a number of potential policy solutions, and there was a debate as to which provided the most effective outcomes, the complexity associated with young driver safety diluted the clarity of whether there was a policy problem. Instead the focus was on the complexity of young driver safety. Whilst there was a large cohort who described death and serious injury as a major problem, whether this was dealt with as a policy problem requiring action from politicians was questioned due to the lack of consensus on which policy solutions to implement. This is not always clear, but it appears a problem stream began to develop, but the policy stream remained contentious due to the perceived unpopularity of GDL.

The influence of car manufacturers and the car lobby, including advertisers, had on whether young driver safety was seen as a policy problem or not, was a theme:

*“Do I think that vehicle manufacturers have done almost nothing to protect young drivers? Yes” (PA L7).*

There are two participants from national NGOs (NGO N3; NGO N6, 2021) who argued that the influence of the car lobby was significantly lower than assumed. A more frequent and opposite view from, for example, a politician who drew a clear correlation between the investment of car manufacturers in organisations such as WHO, EU and the British Parliament (Politician N6) to support the advancement of car travel, rather than road safety. He suggested this direct link and the advancement of private mobility diluted whether road safety was seen as a policy problem. Many views were expressed concerning the influence of the car lobby groups as identified in a sample of quotes:

*“What we’ve got is a culture that, back to the roads lobby and squillions of pounds ... how many billboards are there for cars, Sunday magazines, television? ... So, we’ve got a world and a normative culture which says, these are things you should aspire to own. These are important ... They’ve got deep psychosocial attachment in the sense that it says something about you and where you are in the world to own probably a powerful car ... and it’s obviously very much focused, particularly on males” (Academic 4). And: “It means that you’ve got the next generation of drivers coming in to help keep vehicles on the road. So, from a motoring point of view, it’s really important that you have the next generation of drivers” (NGO N1).*

A further quote illustrates the influence of car manufacturers, and in the interview directly compared the approach to the behaviour of the tobacco industry lobby groups:

*“It is really important that you have the next generation of drivers coming in ... who are you going to sell your cars to if not?” (NGO N1).*

There was a mixed picture, with some contradictions, but applying Kingdon's (1995) definition of the policy problem, the consensus suggested the complexity, the lack of discourse and policy action, and the influence of powerful car manufacturer networks indicates the risks to young drivers was generally not seen as a policy problem, or at least one that does not attract sufficient attention commensurate with the level of risk. There was tolerance of the number of injury casualties, and acceptance the policy solutions were not necessary, some suggesting that young people were targeted unnecessarily.

### 6.5.2 Freedom vs safety

The strongest theme was the debate between safety and mobility where different language was used: for example, freedom, libertarian, mobility, access. There were strongly held views from both perspectives, and many observations about the consequence of legislative restrictions on young people, which outweigh small numbers of politically or philosophically held view of freedom. The Swedish study by Svensson et al. (2014) identifies the conflict between safety and mobility as problematic. Interviewees, on the whole, described these views and consequences rather than acknowledged these views as their own. This quote frames the discourse well:

*"You just end up with a political philosophy that either says I prioritise individual freedoms over everything, or I don't" (Academic 2).*

The libertarian political perspective and the negative consequence of restricting driving behaviours was raised in relation to the 2021 TC inquiry into young and novice drivers:

*"A lot of this was played out in those sessions of the Select Committee inquiry in relation to young drivers. It was very much those who represented rural constituencies that were most against introducing any restrictions, even though their constituencies are probably those where there's the biggest problem because they represent areas that have large numbers of rural roads" (Politician N4).*

It was suggested the TC's decision not to recommend a GDL in 2021 was influenced by political behaviours, and directly attributable to concern about implementing policy solutions perceived as restricting freedom and being politically unpopular:

*"It felt to me like it was more ideological than worried about the electoral consequences of restricting young drivers" (Politician N4).*

On the disagreements between public health and private freedoms, this politician suggested:

*"I think it can be found at the heart of the political discourse in this country at the moment, led by a libertarian cabal" (Politician N3).*

This national policy actor was critical of what they saw as the Government's motives on GDL:

*"I don't think this Government really care about young people at all ... but they pretend they care on the GDL side ... They don't want to make it hard for people to get a job that need a driving license ... They're using them as excuses. I don't know what they are, but they don't like the idea of restricting freedoms" (PA N2).*

There was concern about the reduction in the freedoms of drivers generally and whilst there was a recognition of the balance between safety and freedom, this interviewee was adamant that *“it’s gone too far, and we’ll soon have no freedom left”* (NGO N4). However, whilst a number of quotes are used above to analyse the variation in views, the majority of the discourse was in favour of legislative changes such as a GDL:

*“They’re such a vulnerable group, of course they need sensible constraints placed upon them, and parents would largely support that”* (PA N1).

Or this analogy:

*“If you’ve got a toddler who’s just started walking, you allow the toddler some freedom to walk around your house, but you don’t allow it to go up and down stairs, you use your stair gates and so on. And that’s just such a lovely analogy, because society understands at that point that child requires some protection from the environment. This [GDL] is that simple”* (Academic 2).

However, there was concern about the consequences of GDL. For example, increased costs, reduced access particularly in rural areas, a risk it could lead to an increase in uninsured drivers, or under-estimating the psychological and social importance of private transport of young working class men. The reducing numbers of young people choosing not to drive was raised to suggest young people were able to maintain access to education or employment.

This policy actor reflected the difficulty of making political choices to introduce restrictions because of the consequences on individuals as well as a potential negative political reaction:

*“It’s really easy to have the red view [Labour] when you’re not in Government. But if I’m a 17 year old being denied the right to go to work because there’s only one bus a day or I finish at 8:00 o’clock and I can’t get home without my own transport: in rural communities these are huge issues ... But I think it’s very easy to go, yeah, you’ve gotta regulate when you’re not in Government and don’t have to deal with the consequences ... and the unemployment”* (PA N3).

A further factor was the concern about political unacceptability:

*“No politician will ever address this [GDL], because they would never get public support”* (PA L1)

There were varied views about the types of interventions required to increase young driver safety, including black boxes which were seen as a ‘silver bullet’ or improved education in schools, but *what* might make a difference is not the focus in this thesis. The dominant theme was the debate between protecting the freedom of young drivers or maximising their safety, which was frequently described as a choice between one and the other. The analysis suggested, whilst there was concern about the consequences of restrictions, the prevailing influence was on maintaining young people’s freedom, and some believed this, in the period of a Conservative Government, when the interviews were conducted to be for reasons of libertarian political philosophy. This perspective, however, was not the dominant personal

view in the interviews where the majority supported restrictions to improve safety and introduce GDL.

### 6.5.3 The use of evidence

The inconsistent use of evidence was cited. For example, for those interviewees familiar with the 2021 TC inquiry there was consternation of the priority afforded to the views of fourteen young drivers from a focus group conducted by the members of the TC, over written and oral TC evidence, or published data on surveys on the views of GDL (for example, RACF, 2014b). There was a more general point made about how evidence was used in Parliamentary processes. The evidence on GDL was seen as strong but minimised, and the evidence on telemetry, or learning and testing was seen as weak, but received focus. Interviewees complained about bias and the negative influence of politicians: a ‘pick and mix’ approach to selecting and profiling evidence. An example cited was how the use of inaccurate language – for example, ‘ban on driving in the dark’ had distracted from a debate on the relative benefits of policy solutions in GDL. Speaking on the use of evidence:

*“It was difficult to get into the detail due to distractions of factors not proposed ... The report didn’t reflect the evidence ... it was dismissed” (Politician N4).*

Interviewees reported a differential burden of proof between different policy solutions, with an optimism bias towards unproven interventions. It was suggested this was politically motivated to fit a particular viewpoint, and reinforced by the views of fourteen young drivers.

### 6.5.4 Politics of time

The length of time for policy to change was a strong theme, both from the perspective of interviewees generally frustrated about *why things take so long*, and from those with a closer insight into policy development who described slow progress with resignation and acceptance.

*“We have been talking about young drivers for ages and there isn’t the join up with policy ... we need to make it economically attractive” (PA N4).*

A failure to take difficult decisions in contested policy areas is referenced, for example:

*“Government decision making is often delayed; with COVID being the latest excuse not to make decisions on things that would improve road safety” (PA L1).*

It was suggested that there was a more challenging route for policy change associated with legislative change (specifically GDL) compared to policy changes for improvements to areas such as learning, testing and the use of technology. Policy inaction and delay was the resulting approach in relation to GDL, whilst the other interventions succeeded with incremental change with fewer barriers. This interviewee suggested there was a policy failure because young driver risk was not seen as a sufficiently urgent policy problem:

*“If that isn’t a failed public health intervention or a failed policy problem, or a policy problem with that group, I don’t know what would be” (Academic 2).*

An explanation of the delay in progressing young driver risk and GDL, in the decade following the Coalition Government, was offered by this policy actor:

*“This might be a political motivation for someone like Grant Shapps and Baroness Vere as well, is that they see telematics and they see it as the silver bullet for the young driver problem. And that means that suits Conservatives. Let’s give it to the market, the market is going to create the solution” (PA N2).*

The same policy actor continued and commented on the understanding of young driver risk over time, with slow progress on policy action as the risk to young drivers was reduced:

*“I’m not saying we shouldn’t care about them, but I don’t think it is as problematic anymore as it was. But I don’t actually think that’s saying, oh, the Government have really done all the major, best, amazing things, we have really cracked the nut of young drivers. It’s fortunate ... the gains are a lucky accident with the demographics” (PA N2).*

A politician commented on the 2021 TC inquiry and suggested there was a closed approach to the debate before and after the inquiry, as the Minister stating her objections to GDL influenced the work of the TC:

*“It was quite hard to have a proper discussion about it because almost it [GDL] had become red flag somehow” (Politician N4).*

It was suggested a reason the debate about whether there was a policy problem and the lack of willingness to decide on policy ideas had continued throughout the period of this thesis:

*“Levers that you could in theory pull, the political question is ... is this going to be actually saleable to the great British public? Is the British public ready for this? ... And what are the unintended consequences?” (PA N6).*

There was a circular pattern where the risks to young drivers was universally recognised, but the politics associated with restricting the freedom of young drivers delayed acceptance of GDL as a policy solution. GDL was unacceptable to politicians from both main parties and time was spent on prioritising policy solutions without the evidence of effectiveness. This pattern was identifiable over the whole research period and was true when there were Conservative and Labour Governments. In addition, there were gaps in when young driver risk was discussed, and this resulted in delay and inaction in progressing effective policy solutions.

## **6.6 Young driver safety conclusion**

The political stream significantly influenced whether and how young driver safety was approached. There were similar patterns over time, where there was acknowledgement there was a disproportionate risk to young drivers, policy solutions were debated and contested, and this was followed by inaction, delay, or incremental change. These patterns did not fall along party political lines, but into a form that had support from backbench MPs from all parties and

TC inquiries, and opposition from all Governments to any form of GDL policy. Interventions with a weaker evidence base were consistently favoured. Political concern was that restrictive policy solutions would be unpopular, restrict the freedom of young drivers and lead to negative impacts on the economic and social prospects of young people.

The work of Hinchcliff et al. (2011) was a strong influence on this thesis as they focus on agenda setting and found strong connections between the public's demand for, and acceptance of GDL in influencing political support. They use Kingdon's (1995) MSM to describe how policy problems came to the attention of the Australian Government, and how the communication of the evidence, supportive lobbying and advocacy by policy participants, and media reporting of crashes involving deaths were central factors in agenda setting. The authors suggest there were a series of politically determined, incremental decisions by politicians which achieved consensus between those advocating conflicting positions.

### **6.6.1 Problem stream**

The increased risk to young drivers was first identified in the HoC in 1937 (Hansard HC Deb., 3 May 1937, c.791) and so, was not a new problem. The issue was regularly debated by politicians, but with lengthy gaps, highlighting long periods of time for policy change to develop. Policy attention was periodically seen in debates, and inquiries, as well as an acceptance of the disproportionate risk to young drivers. This was despite the fall in absolute numbers of deaths over time. To illustrate, TCs held three inquiries on young driver safety (1999, 2007 and 2021) and the problem was included in two wider road safety inquiries (2008 and 2012) which was unusual within this small policy area. There was evidence that young driver safety was recognised as an issue (Roman et al., 2015), but the urgency of how politicians approached it, particularly with regard to GDL was directly influenced by whether it was acknowledged and seen as a policy problem requiring attention or not.

Framing Britain as having some of the safest roads in the world distracted from policy action, as high risk areas, such as this case study, have been masked within top-line statistics. This was important in how young driver safety was perceived and responded to. The identification of the issue did not always lead to the recognition of a policy problem, and there were contradictory responses as the problem was not recognised in the same way by different groups. For example, the 2021 TC inquiry was influenced by a more libertarian perspective where restrictions to mobility were unacceptable, but the earlier TC inquiries were more supportive of GDL. Young driver safety received intermittent attention in debates and can be identified as a policy problem during some periods. But the policy window did not stay open long enough to secure policy change for GDL, and incremental policy or delay was the result.

### 6.6.2 Policy stream

The risks to young drivers has been understood for many decades and politicians intermittently grappled with how to make improvements. Policy actors and politicians not in government advocated for forms of GDL, whilst all Governments have prioritised the freedom of young drivers. Throughout the period learning and testing solutions dominated and GDL remained excluded from Britain's legislation (Greenwood et al., 2020).

With respect to GDL, decisions on this controversial policy solution were frequently delayed whilst further research was sought as a way of demonstrating activity, but international evidence was not accepted, and sometimes challenged. Later in the period, policy solutions targeted at education, knowledge and skills dominated, with an optimism bias that technology or the insurance markets would drive improvements. A notable exception from the earlier period, was the introduction of the policy strengthening the probationary period in 1995 which introduced the ability to revoke the licence of young drivers if six points were reached.

Despite strong evidence on the effectiveness of GDL (for example, Hirschberg and Lye, 2020) there was imprecision and ambiguity with how GDL as a policy solution was treated. Some politicians accepted the evidence whilst others have avoided changing their views or have reinforced their unfavourable perspectives. Policy actor and victim voices have been sought but have not persuaded sufficient politicians of the need to restrict the freedom of young drivers (see Twisk and Stacey, 2007, who discuss the importance of cooperation between politicians and coalitions). The perceived imprecision in the evidence was reinforced by misinformation and an implied lack of specificity over time; for example, promoting the negative views of fourteen young drivers (TC, 2021a), rather than supportive, published large scale survey results on public views of GDL (RACF, 2014b). In the political environment where evidence is seen as debateable and so insufficient to remove uncertainty, persuasion, and argument, not facts, have been used to address ambiguity. The value and impact of evidence was minimised, whilst the political discourse prioritised further learning and the freedom of young drivers, over incremental protective licensing changes. At each Parliamentary event or debate, policy solutions with less or no evidence were prioritised as the policy solution to the risks to young drivers, or additional research commissioned, over GDL. Policy solutions have been contested and whilst these were framed as ambiguous, or requiring further research, unpopular policy solutions have not been accepted.

### 6.6.3 Politics stream

The nature and impact of political discourse can influence whether policy problems secure policy change over time, and the analysis identified three main findings:

**Politics of contested evidence:** The erratic use of evidence in policymaking was present, and how the burden of proof was assessed and applied to the evidence was inconsistent. There was significant evidence that the introduction of GDL would reduce death and serious injury, but this evidence was debated and contested. A comment on the 2021 TC inquiry noted: “the report didn’t reflect the evidence ... it was dismissed” (Politician N4). In contrast, the lack of robustness of the evidence on the effectiveness of learning and testing, for example, in *Learning to Drive* (DfT, 2008), was not challenged and accepted as the policy direction. TRL suggested that driver education and training was not effective at reducing young driver crashes (TC, 2021a, p.21). These are examples of the complex relationship between evidence and policymaking and the area of particular interest is how politicians engage with evidence in advocating or detracting from particular solutions (Cairney, 2016).

As a consequence of the political discourse around contested or perceptions of ambiguity of the policy solutions, there was delay, and even as the academic evidence on GDL strengthened over time, the framing of the evidence in this way enabled politicians to decide on specific British research, rather than policy action based on international evidence. Belin and Tillgren (2013) suggest that where there is complexity in the discourse this results in long delays in policy formulation which is shown in this thesis.

There remains concern about the unintended consequences of GDL and the political response in the late 2010’s was to fund research to strengthen the evidence on how to support young drivers to reduce risk – *Driver 2020* (DfT, 2019a). In the earlier periods in this research, the political discourse was between politicians not in government and in Government. In the latter period, a freedom based, or more libertarian political perspective was more evident in how the evidence was treated and the maintenance of access to employment and social activities was prioritised over reducing the numbers of deaths and serious injuries.

**Freedom vs safety:** The 2007 TC report is one example where the framing of road safety as an issue between freedom and safety which directly impacted on the political priority was raised:

*“It is necessary to make an informed choice about the balance to be made between driving entitlement, risk, and costs – both economic and social and the dominance of the car” (TC, 2007a, p.16).*

There was a legitimate role for politicians to balance the competing demands from both sides of the argument and this analysis was more interested in how this impacted on policy change, rather than commenting on the relative benefits of either argument. Over time, the debate had been over simplified and polarised between those supportive and those opposed to licensing restrictions. Opportunities to consider the experience from other jurisdictions where, for example, exemptions to night time driving restrictions have been used to introduce possible practical workarounds, have been missed. Politically unpopular solutions which

restrict the liberty or freedom of young drivers have been avoided even though there was evidence that these were supported by most parents and a majority of young people (RACF, 2014b). In the latest decade analysed in the thesis, there was evidence of an increase in an overt political philosophy towards a more libertarian approach to young driver freedom and a wish to protect economic or social freedom. Throughout the period politicians dismissed GDL and its perceived unpopularity in favour of less controversial, though less effective policy solutions. Options to test political assumptions have not been taken, such as a possible public consultation on GDL, and politicians have not taken on the challenge to be bolder as they relied on reducing, though more slowly, casualty numbers, thus avoiding any urgency to take more radical, or unpopular interventions.

**Inaction, delay, and incrementalism:** The length of the research period was an important aspect of this thesis to identify whether there were patterns. A number of Parliamentary processes proposed licensing change without any decisions to implement such policies. Those advocating GDL have been ignored, proposals consistently rejected, or the policy response was regularly to commission further research or delay decision making through further debate. This was the case from Conservative and Labour Governments. Where there was policy action this was largely incremental and focused on changes to education, learning and testing or a hope that utilising technology would address young driver safety, but with an absence of tangible policy solutions.

There was a circular pattern where the risks to young drivers was universally accepted by policy participants, but the politics associated with restricting the freedom of young drivers delayed acceptance of GDL as a policy solution. Available and effective solutions, or ideas, were unacceptable to politicians from both main parties and time had been spent on selecting policy solutions without the evidence of effectiveness. Political discourse and disagreement directly impacted on the policy choices made and these decisions have not attracted attention from the media or the public, and as Barker (2019) suggests: “the news cycle barely stutters”. Politicians did not prioritise licensing changes and policy entrepreneurs have failed to form effective coalitions as GDL remains contested.

An important aspect of delay was the length of time taken to progress young driver policy and GDL. The circular pattern described had the result of delaying the advancement of GDL as a favoured policy solution and the processes took very long periods of time. For example, the perceived need for further research which resulted in *Driver 2020* (DfT, 2019a) was first identified in 2011 and results are not expected until 2023. The absence of political will to take decisive action was compounded by political churn with both Ministers and Governments, in the latter part of this research. Each time the GDL *can* was kicked down the road (Kingdon,

1995), the review process started again and different Ministers in different Governments were tasked with deciding what to do. Policy processes are not sustained in such circumstances and the result was further policy delay and inaction.

In summary, there was inaction and delay towards young drivers' safety policy, particularly on licensing change. It was suggested the decline in the numbers of deaths was an "accident with the demographics" rather than proactive and effective policy drives by Government (PA N2). The wider importance of the car in society supported by advertising and lobby groups, framed in terms of freedom and access to economic opportunity, as well as an optimism bias towards alternative unproven policy solutions dominate. The need for regulatory change meant Governments were able to largely ignore Parliamentary scrutiny and policy coalitions, however loose, of road safety professionals, public health, the police, and victims who have consistently advocated for licensing change. Stephen Phillips's (Conservative) summary is apposite:

*"The number of young people being killed or injured on our roads unnecessarily is too high, the present position is untenable, the attitude of the Department inexplicable, the persistence of the problem inevitable and the solution readily and easily apparent. Not only can something be done; something must be done"*  
(Hansard HC Deb., 26 February 2014, c.382).

The risk to young drivers was first identified in 1937 in the HoC, and GDL was first suggested as a policy solution in 1993. From this first suggestion that GDL would address the disproportionate numbers of those killed or seriously injured, be a way to discipline young drivers and to stop them showing off, there was a clear pattern of delay and inaction. In relation to wider field of transport policy, Marsden and Docherty (2014) suggest that policy change was characterised as being slow and incremental, over long periods of time, consistent to the findings on young driver safety. Numerous and regular opportunities were available to politicians to implement GDL from all sides of the political divide. These opportunities were consistently not taken and young driver safety policy remains stuck in a sometimes moving and sometimes stationary revolving door.

## Chapter 7

### Framing of road safety

#### 7.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses whether framing is a consideration in how road safety policy is dealt with. It answers the research question: ***do the views of politicians and policy actors on framing vary, and does any variation matter?*** (1.3). It primarily focuses on two interview questions, with data from documents and debates. These are, question 3: ***road safety is described in different ways, illustrated by: Britain has “some of the safest roads in the world” and we need to “end the scandal of complacency” of not addressing road safety. What is your view?*** And question 4: ***how important is the language that is used and does different language make a difference?*** (see table 3.5).

The study of agenda setting includes how a policy image is portrayed, the levels of public, media, and government attention to any policy issue, and what causes attention to rise or fall over time, and whether policymaking develops or not (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009, p.26; Baumgartner et al., 2014, p.66). Policy areas can be framed and categorised to make them appear complicated or linked to wider social values to encourage greater participation (Cairney, 2012, p.185). The influence of coalitions and policy entrepreneurs is important in policy framing and how a policy problem is framed is an important aspect of the work of the policy entrepreneur (Kingdon, 1995, p.204). Dudley and Richardson (2000) suggest that even if relationships in networks are loose, they bring their own language and ways of framing the policy issue. What can be culturally different perspectives can lead to conflict in how the policy image is viewed. Policy actors can inhabit the same policy space, and the interactions are influenced by the language and the framing. Framing is discussed further in section 2.6.3 which cites from the literature where framing is explored: for example, Clegg Smith et al. (2014) suggest that reframing increased the support for the road safety laws in the US, and Belin, Tillgren and Vedung, (2012) conclude that framing road safety differently played a significant role in adopting a new and radical approach to road safety (*Vision Zero*) in Sweden.

The methodology employed throughout this thesis uses CDA on three sources of data: primary interviews, Parliamentary documents, and HoC debates. The methodology is detailed further in chapter 3. There is not a comprehensive method for categorising the components of framing in the literature accessed, however, various writers discuss a number of factors which are described in three sections: perception, ambiguity, and technical. This categorisation, as applied to framing has been developed from how the multiple streams model deals with policymaking under conditions of ambiguity (Zahariadis, 2014) and is explained in 2.5.3.

## 7.2 Results

### 7.2.1 Perception

There are two main themes resulting from the analysis within *perception*:

- framed as inevitable
- framed as unimportant

#### 7.2.1.1 Framed as inevitable

The US book by Singer, *There are no accidents* (2022) argues the use of the word *accident* is a deliberate framing in order to protect those in power or with vested interests to avoid crash investigation by blaming the victims and diluting anger. She suggests “accidents are a political and social problem” (p.250). Using the language of inevitability or blaming victims for crashes to distract from policy interventions is a conclusion by Schmitt (2020), also from within a US context. In an extensive analysis of the Australian legislature, King (2020) explores, in part, the language of framing which she says contributes to “how and why deaths on the road have been treated as a species apart” (p.263). The interest in this research question is in whether there is evidence to support or detract from the analysis from the US or Australia.

Academic 2, in discussing language, argues framing road safety as inevitable has a deliberate and direct influence on how politicians decide to deal with the numbers of deaths and serious injuries. The language of inevitability, they argue, enables politicians to reduce the policy response because road crashes are not perceived as being preventable, and so there is little that politicians are able to do:

*“When you have language that is effectively contrary to the moral step that you want to take, it stops you progressing towards that vision ... It legitimises the counterarguments ... to that philosophy, which says, of course we can never stop this. That to me is the main philosophical divide. Either you're committed to stopping serious injury and death or not. You accept that there will always be mistakes, and you design the system to get rid of the serious injury and death ... Basically, a lot of it is fatalistic language. Just accepting that people must die and be injured so that we can all move around” (Academic 2).*

Adopting the language of inevitability is discussed by this politician in the next quote. They illustrate the point by citing repeated cyclist deaths at two named junctions where there was no resulting policy response. They suggest this is due, in part, to a perception of inevitability. They illustrate the frustration from parts of the community by describing road closures caused by repeated protests by campaigners challenging the absence of political action:

*“Many of us are just feeling really weary at the moment at the way that we are talking about framing the way that road death and serious injury are treated as being inevitable and as being just a part of life” (Politician L1, 2021).*

This policy actor supports and develops the inevitability framing by suggesting that crashes are perceived as “unforeseeable and unpreventable, and it’s an accident rather than a decision” (PA L6). The unpredictability is cited as a rationale for not taking policy action:

*“If ... you insist on using the language of accidents because it's always unpredictable, you don't actually have an overriding requirement to change what you're doing. So, it enables more of the same I guess, and that's where the complacency comes in” (NGO N1).*

An interviewee from a national NGO puts forward the same view by connecting complacency driven by the *safest roads in the world* narrative resulting in “a lot of people say, ‘but that’s not possible.’ Well, it’s not possible if you don’t try” (NGO N6).

As suggested by Singer (2022) and Schmitt (2020), *accident* as the description is frequently cited by all interview groups as a significant aspects in explaining the framing of road safety. Citing the description of crashes as *accidents*, policy actor N4 suggests that “*it won’t happen to me*, so everybody always thinks it won’t happen to them and they drive more risky than they should” (PA N4). A local policy actor describes an acceptance of avoiding *accident* as a narrative, but also a frustration towards many media outlets continuing to use *accident*:

*“Language is the only way you can express an idea accurately, so language is fundamental. It’s ... about brand ... It covers things like our old favourite talking about collisions, not accidents ... I wouldn't say we're at the end of this journey yet. But moving gradually to talking about risk rather than injuries. I think Vision Zero does reposition you away from any sense of complacency because it says, well, the only thing you can celebrate is zero” (PA L6).*

The influence of framing is used to illustrate the challenges of engaging local politicians. This policy actor suggests:

*“If it’s described as an accident ... [the response is] oh well, that’s unfortunate, that’s awful, that’s terrible. I’m sorry. Or a collision. Well, why did that happen? Do you know what’s happened there? What can we do differently? So, the language changes the tone of policy and practice” (PA L5, 2021).*

There has been a debate about the term accident or crash or collision which has been particularly prominent within the road victim networks (Roadpeace, 2022). There are two examples of where action has been taken with the language used to frame road safety: First, a coalition of road safety professionals, journalists and academics produced the Road Collision Reporting Guidelines (2020) with wider suggestions on how to report road crashes, as well as changing the terminology to collision. Second, in 2021 the DfT decided to change its use of the word *accident* to *collision* in future reporting of statistical data and publications. In the response to the consultation, the DfT stated there was no opposition to the proposal for a change in language and there was support from “some respondents” (DfT, 2022a). The

decision from the DfT was made based on feedback and it makes no comment about whether the terminology alters how road safety is perceived or not.

Two quotes are provided to illustrate regular debates with the HoC where language is used from different perspectives. In 1994, Sir Peter Bottomley (Conservative) suggests “We should stop talking about traffic accidents and talk about crashes because we know a great deal about the causes” (Hansard HC Deb., 12 April 1994, c.32), and Mark Lazarowicz (Labour) said:

*“That attitude [complacency] must be challenged because the fact is that even the very term road accident is a misnomer. The huge number of deaths and injuries on the road arise from events that could easily be prevented ... and are easily foreseeable. If deaths and injuries can be prevented, and if the tragedies that befall so many individuals and families can be avoided, why do we, and I mean the entire community, not just the Government and the House, allow them to happen?” (Hansard HC Deb., 8 March 2002, c.611).*

There is to be a consistency in the views from across all the interview groups suggesting that framing road safety as inevitable, and so not preventable influences politicians. The use of the term *accident* is frequently cited as a way of illustrating this finding. Kristianssen et al. (2012) in a Swedish context found that reframing road safety as preventable is a positive factor in changing how road safety was dealt with, and Clegg Smith et al. (2014) found a positive result of re-framing the policy image, and specifically found that communicating injury data improved how road safety was understood and perceived.

There are a range of views and strength of feeling about the political nature and motivation of framing, from objective or neutral views to emotion and anger directed at what is described as policymaker’s neglecting policy action by promoting the inevitability stance. However, one interviewee suggests they had changed their language after many years simply because they wanted to stop being told off for using *accident* (NGO N3). However, this finding supports the analysis from the US by Singer (2022) and Schmitt (2020) and from Australia by King (2020) that framing road safety as inevitable is an important contributory factor. By setting a context where the policy problem is seen as preventable might influence the policy response.

### **7.2.1.2 Framed as unimportant**

The poor visibility and low profile of road safety forms part of the conclusions in the three chapters answering the question on the focus given to road safety over time (chapter 4, chapter 5 and chapter 6) and the evidence suggests that framing is part of the explanation. The approach to how statistics relating to those killed or seriously injured is presented is suggested to result in road safety not being seen as a high profile issue or perceived as important (for example, Academic 3; NGO N2). Examples cited include both the minimal reporting of any of the data and when the data is presented the focus is on aggregated data which is said to mask

higher risk groups. NGO N5 suggests that “people aren't aware of the problem” and it is perceived as an acceptable part of living within the transport system. They cite the choice of language and the low level of interest from parts of the media as an example of how this influences the general public to perceive road safety as unimportant.

The impact on how a policy area is framed is illustrated with a comparison between the elevated death rates which historically occurred when NHS junior doctors' rotas changed, and the number of deaths from road crashes. It was suggested how it was viewed was important:

*“It didn't matter because we only kill people one at a time.’ Nobody notices and I get the feeling that's the way people think about road safety ... it's only a small number of people, and it's unavoidable ... ‘It's just an accepted risk that we run,’ and that to me seems just bizarre and unacceptable” (Academic 2).*

The absence of a response to the recommendations in the road's policing review **Not optional** (HMICFRS, 2020) from Government<sup>3</sup> is cited as another example of the low priority afforded to road safety by the DfT and Home Office, influenced by how it is framed:

*“What's the Home Secretary ... and the PCCs doing? Why is that not important to them? Even now when there's an HMI Constabulary report, what if it was one about stop and search ... the politicians would be all over it, wouldn't they? As would the Chief Constables, but as it's not, then no glimmer” (PA L2).*

They suggest there is a link between the relative importance attached to road safety within policing and the way the policy image is perceived, which influences why politicians have not responded to this report. They also cites the disproportionate reduction in roads policing numbers in the early 2010s as further evidence of the framing of roads policing as less important. The same language was used by both policy actor L2, and in the framing suggested by politician L1 describing road safety as not *sexy* or as *uninteresting*, for example:

*“It's not got enough profile, it's a Cinderella area, and if you talk to anyone who's been affected, it's like people don't want to talk about it. It's sort of, it's a dirty secret. It's a bit embarrassing” (Politician L1).*

The perception of road safety was cited as a factor in how the TC agreed its work programme:

*“MPs would have endless inquiries into railways. But any talk about road safety: it's pretty dull ... Young drivers? Mmm, yes ... Drivers using mobile phones? Ok, yes, that's a good issue. But other areas: scrutinising Highways England over its performance, or local authority delivery or wider delivery on roads – no!” (NGO N2).*

It was suggested that road safety “isn't very attractive” resulting in people not wanting to talk about it (PA L3) and it is “unemotional and a bit dry, a bit dull” (PA N5) in the way that road

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<sup>3</sup> Roads policing was included in *The strategic policing requirement* (Home Office, 2023), following the original report (HMICFRS, 2020).

safety is framed and discussed. An international comparison was used to suggest why the progress of road safety has slowed in Britain compared to most European countries:

*“We’ve not sold what we’re doing. Ministerially it hasn’t had priority backing. In other countries who have come to the party much later like Ireland, Greece, Spain, etc. it’s a new policy topic and politicians have been quite happy to get behind it. Where a lot of people in the UK, like politicians, it’s kind of yawn, road safety you know, we do that, what’s the big issue. And it’s not sexy” (NGO N2).*

Interviewees argue these considerations are material in influencing how road safety is described and perceived by politicians, the media, and the public, impacting on the low profile and the lack of policy action. Policy actor N5 suggests the lack of engagement with the public was a factor in how road safety was perceived, in terms of the engagement itself and the framing:

*“I don’t think we’re having much of a conversation with users of the roads as much as we should do. And we’re not engaging with them at a level that suits them ... there are choices ... around what’s acceptable and what’s not acceptable ... But we’re not having those conversations, and we’re certainly not engaging with the public on that” (PA N5).*

The report by Wales (2017) on the political economy of road safety suggests that the public underestimate the impact and scale of crashes and there is a lack knowledge about it.

Finally in this section, Barry Shearman (Labour MP), who has a long association with road safety suggests a different factor influential in the framing of road safety which impacts on the lack of interest from Parliamentarians:

*“Those of us who’ve been interested in road safety for many years have become known as eccentric. It is strange that the core of us who have over the years tried to maintain the House’s interest in road safety are regarded as slightly odd” (Hansard HC Deb., 5 November 1997, c.238).*

There were a variety of examples cited to explain the role framing had in road safety, there was a consistency which suggests road safety was perceived as unimportant or dull, and impacts on how road safety is responded to as a policy problem.

## **7.2.2 Ambiguity**

There are two main themes resulting from the analysis within *ambiguity*:

- the problem is solved as Britain’s roads are *some of the best in the world*
- dominant car-based framing

### **7.2.2.1 The problem is solved as Britain’s roads are some of the best in the world**

There were frequent references to the *best in the world* or *Europe* framing as described in the three chronologically analysed chapters (chapter 4, chapter 5 and chapter 6), particularly in policy documents, but also in HoC debates. There were references where this framing was

used to legitimately comment on international comparisons where Britain has consistently been in the top decile, but also as a framing that masks specific data that is less favourable, and a political cover for inaction.

**Road safety: the next steps** (1987) and early HoC debates describe Britain's performance as "less worse", but in the later period, this framing developed to be stronger as a *best* performer, without the actual rankings changing materially. There are a number of perspectives suggested in the data. Three academics are quoted to introduce representative views expressed in all interview groups: This academic argues that there was a misuse of data:

*"The aspect of us having the safest roads in the world, it depends on how you measure it, but it is a good idea for the politicians not to use that phrase because it does spawn a certain complacency amongst them because they think, oh, we're very safe, we're the safest in the world and therefore we don't need to pay particular and specific attention" (Academic 3).*

This academic discusses the differential risk factors included within aggregate data:

*"We are not doing well for the most vulnerable groups in society so that language puts people in a certain mindset when it's actually not true for the most vulnerable people ... it's a misnomer to say that we are one of the safest countries. We are only safe for car occupants" (Academic 1).*

This academic comments on the risk for specific modalities and argues that framing road safety as one of the best in the world is misleading to those who are at greater risk:

*"Language is key to everything because it's the power you can have to shape the debate ... The way you frame things is absolutely critical. So, if you want to say we've got the safest roads in the world because we scare the living daylights out of pedestrians and cyclists ... to be outside with motorized vehicle you can say what you like, but it's back to the definition of what is very safe. Road safety should be about not having people killed" (Academic 4).*

Interviewees suggest that the framing of Britain's road safety performance was a cover for complacency resulting in a lack of political action. For example:

*"You can be the safest in the world without being safe ... It's much easier to think, we're already the safest in the world, surely that will do as I've [politicians] got other things to turn my mind to. Maybe it will be until it's your kid who gets killed, or your partner or mother. Whatever it is when you get down from the big numbers to the specifics and start seeing the real impact" (NGO N3).*

Framing road safety as one of the best in the world was connected with a perception that there was not a policy problem needing attention, and interviewees suggested that the prevailing context is there was little need for policy action:

*"It is a general complacency that's reflected in society out there that we've done it, you know, we've solved all the major problems, we've got the rates down, and so there has been complacency" (Politician N6).*

This policy actor comments on the association between road safety and complacency too:

*"I hate it when they start talking about complacency , it annoys me because it's like saying let's not be complacent when that's exactly what you are being ... The consequence is that we accept it with just a full stop ... we will lose a few lives here and there ... I don't think it's wrong to say we've got the safest roads in the world, that's OK, it's the full stop after that [it's the] so what?" (PA N5).*

This quote illustrates the impact of how framing can be used in policymaking. Describing Britain as a high performer in international comparisons is accurate, but it masks the higher risks within certain groups, it condones the level of injury, and some interviewees argue this enables politicians to avoid policy action. "It's the full stop" (PA N5) that was highlighted as the problem as well as the framing itself.

### **7.2.2.2 Dominant car-based framing**

All interview groups strongly suggests that cars and their manufacturers dominate the framing of road safety by using both empirical and emotional tools (NGO N1; Academic 4, for example). Whilst there are numerous views within the detail and individual examples are cited, there are mainly consistent views from politicians and policy actors towards a dominant car-based framing. The evidence suggests that either explicitly or by implication the impact of the social or moral imperatives of safety lose out to the dominance of mobility and productivity. There are suggestions road safety was framed as a choice between mobility (and economic productivity) or safety (Cohen and Preston, 1968). This dominance is illustrated by:

*"When you get fired up and talk about it, you realise it's not something that's just gonna happen if you're very nice [Vision Zero]. It is threatening the hegemony that motor vehicles had for 100 years" (NGO L2).*

Examples were cited where lobbying had been explicitly used to alter Government policy in support of the car industry (Academic 3; NGO N6). One example was the rural roads hierarchy which is analysed in more detail in 5.4. In discussing the funding and focus of many large global organisations, using the World Bank as an example, a politician suggested:

*"Who pitches up [at international road safety conferences]? BP, Shell, the motor industry, Mercedes-Benz, yeah. And who did they send to the meetings? Not people passionate about road safety, they send their corporate affairs people who are passionate about their corporate image, and I gave up on the World Bank because it's not going anywhere" (Politician, N6).*

They further suggest that road safety was used as part of the corporate image of certain organisations to avoid "awkward questions" on road death, with an enduring focus of in-car safety rather than the death or serious injury of vulnerable road users resulting from crashes.

There is evidence on the role of advertising and the media in developing the emotional connections with driving and it was described as "the glamour of driving fast, captured in films and programmes such as *Top Gear*" (DfT, 2010a, p.57). This politician was concerned about the framing of driving and the emotional connections, and cited young drivers as an example:

*“It's about changing and challenging the way that we talk about cars, full stop. You see all this advertising about power, going fast and cars are talked about in how fast they do nought to sixty. It's almost like there's a whole ethos around the car. But ... I don't really understand why it is so integral to some people's sense of self ... We need to change the way that we talk about and think about mobility ... But that's kind of quite a big policy ask really” (Politician N4).*

The car focused framing was evident in all data sources as a factor in how road safety is seen, and the attention afforded by politicians. One example of the consequence of this dominant framing was from Simon Hoare (Conservative MP) who suggested:

*“Car advertisements often make people ... feel as if they are invincible to any form of injury, so safe have cars become, according to the ads, which can encourage them to drive in a less focused way” (Hansard HC Deb., 5 November 2018, c.1321).*

There is literature which suggests similar themes in relation to the dominant framing by powerful organisational venues. There is a perception of an over emphasis on the strong influence on how road safety is shaped by the motorist and driver behaviour (Cohen and Preston, 1968; Evans, 2000), the power of car manufacturers and the car lobby to play a major role in determining the focus of road safety (Plowden, 1971; Nader, 1972), and car dominance more generally (Mattioli et al., 2020). The power dynamic in favour of the car lobby and car users was evident, with this interviewee being explicit, suggesting that vehicle manufacturers have more power than the victim groups:

*“It's about power, it's back to the Socrates thing of the power of the stronger. Everything is given over to the thing that is stronger which is the motor vehicle and I fundamentally think that ... people who are out there on the street have an absolutely equal say in things, but it's much less dominant. It's a real power imbalance and I think the language is always reflected in it” (NGO L2).*

There was consistency in the analysis, but there are also some alternative views suggesting that this framing was exaggerated or comes from a politically motivated perspective. This interviewee suggests: “there is an ideologically driven war on private mobility” (NGO N4) which penalises all drivers, rather than targets dangerous drivers. NGO N3 suggests that all governments are very sensitive to not being seen to attack motorists with *war on the motorist* framing used as an illustration of a reason governments tread carefully with road safety so as not to be seen as restricting the freedom of drivers. NGO N4 was very critical of the lack of credibility with speed management and particularly focused on speed cameras as an attack on safe drivers. NGO N3 suggested that the power of the car industry and the success in lobbying governments was exaggerated. Other interviewees suggest that further work was needed to better engage and understand the perspectives of drivers (for example, PA N3).

The role of automation influences how road safety was framed, but this was not a strong theme. It is suggested that Ministers are attracted to technological solutions, for example, the Secretary of State for Transport (Grant Shapps) is: “B\*\*y obsessed with technology ... and

thinks ... let's just wait for cows [automation] to come along and save the day" (PA N2). There was some evidence the solutions to the number of deaths and injuries were with automation, and car manufactures deliberately use this framing to advance car sales. There was a suspicion there had been a political calculation which relies on automation as the policy solution rather than alternatives, and the question posed: "is it worth legislative and political capital? (NGO N2). NGO N3 suggests the opportunities from automation influences Ministers to the detriment of road safety interventions. It may be that this framing contributes to how road safety policy solutions are approached, or not.

### 7.2.3 Technical

There are two main themes resulting from the analysis within *technical*:

- complex
- distracting arguments over how to describe road safety

#### 7.2.3.1 Complex

The technical or complex nature of road safety is described as problematic (for example, Academic 1; Academic 2; NGO N4). It is suggested that the portrayal in this way can direct the attention towards technical experts or those in the road safety community, and implies less participations from a wider audience. Politician N2 suggests a consequence of this is that local organisations involved with road safety, with different cultures, use contrasting language which detracts from the focus on victims. It is suggested that the complicated nature of road safety leads to confusion, and because "there is too much fluff [this] helps politicians avoid focus or action" (NGO N4). The following interviewee argues there is a correlation between technical and complicated language which distracts from the focus on road safety: "I've been encouraging others to call a spade a spade. I think there's far too many euphemisms in road safety" (NGO N2), and they cite inaccessible or technical language, but do not offer specific suggestions, and attributes framing as part of the problem with not advancing developments in road safety. Academic 3 shares what they believe is the consequence of overly technical or inaccessible language:

*"Who took notice of the [KSI] figures that came out last week? Silence, yeah, you know it's not a political issue because it's so diverse and it's not there in the forefront of people's minds. But it's a difficult task and it actually falls into the too difficult and not visible box as it's very difficult to reduce the number of people injured on the roads" (Academic 3).*

Academic 3 is less concerned with the branding of road safety, but is very concerned framing road safety as a complex and difficult area of policy enables politicians to believe the problem has been mostly fixed, or politicians struggle to understand the problem. They suggests two

contributory factors: first, an acknowledgement that the road safety problem is complex with multiple contributory factors or dispersed crash locations, and there is no agreement on what measures could further improve road safety. Second, the selective or misleading use of KSI data which can mask high risk groups. They suggest both factors, when combined with the choice of language, distract politicians from taking action.

There are a number of debates in the HoC which express concern about the complex nature of road safety and the impact it has on influencing the direction for road safety policy. An exchange between Steve Norris (Conservative) and Joan Walley (Labour) demonstrates this (Hansard HC Deb., 25 November 1994). However, complexity is not a unique policy circumstance as there are many examples from other policy areas. The final quote in this section supports the view that the perceived nature of road safety results in disadvantages and negatively impact on victims in a difficult area of policy. They suggest there is a problem:

*“There's a lot of different groups and a lot of different vested interests, and everyone's focusing on slightly different things ... because it's such a complicated thing to address, and I think we don't do a very good job as a community in terms of singing from the same hymn sheet ... people are focusing on slightly different things, so there's not that kind of momentum to change things” (NGO N5).*

There is evidence from all groups that complexity negatively impacts on the priority and progress of road safety, and many of the views from politicians and policy actors reflect this. Wales (2017) also found that the complexity of road safety did impact on the policy image and organisational venues. There is some data, for example, from Academic 4, to support the suggestion that certain groups deliberately exploit the limitations in order to protect a policy monopoly based on the dominant framing.

### **7.2.3.2 Distracting arguments over how to describe road safety**

Within the road safety community, there is an active debate about the *correct* language to use for road safety. Using the *road safety* language generates dissatisfaction from, for example, the Road Danger Reduction Forum which suggests this description is part of the problem in not reducing danger on Britain's roads (RDRF, 2022). The question of what description should be used, for example, road safety, road danger reduction, *Vision Zero*, or whether a change is needed at all, is not part of the thesis. The focus is on whether the views towards framing road safety itself are different and whether any difference matters. This first quote is illustrative:

*“There is a struggle going on to get the correct term or language for road safety ... Road safety has rather boring connotations and is actually disparaged by some road safety lobbyists. So the road danger reduction people equate road safety, old-fashioned road safety with messages to tell children to be careful or wear cycle helmets and all that stuff: the victim blaming side of road safety” (NGO N2).*

The debate about the language adopted, combined with whether it is framed as an *accident* or a crash, is suggested by an interviewee from an NGO that it further dilutes the key messages and is a distraction (NGO N2). A further example is given from the debate on what to call the division within the DfT following a restructure:

*“We’re going to be called the Road Safety Division because it’s simple ... if you start calling it the road risk, harm reduction division, it’s a bit of a mouthful ... but when you’re dealing with partners ... and the public, we need to use terminology that switches them on, and road safety well, we remember Tufty and the green cross code man, but road risk, you’re a lot more live to that” (PA N3).*

They further reflect the debate on what language to use, and suggests that the *road safety* description is less useful when compared with alternatives:

*“The problem is the language that’s historically been associated with road safety. So road safety is perhaps a passive title. Whereas if we were to refer to it as reducing harm, or reducing the risk of harm, that would suggest that there is a risk of harm in the first place ... Road safety is not a sexy term, and everybody needs a sexy logo ... Road risk, reducing road risk, reducing harm on the roads, that’s the sort of language I think we should be using” (PA N3).*

A different interviewee implies that the decision to maintain the *road safety* description within the DfT had a political element in order to maintain language that was seen as less alarmist and references how the media respond to it. In terms of the language used:

*“It’s the media that makes people less concerned about road safety and it makes them think that you can’t do much about it ... I can see that if the Government started using language like road danger reduction, which is quite powerful, they would be seen as over egging the pudding, it’s not road danger all around us, well, there is actually. The Government are resistant to some of the more radical end of the language, like even Vision Zero is super scary to Ministers” (PA N2).*

An academic suggests the *road safety* description is favoured by vehicle manufacturers as it is a neutral term and “so, the vested interests of the automotive industry and their influence on politicians [is maintained] either directly or indirectly” (Academic 4).

This theme suggests the debate on whether road safety is the best description or not is distracting to the wider framing of the policy area and how it is perceived. However, the data is not evident in all interview groups and was not found in policy documents or in debates.

### 7.3 Conclusion

The research question contains two parts: ***do the views of politicians and policy actors towards the framing vary, and does any variation matter?*** There was consistency across the interview groups and evidence from debates and documents that there was a dominant framing. Road safety was seen as largely solved, overly complex which was compounded by the competing language used to describe it, and dominated by the importance and value of mobility. As a result crashes were seen as largely inevitable.

There were limited views this perception was exaggerated, or generated from those advocating a *war on the motorist*. As the results were mainly homogenous, there was no fundamental difference to analyse (the second part of the research question). However, the consequence of this consistency and dominant framing had been a policy monopoly from around the mid 2000's largely promulgated by the powerful car manufacturer coalitions and aligned organisational venues. Kirp suggests that "the way a policy problem gets defined says a great deal about how it will be resolved" (Kirp, 1982, p.31), and as road safety was framed as being solved, politicians were not persuaded there was a problem in need of addressing. In order to alter the focus on road safety, it may be that changing the language and reframing how road safety is seen could result in a new framing and thus increased attention. The shift from what was described as more traditional road safety to more radical policy (for example, *Vision Zero*) was found to be a significantly influential factor in Sweden by, for example Belin et al. (2012) and Kristianssen et al. (2012). Conclusions are structured in three sections:

**Perception:** There was evidence of poor visibility associated with the road safety problem and it was seen as unimportant. It was suggested that the general public were not aware of the number of people killed or seriously injured, or aware of the policy area more generally. The perceived view that the numbers of injuries were small was offered as one example of what contributed to this framing. This interviewee, in explaining why road safety was perceived as unimportant argued that a response was: "what's the big issue" (NGO N2). Road crashes were perceived as largely unpreventable and so an inevitable result of travel within the transport system. The inevitability framing was criticised in this quote: "*we can never stop this ... it's just fantastical language*" (Academic 2). Describing death or injury resulting from crashes as accidental was seen, to a large extent, as an important contributing factor to the inevitability framing. It was suggested that the consequence of this policy image was that politicians did not focus sufficiently on safety and were discouraged from more radical policy interventions.

**Ambiguity:** Using language to describe Britain as one of the safest countries in the world generated a significant response from interviewees. This framing was used by all governments from all political parties during the research period and was seen as problematic. Some suggest it was inaccurate or misleading, or masked areas where there were greater problems, with injuries to vulnerable road users cited. The framing generated complacency: "we think we're OK, so we don't have to do anything" (Academic 1). A framing that implied the policy problem had largely been solved and the language associated with this framing suggested it enabled politicians to focus effort elsewhere. The debate about the balance between mobility and safety was referenced in relation to the choice of language selected. There was evidence that positive and glamorous language was chosen, for example, about driving fast cars, and

promoted through advertisements and in the media, to support a car and mobility dominant framing, rather than a strong safety framing. It was suggested that a powerful car-based political economy played a large part in this framing: “everything is given over to the thing that is stronger which is the motor vehicle” (NGO L2). This framing suggested there was a choice offered between mobility and safety, and so the numbers of deaths or injury were accepted, and this reinforced the ambiguity of making decisions on new policy solutions.

**Technical:** The language used within road safety networks and more widely, was seen as overly complex or technical, and distracting. It was suggested that “everyone's focusing on slightly different things ... because it's such a complicated thing to address” (NGO N5) and this diluted the focus and resulted in less policy attention. There was a debate about the most appropriate language to use, and *road safety* appears to be favoured by powerful organisational venues, for example: “the Government are resistant to some of the more radical end of the language, like even *Vision Zero* is super scary to Ministers” (PA, N2) and those seeking to introduce different language in order to change the framing are less powerful and less effective. It was suggested that framing an issue as complex or technical led to confusion and ambiguity about the problem as well as uncertainty about which policy interventions may be effective. It was suggested that the public have become accustomed to the number of deaths and serious injuries. Kingdon (1995, p.198) suggests that the visibility of a policy problem can fade when the perception is that the problem has been addressed and this is the case with road safety. The framing contributed to the focus of policymaking shifting to other areas, and road safety had been crowded out to these competing policy issues. Baumgartner and Jones (2009, p.38) suggest that where the policy image and institutional venues combine, they can generate rapid change, or, as seen in road safety, interact to reinforce the current approach to policymaking. In road safety the power and control remain in the existing policy venues which has contributed to the consistent policy image over time, and this influenced policy stability. In these circumstances, the policy image was less likely to alter and in road safety there was little evidence that this framing changed.

Road safety policy networks have become fixed on the dominant framing which contributed to restricting progress, and has made any re-examination difficult. Positions can be seen as unduly restrictive, logically inconsistent or failing to accommodate empirical features (Hogwood and Gunn, 1984, p.120), and there is evidence of this when applied to road safety. There was evidence that the current framing, language, and terminology were problematic. For example, the debate within the DfT to agree the name of the road safety division, even if policy actors or networks were able to accept that reframing can be beneficial, there were problems with persuading senior civil servants or politicians to accept a changed framing.

In summary, the road safety problem is framed as largely solved, unimportant, overly complex and dominated by the value of mobility, and as a result crashes were seen as largely inevitable or accidental, and so accepted. Politicians and policy actors have developed the current framing and understanding of the policy issue, and have developed a dominant monopoly framing. In analysing a particular framing, the political advantage or disadvantage of shifting the language is important as it could be seen as unpopular with certain networks or could be very effective in changing perspectives. This can be subjective as few policy problems are capable of being fixed and policy actors identify with different framing, with interpretation based on their own set of values and world view. Baumgartner et al. (2014, p.67) suggest a new policy image may attract new policy participants or entrepreneurs to further advance a new framing or image, but the power of those advocating change was significantly less, and the dominant framing continued. Using automation or the use of technology as the solution to the policy problem suggested that framing road safety only within the car safety framing perpetuates the dominant framing which was not challenged.

The example of smoking policy is a useful case study of effective reframing over decades where the perception shifted from an economic and positive lifestyle choice driven by the tobacco industry, to one framed as describing the consequences of ill health and death. Douglas et al. (2011) suggest that cars are the new tobacco. Reframing can attract attention by linking the policy area to more widely accepted values. Framing road safety as complex and inevitable, rather than preventable with available solutions enabled different networks to present alternative arguments and perceptions which were developed and advocated.

The current framing of this policy area limits the potential of the scale of change needed. There is a need to shift the policy image and agenda from a policy area perceived as the domain of the technical road safety community or one controlled by a powerful policy monopoly. In road safety, the framing needs to change to one where road crashes are seen as preventable and of interest to the general public, or to powerful and influencing sections within it. The framing of a policy area can be changed by focusing on tone and engaging with the media and policy participants to alter dominant frames, but this shift was not happening quickly, or at all, in road safety.

## Chapter 8

### Factors which influence road safety in Britain

#### 8.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses political and organisational factors, and how they might impact on road safety policy. The original research question was: ***which political and organisational factors explain local and national differences in the number of those killed or seriously injured?*** The question has three separate elements: an evaluation of political and organisational factors, the impact of the relationship and any differences between government at a local or national level, and seeking to explain the differences in the numbers of people killed and seriously injured. It became clear during the interview process and the analysis phase that seeking to understand whether factors *explain* any differences in the number of casualties was overly ambitious and not feasible. The research aim includes an analysis of which factors might contribute to the progress of road safety policy, and exploring whether there was a cause and effect between local and national, and governance structure, and the number of casualties would have risked diversion away from the core aims of the research. This chapter answers the slightly revised research question: ***which political and organisational factors contribute to the development of road safety in Britain?*** (1.3.3) which remains consistent with the research aim.

Kingdon suggests that problems fade (1995, p.198). This can be either after the policy issue has been addressed or there is a perception that it has, and attention moves elsewhere. He suggests that people can become accustomed to the problem, or it gets crowded out by competing policy areas which demand the attention of politicians and competing issues are prioritised. This chapter analyses which political and organisational factors might impact on road safety by primarily focusing on four interview questions (table 3.5):

- *I am interested in the balance between local and national responsibility. "To deliver decentralisation and empowerment we do not consider that local service deliverers need further central persuasion on the importance of road safety." (DfT, 2011). What are your views? (8)*
- *Over time, there has been variation in road safety progress. What factors do you think explain this? (12)*
- *What role does politics or party politics play? What is the consequence? (14)*
- *Do victim groups support the advancement of road safety policy or detract from it? (17).*

In addition, there are also data from documents and debates. The methodology is detailed further in chapter 3. There are a number of possible public policy frameworks or concepts

available to structure and analyse the chapter on factors, but none comprehensively cover the interview questions and the themes within the data. However, there are a number of ideas from the literature which are useful in analysis, and rather than concentrating on one framework, a number are used: Advocacy Coalition Framework; policy venues; multilevel governance; and policy sectors.

The interview questions have been used to structure this section because of simplicity and clarity, rather than selecting one of the numerous theoretical concepts. Instead, these are used to inform the analysis, rather than direct the structure.

## 8.2 Results

The results section is divided into four subsections, with each concentrating on a single interview question, but not exclusively:

- Governance factors (question 8)
- Organisational factors (question 12)
- Political factors (question 14)
- Policy actors and networks (question 17)

### 8.2.1 Governance factors

The discourse on the institutions in which authority lies to make decisions, and the relationship between them, is the main theme in this section. Policy venue accountability can be shared, as in road safety, where it is the subject of the jurisdiction of several institutions, or they can be monopolistic, and the domain of only one institution (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009, p.31).

There are four themes resulting from the discourse analysis on factors relating to governance:

- Structural complexity
- Changed relationships between venues
- Leadership
- Not new!

#### 8.2.1.1 Structural complexity

**Number of venues:** The number of organisations involved with road safety, both locally and nationally was a strong theme from all interview groups. There were numerous examples of interviewees sharing their experience of attempting to engage with different parts of the governance system, only to be frustrated by being referred onto a different part. It was suggested that national government was overly complicated, and as a result cross departmental engagement and planning was less effective (NGO N6):

*“One of the problems is there's too many bits of government that manage a little bit of road safety. And it's lots of little bits of something they don't think is important anyway” (PA L2).*

An example cited was the fragmentation between the Home Office, DfT and Ministry of Justice (NGO N5), and suggesting an absence of joint accountability, this policy actor described: “I couldn't even get DfT and the Home Office in the same room” (PA N1). There was, however, some optimism that the relationship between the DfT and the Home Office was improving, from the early 2020s (PA N3).

The impact of the number of devolved organisations responsible for aspects of road safety was described by a national politician who also had experience of working locally in road safety:

*“It is because you've got a whole number of organisations who take some responsibility in [name], we've got around the table two local authorities, police, Highways, [more named], some are more committed than others, and the problem is that we get a lot of decision by committee ... I was always extremely frustrated about the lack of focus” (Politician N2).*

This issue is certainly not unique to road safety.

**Complexity: UK transport safety: who is responsible?** is a review by the Transport Safety Commission (2015) of the legal framework and institutional responsibilities in road safety (and air and rail). It suggests that “the future will become progressively harder unless our current fragmented arrangements are improved” (p.iii). Within a structure involving numerous venues, with national and local accountabilities, interviewees from across the interview groups described a complicated and uncoordinated governance structure.

When describing the difficulty inside government to navigate governance structures, this interviewee close to government suggested: “It's just not being pulled together. It's a very fractured landscape ...the thing that's missing is national leadership” (PA N3). Similar and typical views are expressed about local structures, which are said to have worsened over time, as road safety partnerships are “a shadow of their former selves” (PA N2):

*“So many things are siloed ... you have a road safety department which is doing education. You have a transport department which is primarily associated with moving people around in cars. And you have a separate public health organisation ... So we have all these different silos, and it's not until we can bring these together that we can actually make useful decisions” (NGO N7).*

**The consequence** of the number of venues and the complex nature of them was that accountability was dispersed or unclear: “It is about the governance of these issues [and] in the absence of strong governance, road safety is left” (PA L1). This was a comment both about the complexity causing bureaucracy, and opaque accountability, describing the arrangements as inadequate. There was a suggestion that within the existing structures, accountability is diluted and “there's a fragmentation of responsibility and discussion” (PA L7). It was suggested that not all parts of government believe they have a role in road safety and the solution is to:

“establish a new normal. Whether [we] will establish a new normal remains to be seen” (PA N3). There were many calls to strengthen cross departmental working and this speech was one example (Hansard HC Deb, 2 July 2009, col.564) and PACTS (2007) recommended improved coordination between government departments.

There was evidence that structural changes impacted on governance arrangements over time. Cited examples of previous mechanisms included: a national delivery board, effective cross departmental working, accountability processes reporting local authority KSI performance, and annual reporting to Parliament of KSI numbers. It was suggested that it was “being held to account, which raised our game with innovative stuff” (Academic 1).

### 8.2.1.2 Changed relationships between venues

The importance of the relationship between different organisations was raised by all interview groups, and cited by Bax et al., (2010). This indicative quote discussed the relationship between the centre and local government suggested relationships were: “now extremely weak” (Academic 3). But it was also suggested that this is not a new position: “There's always a tension between central and local government on transport issues ... [success] really does depend on the frameworks that are set by national government” (Politician N4). One explanation was the lack of trust from national government to rely on local government to deliver (PA N6), which was reflected on by a national politician who described their experience locally. Road safety should be:

*“Dealt with at a local level. It should be done effectively and responsibly, and with the consent and support of local taxpayers. ... Is governance working to make sure we are taking action? ... I'm not sure that we are living up to that” (Politician N2).*

The change of Government in 2010 is described as causing an impactful and negative shift in approach on the relationship between the DfT and local government. Prior to 2010:

*“There was a very heavy hand on local authorities, and they had to provide all kinds of information ... And there was quite a bit of dissatisfaction with that approach and the amount of guidance that was coming out from the DfT. So when the DfT said OK hands off, local authorities were completely and utterly at a loss. Except the really good ones. They did not know what to do. They did not have knowhow to do it because they had had their hands held for so many years and so they started kicking and screaming for more guidance” (Academic 3).*

Describing the 2011 localism agenda, it was suggested that new governance structures and reduced national guidance left local authorities to make their own choices and too many neglected road safety (Academic 2). The shifting of accountability between venues is cited: “Government don't see it as their statutory responsibility, and feel that it's a local issue. Local decision makers think it's an individual responsibility” (Politician L2). It was suggested this was depoliticisation where shifting of accountability is described. The consequence was said to be:

*“Bad because local authorities have said, well, we've not got any money, we have a host of other priorities and there's no target, so you know there's no pressure on us from above, so it's very easy for local politicians to not bother” (NGO N2).*

It was suggested devolution impacted on the behaviour of central government. There was a:

*“Lack of ownership from Westminster. The removal of road safety targets, and devolution, doesn't show any kind of leadership from the top level whatsoever and lo and behold, nothing happens” (PA L3).*

This local policy actor deflects responsibility by implying that local leadership was only possible with national guidance. There was a different suggestion from some interviewees that local areas were prioritising road safety more than the national government. This example from a city based policy actor does not indicate which additional devolved powers were needed:

*“The national government is lagging behind. Where we're seeing the innovation is within cities ... I think the national government has to try and keep up with the changes that cities are making, but also the cities are asking for more powers as cities haven't got enough [power] to drive the scale of change” (PA L5).*

The challenges for local areas to prioritise road safety was described, with an absence of targets and an accountability framework, and reduced funding was frequently cited. It was suggested that the reduced levels of funding was a factor with greater impact as local government were able to decide on targets, but increasing funding was significantly more complex. An example offered was on the requirements on nationally controlled funding:

*“We have a Government that likes to talk about localism but then actually the funding is all very tightly controlled by the centre ... So, whilst some stuff can be decided locally, actually a large part is determined centrally because of the way the money is allocated” (NGO N1).*

The complexity, and the different views on where power resided was illustrated in this quote.

*“I don't understand how local authorities are going to be able to deliver Vision Zero when there's a lot of issues that are at a national level which are out of their control. I think what's happened is the Government is saying to local authorities, you've got the power to do it, but they haven't. If they do adopt Vision Zero, they haven't got the power to deliver, so that's limiting” (NGO N5).*

They suggested the result was confusion, deflected accountability and a low priority for road safety.

### **8.2.1.3 Leadership**

Whilst interviewees named a few individuals or politicians who were said to have significantly influenced road safety, all interview groups suggest that effective political leadership was lacking and was a significant contributor to the slow progress (for example, PA L1), and solutions included: “leadership from the top” (Academic 2). Leadership was difficult to define as “there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are people who have tried to define it” (Northouse, 2010, p.2). Analysis of leadership in this section has focused on the influence of individuals or organisations to prioritise and make change happen (Gold et al.,

2010), but in the discussion seeks to maintain a focus on the role of the policy entrepreneur in coupling the problem, policy, and politics stream to achieve policy development.

This interviewee with a long association with road safety concluded that:

*“I've met most of the Prime Ministers, and I can honestly say there is no Prime Minister who has said to me: five people a day are dying on the roads is a really big issue and we must address it ... I don't think we've seen good enough leadership” (NGO N6).*

The connection between the need for a compelling national strategy and leadership were made. In the 2010's it was suggested that the focus was on publishing statements, rather than a national strategy, combined with strong leadership (Academic 2), and that in the absence of an identified national priority, local areas find it “quite difficult” (NGO N5) to prioritise. This was particularly as there were growing demands from areas such as social care which competed with other policy areas. It was suggested that a consequence of the absence of a national strategy and a performance mechanism from the DfT, and because roads policing was not a strategic priority from the Home Office, local organisations:

*“Are sadly stuck so that, for me it needs to be in the strategic policing requirement so that it is explicitly stated you now have to do something, and it is going to be reported back through to the political centre, and it is a combination of local delivery, but policy set from the centre” (PA N1).*

The importance of leadership was suggested as a vehicle to raising the profile and visibility of road safety and: “talking about this a lot more than they [politicians] are” (PA L1, 2021). A consequence of “a huge national vacuum” (NGO L2), no national strategy, and little evidence of policy entrepreneurs with high profile, was less action and difficulties for local areas to prioritise road safety.

Political leadership was included as a contributing factor in many of the reports sampled in 2.4.3 (for example, OECD, 2016). Interviewee groups support this notion and the need for better coordination and cross departmental working (NGO N5), and the creation of a national commissioner was one suggested solution:

*“Having a far more sophisticated join-up across all the agencies ... road safety [is] working in isolation and there isn't one coherent strategy. I've always felt that having some form of road safety commissioner would be really helpful who was given the direct task of pulling everybody together” (PA N4).*

Early in the research period there were suggestions of strong leadership (for example, HC Deb., 25 November 1994, col.837), and the cross party commitment to prioritise road safety (for example, HC Deb., 28 January 1998, col.286). However, the absence of high profile and committed leadership or policy entrepreneurs appeared in the chronological analysis in chapter 4 (for example TC, 2008) and increased as the research period progressed: For example, from 2012:

*“The principal factor in improving road safety is political leadership ... the presence of targets was a sign of this leadership. If the Government is not going to adopt this approach, then it should be making more effort to provide leadership in other ways ... Stronger leadership and a clearer vision are required from Government to communicate the importance of road safety to local decision makers” (TC, 2012a).*

Finally, this interviewee with many years’ experience in road safety suggested:

*“In politics, making decisions, being bold ... It's about leadership, and we haven't seen that ... We've not got leadership from the top” (NGO N6).*

They suggest the lack of leadership had been one of the biggest political failures in Britain.

When analysed within the frame of the role of the policy entrepreneur in securing successful policy development by coupling the three streams, Kingdon (1995) offers a useful approach on which to analyse political leadership, or the role of policy entrepreneurs as he describes it, or the lack of leadership in the second phase of the research (see 4.6.2).

#### **8.2.1.4 Not new...**

The discourse analysis found that many of the problems were not new and were analysed in the chronologically based discourse analysis (chapter 4, chapter 5 and chapter 6). Issues of structural complexity, the relationship between local and national venues, and accountability appear throughout the research period. Four direct quotes are used to illustrate the consistency that governance played as a factor influencing the progress of road safety.

From 1989: *“More needs to be done to overcome the difficulties arising from the central government/local government split of responsibilities ... [it] needs to be co-ordinated effectively, if the full benefits ... are to be achieved ... [There is] a disturbingly wide variation in the degree of importance attached to road safety planning and priorities by individual authorities” (CoPA, 1989, para.1&9).*

From 1994: *“The Government have fragmented and dismantled many of the agencies that used to underpin road safety and it is clear that their approach to it is piecemeal” (Hansard HC Deb. 25 November 1994, col.859).*

From 2002: *“There must be better co-ordination between government offices and local authorities, regional planning bodies, and health professionals; and between the Government offices in the regions and the centre” (TLGRC, 2002a, para 162).*

From 2012: *“Simply providing guidance limits the DfT to a passive role. Under conditions of reduced local authority resources and loss of skilled road safety personnel, the Government should not sit back and expect road safety to remain a priority. Stronger leadership and a clearer vision are required from Government to communicate the importance of road safety to local decision makers” (TC, 2012a).*

Interviewees offered views on governance, structural complexity and changing relationships between venues, suggesting that governance was a significant factor in influencing the lack of priority given to road safety. However, the four illustrative quotes cited, each from a different decade of the research (1988, 1994, 2002 and 2012), and the earlier analyses, suggested these issues were not new and raises the question of how material these governance factors are.

This suggests that other factors may be more influential in securing the alignment of the many

different actors in road safety to make improvements.

In summary, interviewees were asked about the balance between local and national responsibility for improving road safety in a context of national policy towards decentralisation and local empowerment. The findings were that all interview groups believed that road safety remained an area that should have been a higher priority, and that central persuasion should not have been needed, but that structural complexity, the changed relationship between the centre and local organisations, and questions about the effectiveness of leadership were factors which impeded the degree of progress. Political and organisational factors did impact on the governance of road safety, particularly in relation to the consequence of complex relationships between venues, and at multiple levels:

*“There's too many bits of government that manage a little bit ... and it's lots of little bits of something they don't think is important anyway” (PA L2).*

The shared accountability by policy venues, and the complex and contested governance structures resulted in problematic relationships between central and local government, said to be “now extremely weak” (Academic 3), and an insufficient focus on road safety policy. The number of venues, the complexity of the relationship between these venues and the removal of governance processes contributed to a lack of policy action. The drive towards localism in 2011 was described as a significant further fragmentation of structures and combined with policy statements, rather than road safety strategies throughout the decade have contributed to the plateauing of KSI numbers. Whilst these findings are clear, there was an outstanding question of the degree to which governance issues impacted on the progress of road safety. As has been shown, these issues were not new, but road safety was prioritised in the earlier period, and governance issues may not have been as problematic as suggested. This may lead to the consideration of the intra-government coordination and communication, the availability of a clear national strategy and national leadership as more important factors (see Johansson, 2009).

## **8.2.2 Organisational factors**

There are three main themes resulting from the analysis of the discourse:

- Legal factors
- Resources, illustrated with roads policing
- Casualty reduction targets

### **8.2.2.1 Legal factors**

The impact of legislative change is not the focus of this thesis, and there are no interview questions about the effects of the legal aspects on road safety policy. However, this area has

featured in the work of Parliament and to illustrate, the definition of careless and dangerous driving, and the resulting sentencing has been debated throughout the period. For example, in 1992 dangerous driving and causing death by dangerous driving came into force in the *Road Traffic Act 1991*, following recommendations from Dr Peter North (Hansard HC Deb., 15 November 1992, c.851), and in 2020, Theresa May (Conservative) introduced a Bill to increase the tariff for causing death by dangerous driving to life imprisonment (Hansard HC Deb., 21 July 2020, c.2039). Interviewees cited the impact of legislative changes on how road safety had been approached, and though brief these are set out. This section includes evidence from limited interview categories and so is not representative of all groups.

It is suggested there was a relationship between the perception of road crime or traffic offences being seen as an acceptable consequence of mobility, and that there was a lack of parity between road crime and other crimes. Interviewees submit that the language used to describe traffic offences should be challenged and road crime used instead (PA N4). The *wrong* language and the resulting minimising perception leads to road crime not being prioritised, and opportunities to investigate the relationship between crime and road safety can be missed (Academic 1). This interviewee cites a case where the Yorkshire Ripper was “stopped by traffic cops” (NGO N6) to illustrate the importance of viewing road traffic offences as crime. Whilst these examples include the importance of language (chapter 7), the argument presented was how the discourse was conducted influenced the role of the legal system (NGO N5). This tension and the difficulty to strike the right balance between safe driving and appropriate penalties for offences was demonstrated by the two following and opposing quotes:

*“‘Why aren't you out catching proper criminals,’ and you know, ‘have you lot not got anything better to do?’” (PA L1); and: “Criminalising drivers is unnecessary and makes speed limits not credible and in disrepute” (NGO N4).*

The lack of parity between different motoring offences, as well as between different areas of crime was cited as inequitable, resulting in mixed messages affecting the value as a deterrent (NGO N5). This interviewee cites what they described as the “confusing messages” (NGO, N5) about mobile phone use which they claimed sought to maximise driver convenience, rather than minimise the risks of driver distraction.

The tensions between different parts of government in relation to penalties was described (PA N2, and see Gössling, 2017). They cite the unresolved “battles with the MoJ” (PA N2) about the exceptional hardship defence, and tension between the right to drive for economic reasons and the safety implications of people driving with more than twelve penalty points. This was referenced, for example, by Judith Cummins (Labour) as a major issue in Bradford (*Hansard HC Deb.* 5 November 2018, col. 1332) and as an example of wider concern in Parliament. There was evidence that the right to drive versus driving is a privilege fed into the design and

enforcement of legal penalties (NGO L1). For example, “having a motor vehicle on the road is not a right, it’s a privilege” (PA L2) and it was suggested politicians resist increasing penalties due to nervousness of alienating driving voters (PA N4).

### 8.2.2.2 Resources

Kingdon (1995) suggests the availability of funding and wider resources makes it easier for governments to identify policy problems and innovate to pursue policy solutions (p.109), but more often, the budget acts as a constraint which dampens enthusiasm for new proposals and inhibits policy development (p.133). Baumgartner and Jones (2009, p.196) also identify the importance of budgets in the punctuated equilibrium model (2.5.2) and suggest that changes in budgets can be one way of measuring a punctuation where policy change can be identified.

In this section, evidence is from all interview groups. The availability of resources (funding, budgets, or people) is analysed using reduced police numbers to illustrate, as interviewees made a connection between funding and the impact on road safety; an alternative was the availability of funding for research. In 2010, there was a 27% reduction in the Road Safety Revenue Grant (from £77.3 million to £56.7 million), and the abolition of the Road Safety Capital Grant (£17.2million) (DfT, 2019b). This is not a detailed analysis of the reduction to roads policing numbers: it is focused on whether resourcing is seen to be a factor in influencing how road safety policy is approached.

The discourse in the HoC regularly sought to connect the availability of funding with the ability of local authorities to prioritise road safety, often advocating for local schemes, or lobbying for local funding. This quote from Sir Christopher Chope (Conservative) is representative of many connecting funding with delivery:

*“Invest more resources in the maintenance of our highway infrastructure. Let us ... get rid of potholes ... and invest in road safety measures that reduce further the number of casualties on our roads” (Hansard HC Deb., 28 January 1998, c.297).*

There was broad consistency in the view that there was an improved ability to identify policy problems and pursue policy solutions when innovation was enabled by resources. This interviewee covers the negative impact on reduced funding in research generally, policy development nationally and on delivery locally:

*“We’ve taken our eye off the ball in the last ten years ... not much funding of research, and the policy and research teams. And road safety has been reduced [DfT] and in local authorities and so a lot of expertise has gone” (Academic 3).*

Examples are given from three interview groups which are illustrations of general views, and from a local and national perspectives. Someone with a long career in road safety in the same local authority suggested:

*“The budgets that I've had ... have declined considerably over time ... There is almost an acceptance that because we were on a downward trend [for KSI numbers], it's alright to then reduce spending, almost as if it's acceptable to keep the level of death and serious injury” (PA L3).*

This view was consistent with this academic relying on research undertaken within a local authority to suggest: “There was no money in local government ... [and they] were left to flounder” (Academic 4). This was further supported from a different interviewee:

*“We haven't got that level of funding anymore, that's been reduced drastically over the years ... Before, we had a lot more ... [and] we were able to make sure we were supporting road safety ... It's much harder to do that now or has been over the last ten years ... [There is] tension between funding and expectations ... Politically everyone is very keen on making sure we have the safest possible highways ... but we just don't have resource anymore” (PA L4).*

This perspective was derived from those working in national organisations, who work closely with local organisations. For example, describing a result of the budget reductions in 2010:

*“The road safety fraternity felt cast aside; well and truly, and they had no leverage to get more resources, they were already under the cosh, and central government was being cut and local government was” (PA N5).*

At the time of the reduction in national funding for road safety, Paul Blomfield (Labour) asked a question in Parliament about assessing the risk to road safety following budget reductions, and responded to the answer that there was no risk assessment:

*“Frankly, I am shocked to hear ... that no assessment has been made regarding the consequences of significant cuts to capital and revenue funding and the ending of ... road safety grants at a time when local authorities are going to be under unprecedented financial pressure. I urge the Minister to think again about the dangerous consequences of the lack of priority that the Government are giving to road safety” (Hansard HC Deb. 2 December 2010, col.949).*

As many of the interviewees began their experience with road safety in the latter period of the research period, and as the funding reductions occurred in 2010/11, most of the analysis concentrated on this period. There was a connection between the availability of funding and skills (Academic 2; PA L5) and when budgets were constrained this had a direct impact on road safety: it is not possible to state that it “dampens enthusiasm”, as Kingdon suggests (1995) but it did dampen capacity and the ability to progress road safety policy.

**Roads policing:** This is used to illustrate the relationship between funding and road safety.

There was a reduction in roads policing numbers between 2010 and 2015 (DfT, 2019b), and a reduction in fixed penalty notices (FPN) between 2006 and 2017, which is a useful measurement of police performance. Data from the NPCC indicates (DfT, 2019b):

- Roads policing numbers fell by 27% (a fall of 1,437)
- Breath testing reduced by 25% between 2010 and 2015
- Changes to enforcement through FPN's

- Neglect traffic signs – fell by 54%
- Mobile phone offences – fell by 68%
- Seat belt offences – fell by 92%
- Speed limit offences – increase 10%<sup>4</sup>

Research drew a correlation between casualty numbers and a reduction in roads policing and where enforcement had been increased, compliance had improved and casualties dropped (PACTS, 2020). Elliott and Broughton (2004) suggested increased levels of traffic police reduced the number of crashes and traffic violations.

The findings were consistent across the interview groups and from local and national perspectives. Representative quotes from the constituent groups illustrate the connection between reduced funding and the impact on roads policing. This politician suggested:

*“There's quite a lot of evidence out there that roads policing has been one of those areas that suffered in recent years. I raised it only last week with our Chief Constable and he was saying that actually he needed to put extra [resources] in, recognising it had been pulled back too far” (Politician N4).*

The following interviewee had national oversight and gave a number of operational examples of where the reductions in police numbers had a direct impact on both the ability to deliver effective roads policing, and on the impact it had on some PCCs in not prioritising road safety:

*“Since 2011 ... when we went through significant cuts and realignment of our resource, roads policing officers disappeared, half of policing crime plans had no mention of road safety. Half of the Chief colleagues decided it's not force priority because that's what they've been told by the Government” (PA N1).*

Two quotes from NGOs with very different roles offer consistent perspectives:

*“Policing is not a priority in terms of enforcement because traffic police have been cut so much” (NGO N5). And: “The reduction in traffic police has made you notice a vast negative difference to the safety of our roads, and this is where I think from a leadership point of view, there are major gaps” (NGO N6).*

The connection between funding and the ability to achieve progress with road safety was evident in a specific geographical area, but from a different perspective. In an area where there was additional funding from local government to the police to focus on roads policing and in working towards *Vision Zero* (PA L2; PA L5). It was acknowledged that this was an unusual, if not unique circumstance, but it had a positive impact on road safety across those organisations involved, and was described as: “a key enabling factor” (PA L6).

In summary, there was consensus from across all interview groups that the availability of resources was an important factor in influencing road safety policy development (suggested by Wegman, 2003) and when the national budgets were reduced in 2010, this had a constraining

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<sup>4</sup> As the FPN data period begins prior to the reduction in police numbers, this impedes the analysis.

effect on activity, both in national government and locally. Commenting on the reduced funding at the same time as the removal of targets, this interviewee suggested the consequence was “people dying on the roads” (PA N1). This is a road safety example of what Kingdon (1995) describes as the constraining consequences of inadequate funding.

### 8.2.2.3 Casualty reduction targets

Interviewees regularly reference the ability to achieve reductions in casualty numbers, targets, and the availability of funding. This analysis was not an analysis of the levels of support or dissent for targets, but an analysis of the influence of an organisational factor.

In Britain, the 1987 Conservative Government was the first to set national road casualty reduction targets in *Road Safety: the Next Steps*, by setting a target to reduce the number of casualties by the year 2000 (DETR, 1987). In this period, a reduction of 40% was also advocated in *Danger on the road: the needless scourge* (Plowden and Hillman, 1984). There was both an explicit political statement of priority with a clear policy intention, and over the following decade, road death and serious injury numbers reduced. *Targeting the future* (DoT, 1996) established a connection between targets and casualty reductions and set a clear policy direction to continue with targets. In 2000, the Labour Government set targets, identified in *Tomorrow's Roads: Safer for Everyone* (DETR, 2000b). There was both an explicit political statement of priority with a clear policy intention and over the following decade, road death and serious injury numbers reduced. In 2009, the DfT, in their scoping study *Road Safety Strategy Beyond 2010* (DfT, 2009) advocated the need for further targets to continue casualty reduction, though they sounded a word of caution: “these numerical targets, even if based on a summation of casualty reductions in individual accident types, are poor at clarifying the policy changes that are needed to achieve them” (DfT, 2009, p.45).

The Coalition Government in *Strategic Framework for Road Safety* (DfT, 2011) chose not to have targets. Over the next eight years, both the Cameron Government in *Working Together to Build a Safer Road System* (DfT, 2015) and the Johnson Government in *The Road Safety Statement 2019: A Lifetime of Road Safety* (DfT, 2019c) decided not to set targets. Since 2011 the trend in the numbers of those killed or seriously injured has plateaued. This context is important in understanding the political priority of addressing road death policy over time and to better understand the discourse on resources.

This quote from someone close to Government discusses the relationship between resources and the use of targets:

*“It is really hard to tell whether they [targets] cause things to happen. But they definitely ... help people in local areas to focus ... [but] it is more the things that you do rather than just the target ... If we brought in targets tomorrow ... with no*

*extra money ... I don't think it would change a jot. You need the other stuff as well. Actually, a target with no extra money would probably p\*\*s everyone off because we're trying to do things with no extra resources" (PA N2).*

This typical quote was from a local perspective:

*"A Council forecast a £100 million deficit, and to try and get them interested in making roads safer when they would say, I can't even fill potholes. Their view of me was a little quizzical and not living in the real world ... The difficulty is ... if there are targets there's an opportunity to have a discussion ... in an ideal world, it is as a collective. It then forces conversation around accountability and how we can use our resources more effectively. If there are no targets, I don't need to discuss it and the risk is that other things crowd it out. Without that level of accountability, without being crass, some people would assume it's just an act of God ... There's nothing I can do. It's not my fault. I'm not a great fan of league tables, but at least it does sharpens people's focus" (PA L7).*

Interviewees provided views from their own organisational or policy outlook, and quotes are cited as illustrative of these perspectives. This national policy actor discussed the impact on the DfT and the impact of political choices:

*"There was a whole research team that just focused on road safety. The Department was cut quite considerably in 2010 ... If you've got government that cares a lot about road safety and is invested in it, you have more interventions and gains ... I wouldn't say just having a target makes a difference." (PA N2).*

A similar standpoint was suggested from an academic:

*"If you were being very cynical, you could say, well, they were never going to give targets to local authorities having taken all their funding away. So maybe it was just the only thing they could do given the dire funding circumstances" (Academic 2).*

There were a wide range of views which supported the use and benefit of targets, but this is not the focus of the analysis (see EU, 2020). However, one of the benefits was an ability to raise the profile of road safety in order to argue for funding. It was suggested: "the existence of the target created the rallying call; it created the flag around which people could gather" (NGO N3). Having a target as a statutory requirement was advanced as a way of raising the profile of road safety and in securing the appropriate resources to deliver objectives. Targets:

*"Hold people's feet to the fire and helps at the local level to argue for funding, if it's a legally binding target, which they were at one point, it was a target that came down from the Secretary of State and, they would have used that to argue for more funding, which is what a lot of local authorities did" (Academic 3).*

There were limited negative views about targets, and these related to the unintended consequences, perverse incentives (NGO N7) or politically driven motives to be seen to be doing something different to the previous government: "They wanted to get rid of all those b\*\*y Tony Blair targets all over the place" (NGO N3). It was suggested that the Coalition Government felt the Labour Government distorted clinical practice with the health targets:

*“That is what put a kibosh on [road safety] targets ... and the lack of targets has made a huge [negative] difference” (Academic 3).*

There was a view that removing targets more generally across government in 2010 was to deliberately avoid accountability at a time of budget reductions (NGO N1), and in relation to road safety specifically:

*“People do not set targets if they do not think they're going to meet them ... The reason why they haven't set targets since 2010 is because they knew that they were going to be cutting budgets to various organisations that help with reducing road casualties. So it's almost as if they knew it was going to happen, so that's why they didn't set targets” (NGO L1).*

This interviewee suggested it enabled government to “dodge accountability” (NGO N4).

There was a connection made between the delivery of policy and measurement:

*“The problem with this Government in so many ways is it talks the talk about great policy objectives, but it doesn't walk the walk, it doesn't put the measures in place, it doesn't set targets, so it doesn't measure them, and it doesn't invest in the specific initiatives in order to achieve whatever target it is they're trying to achieve. So, this is just yet another one ... To me it's a fundamental aspect of government being in power” (Politician N3).*

In each of these examples, the connection between funding and the political use of targets was made. Finally, this policy actor (PA N4) suggested the decision to not have targets in 2011 had received comparatively too much attention and that the loss of funding was as important. They advocated for the two factors to be considered together in order to make improvements.

### **8.2.3 Political factors**

This section focuses on whether politics was a factor which influenced road safety policy and is driven by the interview question: *What role does politics or party politics play in road safety? What is the consequence?* The focus in this section is on three themes:

- Party politics
- Political ideology
- Relationship between politicians, the media, and the public

The discourse included references to: the high turnover of Ministers (Academic 2) or “Ministers come and go too quickly ... it's like changing your socks” (NGO N4); the junior nature and limited influence of the Roads Minister role (Academic 5); the reduced capacity within the DfT since 2010 (Academic 3); and the preferences and interest of the Minister: “Getting a good Minister who stays in post who will listen and actually take it [road safety] on board is really crucial” (NGO N2). In addition, there was discourse on the political nature of PCC's directing choices, and the absence of the Home Office classifying road crime as a strategic aim was suggested resulted in the lack of prioritisation. These views were from limited interview groups and mainly from those with first-hand experience of the national

political system. The data from the following three sections was from across the interview groups.

### 8.2.3.1 Party politics

The discourse suggested party politics, on the whole, did not play a significant role, though there were some contradictory views. There was a pattern in the interview groups where those who believed party politics was not influential were mainly from policy actors, politicians and those who had worked closely with government (for example: PA N3; PA N5; PA N6; Politician N1; Politician N3; Politician N5, 2021), illustrated by: “party politics moves the distribution. It does not necessarily do much” (Academic 2). Those who suggested it was a major factor were from campaigning NGOs (for example: NGO N7; NGO L1; NGO L2). Proximity to and the level of experience with the mechanics of government influenced these views.

In answering the interview question, this politician expressed very strong views: “Of course not. No, I don't think so, it's about people's lives. Party politics? I mean everybody wants to be re-elected, but this was something that upsets people, so no!” (Politician L2). There were examples from London where a complicated, layered perspectives was described. This complexity was illustrated with a contrast between the instigation and development of active travel which began under Mayor Johnson (Conservative) and whilst there was significant progress with *Vision Zero*, Mayor Khan was said to rarely discuss it (PA L6), so little difference on the policy aims between the two political parties. Different responses were described from London boroughs, some of which were difficult to predict by the party in power. Safety:

*“Measures for vulnerable road users and active travel is political, but in a really complicated way. The colour of the party might not necessarily predict it” (PA N2).*

It was suggested it was difficult to predict which party would advocate road safety or not, and so party politics did not always direct the decision of road safety, and low traffic neighbourhoods and cycle lanes were cited as examples of the complexities.

In contrast, a minority felt equally strongly that party politics was influential in whether road safety was prioritised, but not necessarily between Conservative and Labour parties.

Interviewees from NGO's suggested Labour run local government were more likely to prioritise road safety (NGO L1; NGO L2), and discourse included direct criticism of the Tory Government.

It was suggested that all choices were made because of a single focus on getting party members elected: “It's all about chasing the voters” (NGO N4). This local politician, commenting on the influence of party politics suggested the impact was:

*“Massively, massively, prevalent ... The whole low traffic neighbourhood debate ... the Conservatives have been very reluctant to do anything in that space ...they've really not wanted to do it and they clearly feel that they are speaking for the*

*decent ... car driving majority. And as if speaking out for people who walk and cycle for their convenience and safety is just a bit weird" (Politician L1).*

This interviewee suggested decisions were based on choices which can be inherently political:

*"It does need to have a political focus without a doubt, I think policy is really, really important ... generally we've done better under Labour" (Academic 1).*

But there were contradictions here too. Some interviewees suggested that Labour, notably in local government, was focused on road safety much more than other parties. The Welsh Government's approach to road safety was cited as an example, and in Scotland, it was suggested that the SNP prioritised road safety more than other parties. But nationally in England, Labour was criticised as having little direction:

*"The Labour Party could make a gain out of this politically. They could spin the story definitely in terms of this Government have not made any progress in road casualties, but they don't" (PA N2). And: "I don't get the Labour Party; they are desperately uninterested. I wish they were more interested. There's individual politicians, but I don't get Labour Shadow Ministers saying, we're really concerned about road safety and [are] not after doing something" (NGO N2).*

Earlier in the discourse (chapter 4) it was found that collaborative politics was an explanation for the effective development of road safety policy, as illustrated by Paul Clark (Labour):

*"Members from all parts ... strive to reduce the numbers [KSIs], and although there should never be any cosy relationship between the Government and the Committee or the opposition, we share that goal of reducing road casualties. Collaborative work and ideas will help us to achieve what many of us want, which is zero deaths" (Hansard HC, 2 July 2009, c. 579).*

It was suggested because there was little focus on road safety, this resulted in less political debate and it was not tested, so it was difficult to evaluate whether party politics was influential or not:

*"I don't think I've ever seen strong party politics getting in the way, but I caveat that by saying that you really need to be having quite an interesting debate to drum up good party politics. And if they're not having the debate, they can't really take a position. So that's probably why I haven't seen it" (PA N1).*

Whilst there were contradictory findings, overall, party politics does not seem to be a significant factor in influencing road safety.

### **8.2.3.2 Political ideology**

A distinction was made between party politics and the political ideology of politicians, and whilst there was some coalescing within political parties, this section analyses whether the ideology, rather than the party was influential. Ideology is a collection of ideas, views, and concepts and is a reflection of the social, economic, and political circumstances, and is associated with power structures (Harrison and Bord, 2018). Libertarianism for example is cited, and as this ideology originates from both left and right leaning politicians, this was influential in deciding on the separate analysis of ideological factors from party politics.

This interviewee suggested that all politicians were concerned about road safety, but the debate occurred when specific interventions are explored:

*“Sometimes the specific measures that are proposed are more or less controversial or more or less palatable to different politicians, and sometimes that's to do with local opinion and sometimes it's to do with ideologies about freedom and responsibility” (PA L6).*

This interviewee suggested there was a right, left influence on decision making, and suggested that libertarians were all on the right of politics, despite there being left wing libertarian politicians:

*“It obviously depends upon the party. The further right you are, the more conservative, freedom and liberty [influences]. The further left you are, the more you are inclined to restrict things” (Academic 5).*

A debate within the TC (TC, 2021a) on young drivers and GDL was used to illustrate a view that political ideology influenced policy choice in relation to using market levers to drive change:

*“This might be a political motivation for someone like Grant Shapps and Baroness Vere as they see telematics ... as the silver bullet for the young driver problem ... That suits Conservatives. Let's give it to the market, the market is going to create the solution ... Under the current Government there has been less attention on road safety business, as they don't want to be an interventionist” (PA N2).*

Or in this second quote, a reluctance to use restrictive policy mechanisms:

*“I don't think it was party politics, it was sort of political ideology. But I don't think it directly comes down to or aligns with people's political parties. The concern that some of the Conservative members saw themselves as very libertarian and they don't like the idea of introducing any restrictions” (Politician N4).*

Further examples related to the choice not to introduce targets in 2011. It says:

*“A lot about political philosophy. People should take responsibility for themselves. We don't need to stamp on freedoms, we don't need targets” (Academic 2).*

And from a politician who suggested targets were not reintroduced because of ideology:

*“There is a real plateau [KSI's]. We've been self-congratulating ourselves for years, so we and the Swedes are the best. We've got casualties down to a low level, but they're still significant and we've had a Government ... since 2010 that doesn't believe in targets. All the evidence shows as soon as you get rid of targets, you cease to make improvement. And for whatever God forsaken ideological reason ... the Tory administration that came in didn't like targets. Across the piece, they don't like setting targets and in road safety, that is not good” (Politician N6)*

The internal process within the DfT to decide whether targets should have been reintroduced between 2009 and 2011, were described as a shift from Labour planning to use targets to the Coalition deciding they were not necessary:

*“It was a very political decision when we got the new Government in ... not to do targets and a very last minute decision ... The Secretary of State decided not to, whether [they] were told by number 10, or decided themselves” (PA N5).*

Further examples were cited in relation to the ideologies which were said to align with the Conservative party. These included the drive for smaller government (PA N2), choices directed

by libertarian views (Politician N3) and a general reluctance to introduce laws (NGO N3). There was also a theme in the discourse where it was suggested that wider policy decisions from the Coalition Government were directed by overriding political considerations, and that road safety was dealt with in the same way as other policy areas, and that “they probably didn't even really think about road safety” (PA N2).

### 8.2.3.3 Relationship between politicians, the media, and the public

There was evidence of the relationship between politicians, the media, and the general public (Debinski et al., 2013). It is suggested that politicians form their views based on certain groups of policy participants or policy entrepreneurs. In relation to the media, three quotes are used to illustrate:

*“The difficulty in talking to some MP's is that they are bringing an agenda, they're looking at what's popular, more than the real issue ... looking for column inches around popular exposure and what's fresh in the press of the time” (PA L3).*

An academic described the difficulties with engaging with journalists. Road safety does not:

*“Loom large enough in the minds of those setting policy ... In terms of what is the thing that's going to make the most noise in the inbox of a Minister, is it going to be something like road safety ... or is it going to be whatever the Daily Mail are printing? ... It's just part of that wider issue we have with journalists not really feeling they want to write about the real science. Instead, they just want to write stuff that is going to basically get clicks. So, I think the media have a big role to play if we're going to change that narrative” (Academic 2).*

A further example related to young drivers, and this interviewee suggested the media played a significant influencing role with politician's decisions. GDL was:

*“Not going to happen because Ministers think the Daily Express will run a story saying they want our kids to be apprentices, but they won't let him drive to work ... I've worked long enough with politicians to understand that that's what the relationship with the media and the electorate is like. And there's one thing above all others that politicians want, and that is to be re-elected. And if you invite them to do things that puts re-election in doubt, they don't like it” (NGO N3).*

This local policy actor described the reluctance of journalists to report crashes, and the direct impact of poor visibility in the public's perception:

*“I keep pushing. I ask every journalist as I'm convinced that the amount of media coverage keeps these things on the forefront of policymakers ... the response is it's not news, it's only news if something unusual happens” (PA L5).*

Evidence suggests that the role of the media and the public were described as a connected influencing factor, but the influence of the public was also cited. This interviewee suggested that there was a more powerful framing which influenced politicians:

*“There's certainly a divergence between politicians and members of the public. It's tremendously skewed by most decision makers ... viewing road safety through a windscreen and from behind the steering wheel, rather than through what I call the height of an eight year old at the side of the road” (NGO N7).*

It was suggested there was a lack of profile within the public and much of road safety was not political: “I do think public attitudes towards road death and danger really limit how far the Government can go” (PA N2). It was suggested there was a disconnect between public views, and the interpretation by politicians from what was in newspapers; illustrated from polling data:

*“I’ve got figures from every year from 2008, and these are all surveys of 16 to 20,000 drivers, and there’s a question around acceptance of speed cameras and throughout that period from drivers, acceptance has been between 70 and 86% consistently year on year. And yet reading the Daily Mail, it is a war on drivers ... my point is sometimes government and local authorities have thought if they acted on something it would be unpopular, detrimental and it’s kind of stopped them or delayed them from acting” (NGO N6).*

There was a complex relationship between politicians, the media, and the public. Evidence was cited which suggested that politicians make policy decisions based on their own assessment of selective information, for example news reports, which might not be representative. The influence the media had in selecting which reports are published was also an important factor, with suggestions that this was a key influential factor on politicians.

In summary, there was evidence that political factors influenced road safety policy (suggested by Hyder et al., 2012) particularly in relation to political ideology and the role of the media and public in influencing political choices. The role of party politics as an influencer was more complicated. There was a clear pattern where interviewees from policy actor and politician groups disagreed that party politics was material, where campaigning NGOs suggested it was a strong factor. Whilst the findings include contradictions, political factors contributed to the profile of road safety and the choices that politicians made, with suggestions that the consequences were determinantal to road safety not being seen as a political priority. It was suggested that the media was prominent in influencing politicians on the priority of road safety, and as the media perceived a number of policy solutions as problematic, this persuaded many politicians that road safety was not a policy problem which required attention.

#### **8.2.4 Policy entrepreneurs and networks**

Most aspects of politics involve relationships, and there is debate about the effectiveness of the role of networks, or whether ideas, interests, or institutions, as factors within networks are more important (John, 2012, p.74). Given the linkages to other factors analysed elsewhere, the findings here concentrate on the role of networks and policy entrepreneurs in how they may influence communication between actors, within and outside the political institutions, and in how they shape decisions and outcomes. The interview question applicable to this section is:

***do victim groups support the advancement of road safety policy or detract from it?***

The findings presented represent a subsection of the interview group as many responses concentrated on nonspecific praise for the role of campaigning groups, particularly victim groups (a reference to which was included in the question itself), rather than a willingness to critique the role of networks or policy entrepreneurs in advancing or detracting from policy development. For example: “In the political game they [campaigners] are very important because they are the hearts and minds campaign” (Academic 1). And:

*“On balance they [campaigners] help because I dread to think where we would be if nobody was saying, hey, this is stupid. Look at these numbers of people being injured and so I think, on the whole, I would say probably a positive” (Academic 2).*

There was evidence interviewees used terminology interchangeably, meaning that analysis became less precise: for example, networks, campaigners, coalitions, groups, and partnerships. Whilst this does not help with consistent themes, it does not completely hinder the analysis. The design of the interview question is identified as a limitation in this research (see 10.3) due to the specific reference to victim groups, rather than networks more widely.

Policy entrepreneurs and what is commonly described as leadership is an important factor in the literature (for example, Jones et al., 2016) and appeared as a factor in road safety policy development. Policy entrepreneurs attempt to couple the three streams and when policy windows open, they must immediately seize the opportunity to initiate action, otherwise windows close. As identified in the thesis (for example see 10.2.1.1) the chances of a policy being adopted increases dramatically when the problem, policy and politics streams are coupled into a single package (Zahariadis, 2014, p.35). The chances of policies moving up the agenda are dampened considerably if no entrepreneur “takes on the cause, pushed it, and makes the critical couplings when policy windows open” (Kingdon, 1995, p.205).

**Are networks important?** The strongest theme was an assertion that networks could be important and should play an influential role in advancing road safety. The discussions which took place prior to the formation of PACTS in the 1980s was cited as an example. There was a recognition networks had been instrumental in securing seat belt legislation, and there was a wish that groups of interested parties working together should continue (Politician N6).

In discussing networks, this interviewee from an NGO suggested that a main strategy adopted to persuade and influence politicians was to secure:

*“Universality of the actors ... Politicians need to feel there is an alignment between the people involved in activism, the intervention, and their constituents” (NGO N7).*

They described the negative consequence of not having alignment of the policy idea and the influence of an effective coalition. They suggested that if politicians can see agreement for the policy idea and not see individual groups competing for different aspects of road safety (they list a number of groups campaigning for cycling, walking, air quality), and connect the idea with

the constituents, there was a greater chance of policy advancement. The importance of networks was advanced in relation to policy ideas and policy images: "If you really want something, whittle it down to a set of tasks that are more targeted and more credible. Getting a coalition of voices together can be very good" (NGO N3). And Barry Shearman, in the HoC suggested a route to make changes in road safety: "We would have to build a partnership between politicians, Ministers, police, road safety organisations outside this place and every concerned citizen" (Hansard HC Deb., 5 November 1997, c.238).

In a section which suggested networks had been historically ineffective in relation to road safety, this policy actor, close to government, offered an example of where a network with a clear policy idea, had been successful in respect to vulnerable road users:

*"Loads of organisations got together ... and they recommended changes to the Highway Code. They came to the department with a wish list for the changes together, as a collective, which made it much easier. Actually what went out to consultation was not vastly different from their wishes. Working with motoring groups as well, which was good" (PA N2).*

**The nature of networks:** There were views relating to the scale, complexity and number of organisations involved (NGO N3), and example quotes are given. The combination of the number of organisations and the range of priorities was suggested as problematic:

*"There's a lot of different groups and a lot of different vested interest, and everyone's focusing on slightly different things, and there's lots and lots of different issues because it's such a complicated thing to address" (NGO N5).*

This interviewee also suggested there were too many organisations involved with road safety, and there was a lack of a policy image within policy entrepreneurs, and so there was a problem with the engagement with Ministers:

*"There is also a single Minister ... to lobby ... There are quite a few players on the road safety pitch ... each with their own special interest ... I'm not sure it gets them further forward with what they want. I'm not sure that it sends them into reverse ... it's at least two steps forward and one back" (NGO N3).*

It was suggested that the success of the relationship between networks and politicians was influenced by the impact of the design of governance structures. Victim groups:

*"Not in the UK, but in some countries like Ireland, have been very influential with Ministers. That's because in smaller countries, politics and civil society is much closer" (NGO N2).*

It was suggested where the decision makers were closer to networks, the chance of success was greater as communication was more effective and networks were more visible (NGO N2).

A further factor within the nature of networks was the tone in which dialogue and debate happened between government and networks. Criticism was made of government:

*"Government decision makers should give a bit more credit to the electorate in terms of their understanding, there's this kind of arrogance that the public won't*

*understand, or it's too complex. And I think that's quite an arrogant message that often comes out of government in relation to road safety" (NGO N6).*

From the perspective of the networks, it was further suggested that too many road safety groups do not have a good relationship with government and "when contrasted with motoring organisations, the consequence is that road safety is less of a focus, where getting people to work more quickly is a higher focus" (PA N2). A suggested reason for the tone of the relationship between networks and government was that Government:

*"Doesn't necessarily respond too well to people shouting at them about things needing to change. I think it works well when things are collaborative" (NGO N5).*

**Consequences of ineffective networks:** The ineffectiveness of some relationships between government and networks was a theme expressed in terms of how road safety was organised more widely. Suggesting there was little evidence of successful networks, problems with the relationships between networks and government, and the complexity of the governance arrangements, this interviewee suggested: "the problem is everybody's got a little bit of the problem, but nobody's got enough of the problem to do anything about it" (PA N3). This was in stark contrast with largely effective car lobby groups or networks who have been successful in maintaining effective relationships with governments from all parties.

A final example suggested there were two potential consequences of the lack of effective networks: i) as there were so many different policy ideas within road safety, many presented by different campaigners to a single Minister, the policy landscape became unclear or confused, resulting in inaction; and, ii) there were risks of presenting long lists of recommendations, in lengthy reports, as the consequence was: "when people recommend 25 things, I can accept the one I agree with and just go quiet about the other ones" (NGO N3).

**Leadership:** Views on the leadership role played by politicians was dominant in this analysis, and whilst the role and importance of policy entrepreneurs is clearly set out in the literature (for example by Kingdon, 1995 and Zahariadis, 2014), there was less visibility of leadership in the discourse. In the second period of the research, where there was discourse, it was largely critical of a lack of political leadership, and Louise Ellman (Labour MP) as Chair of the TC during the 2000's was one high profile critic of a lack of political leadership as cited in 4.4.3.2. Views were largely consistent and critical of the low profile or absence of political leadership, and the low profile of policy entrepreneurs. Three examples from three interview groups are cited as examples:

In describing the lack of priority, profile and a weakness in political leadership, this interviewee suggested:

*"We need a senior politician to change and challenge the narrative ... a senior politician to come out and say OK, we've not taking this seriously" (Academic 2).*

The following two interviewees were equally critical:

*“Why haven't transport Ministers had this [road safety] more front of mind? ... But in politics, you know, making decisions, being bold, looking beyond what your civil servants are saying is that it's actually pretty important. It's about leadership, and we haven't seen that I don't think in transport (NGO N6). And:*

*“I think if you look backwards, the thing that's been missing is national leadership. And that came out very clearly in the responses to the roads policing review ... It's just not being pulled together. It's a very fractured landscape. That's the phrase that I would use. It's a fractured landscape” (PA N3).*

In summary, the potential of networks and policy entrepreneurs to influence government was identified (Hyder et al., 2012). Policy entrepreneurs can influence communication between actors within and outside the political institutions, and so how decisions and outcomes were shaped. There was evidence that historically networks have been largely ineffective in coordinating and advocating specific policy ideas, but effective in maintaining some visibility of the policy issue. This was due to the wide range of policy priorities, the number of organisations involved, and the nature of the problematic relationship between some policy actors and politicians. Whilst the range of networks with differing agendas detracted from consistent messages, it did not completely hinder progress, as suggested by the coalition which strongly influenced the new Highway Code in 2022. It was suggested that with better coordination between campaign groups (PACTS, 2007), the ability of these networks to influence government could be increased. Political leadership was largely absent in the second period of the research, and the limited role of policy entrepreneurs contributed to the failure of the coupling of the problem, policy and politics streams.

### 8.3 Conclusion

Political and organisational factors contributed to, and explain, in part, the low level of focus on road safety policy. The use of theoretical concepts to support the analysis, rather than direct it, was beneficial in explaining and structuring the findings: for example, the work on budgets or resources by Kingdon (1995) and Baumgartner and Jones (2009). Conclusions are structured by: governance, organisational, political, and policy entrepreneurs and networks.

**Governance:** Central persuasion should not have been needed to improve road safety which received wide support, but structural complexity, the changed and weakened relationship between central and local organisations, and questions about the effectiveness of leadership were factors which impeded progress (see Wegman, 2003). Political and organisational factors did impact on the governance of road safety, particularly in relation to complex relationships between venues, and at multiple levels of government which resulted in distraction or inaction (Plowden and Hillman, 1984; UN, 2019). There was evidence the impact of complicated governance was not new and the difficulties resulting from the split of responsibilities between central and local government, and other organisations, was reported early in the research

period, for example in 1989 (CoPA, 1989, para.1&9) and in conclusions from Bax et al. (2010) from The Netherlands. There was a weak devolved delivery system, described as *fuzzy governance* by Bache et al. (2014) in an analysis of multilevel governance structures in relation to climate change. Whilst weak governance in road safety is consistent when compared with the Bache et al. (2014) example, a significant difference which compounded the problems with road safety, was the absence of targets which existed in the climate change example.

The localism agenda from 2011 had a major impact on central government where austerity, reduced capacity and ineffective coordination across government resulted in fragmentation and a diminished scale of research and policy development. There was broad support for decentralisation and local empowerment as a policy aim, but the result in the 2010's impacted on the ability of local organisations to focus on road safety as it was crowded out by competing priorities which resulted in ineffective and reduced progress (see Bax et al., 2010 for competition from other transport priorities). The number of organisations with dispersed accountability for different aspects of road safety, nationally and locally, and fractured or removed systems further impacted on the effectiveness of governance structures and processes, once the clear national priority was weakened. The dispersal of authority and power for decision making resulted in less policy activity, as suggested by Baumgartner and Jones (2009), and impacted on the progress in addressing the number of people killed or seriously injured. A small number of back bench politicians who had prioritised road safety and exhibited strong leadership were cited, but it was suggested that bold and decisive political leadership from the top of government or the Shadow Cabinet had been missing, as illustrated by an absence of focus or discourse from all Prime Ministers (NGO N6), or Cabinet or Shadow Cabinet members. However, interviewees did not explain why there had been a different response over time, even though road safety did not feature in discourse from very senior politicians earlier in the research.

**Organisational:** Legal and resource considerations were the main organisational factors which had a constraining impact on the development of road safety policy, as described in the management capacity review (DfT, 2018). There were suggestions there was a relationship between the perception of traffic offences being seen as an acceptable consequence of mobility, and that this contributed to a lack of parity between road crime and other crimes. This then added to tension between those advocating stronger penalties to increase the deterrent effect and those resisting restrictions and harsher penalties: the hardship defence for those with twelve points or more, was cited as an example. Marsden et al. (2014) similarly suggested the transport sector was highly complex, fragmented and delivered through a multilevel environment which is consistent with the findings on road safety.

The evidence on the impact of resource pressures was consistent and strong (OECD, 2016; UN, 2019). The availability of resources was an important factor which influenced road safety policy development (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009). When the national budgets were reduced in 2010, this had a constraining effect on policy and research activity, both in national government and locally. There was evidence that as a result of a twenty-seven percent reduction in roads policing numbers this had a chilling effect on enforcement activity. The removal of targets at the same time as reduced funding was a major factor in the profile of road safety and the ability of organisations to prioritise it (see Wales, 2017). It was suggested that the result of the changed policy direction was detrimental and an example of what Kindgon (1995) describes as the constraining consequences of inadequate funding.

**Political:** Political factors influenced road safety policy (Hyder et al., 2012), particularly the role of the media and public in influencing political choices, which was complicated. Politicians can make policy decisions based on their own assessment of selective information, for example, news reports, which might not be representative, rather than evidence. To illustrate, consistently strong support for speed cameras from surveys was minimised due to the fear of negative press coverage, described as a *war on the motorist*. The influence the media had in what was published or not, was an important factor, with suggestions that media coverage had a disproportionate influence on politicians.

There was evidence of depoliticisation where politicians, both locally and nationally displaced responsibility elsewhere. For example, relying on responsible drivers to make safe choices instead of reverting to restrictive policy solutions or “national diktats” (DfT, 2011) was cited as a preferred policy choice. There was some evidence that political ideology impacted later in the period. Libertarianism was cited as an influential factor in the decision not to recommend a GDL in 2021 because politicians did not want to restrict the freedom of young drivers. Other examples included an ideological drive towards smaller government or market driven solutions in areas such as insurance. There were also references to the turnover, level of interest, and seniority of Ministers responsible for road safety impacting on the ability of road safety to attract political attention.

Whether the role of party politics was an influential factor was more complicated, with two opposing views. There was a clear pattern where policy actor and policymaker groups believed that party politics did not significantly contribute to the profile or seriousness in which road safety was addressed, but that campaigning NGOs suggested it was a strong factor. However, the dominant view was that party politics did not significantly impact on the development of road safety policy. Whilst the findings include contradictions, political factors do contribute to

the profile of road safety and the choices politicians made, with suggestions that the consequences was that road safety was not seen as a political priority.

**Policy entrepreneurs and networks:** Road safety organisations have been effective in maintaining some visibility of the policy issue and keeping it on the agenda over time. Kingdon (1995) identifies the importance of keeping an issue on the agenda (p. 196) as influential in any progress through the multiple streams. There was evidence that policy actors had agreed on the need to address road safety over time, but there was less success in agreeing on the policy solutions. Historically, road safety networks have been largely ineffective in coordinating specific policy ideas. The ineffectiveness was, in part, due to the wide range of equally important policy solutions, the number of organisations involved, and the nature of some problematic relationships between policy actors and politicians. The result was that the road safety community struggled to influence the politics stream. Immature road safety networks and policy entrepreneurs were in stark contrast with the effective car lobby groups who had been successful in maintaining relationships with governments from all parties, which may constitute a policy monopoly. However, the ability to set and sustain the agenda was more important than the role in, and ability of networks to achieve this. The lack of political leadership framed the second period and the lack of visibility of policy entrepreneurs contributed to the failure of the coupling of the problem, policy and politics streams. Whilst the range of road safety policy entrepreneurs and the immaturity of networks with differing agendas had detracted from consistent messages, this did not completely hinder progress, as suggested by the early success of PACTS or the coalition which strongly influenced the new Highway Code in 2022. Improving the coordination between campaign groups (PACTS, 2007) or the development of more effective networks may enable the coalescing around policy solutions, and improve the ability to challenge competing networks. But even with effective networks, having unclear or contested policy solutions weaken the power of the policy image and so reduce the ability to progress through the multiple streams. This impacted on the availability and profile of political leadership and the result was policy inaction or delay.

In summary, political, and organisational factors partly explain the low level of focus on road safety, and a number of factors have impacted on the ability to develop road safety policy over time. There were some contradictions and debate on which factors played a greater or lesser role, and the above conclusion set out a detailed analysis of these. Chapter 4 identified two main periods in the thesis with different characteristics. First, before about 2002 where there was evidence of proactive development of policy and there was a coupling of multiple streams. Second, after about 2003 there was less attention to road safety, and criticism of complacency and policy inaction where the streams failed to combine. These two periods help to shape the

answer to the research question: do factors contribute to the development of road safety in Britain? In the first period, road safety was clearly identified as a policy problem and remained on the agenda whilst politicians responded with clarity about the policy solutions which were based on cross governmental discourse, and Parliamentary agreement. This occurred in the development of *Road safety: next steps* (DoT, 1987) and *Tomorrow's roads: safer for everyone* (DfT, 2000). There were similar characteristics: notably, a national strategy, the inclusion of targets, budgets, and resources. These were complemented by a largely constructive political discourse on the need to take action on the policy problem, agreement about policy solutions, and through visible political leadership, prioritisation of road safety.

In contrast, different characteristics shaped the second period. There was evidence of incremental policy change and periods of inaction, which resulted from ongoing debates as to whether road safety was a problem requiring attention and political disagreement about policy solutions; for example, the speed management between 2000 and 2004 (see 0). Following a period where road safety did not feature strongly in the political discourse during the mid and later years of the 2000s, a number of factors came together in the 2010's. The three Government policy documents (DfT, 2011; DfT, 2015, and DfT, 2019c) were criticised for their lack of strategy, described as a "lot of filler" (Academic 2), and the absence of targets (PA N4). Reductions in budgets were described as a constraint impacting on the profile of policies (Kingdon, 1995, p.105) which happened in 2010 with the result of less resources in all organisations (p.33). During this period there was less political discourse and visibility of the need to address the policy problem, and where there was discourse, policy solutions were contested.

Governance and organisational factors and the role of policy actors did influence policymaking in setting the agenda. But because there was evidence that these were present during the whole research period, it was difficult to identify which had made the greater difference, as the dispersal of authority and the power of decision making (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009) was a feature throughout the research period. Governance structures and processes impacted on policy activity over time, as suggested by Bax et al. (2010) in the context of devolved responsibility, where road safety had to compete with other local policy priorities. Wider governance issues associated with structures and processes featured throughout the period (for example CoPA, 1989; TLGRC, 2002a), and do not appear to explain the differences in focus. There was also evidence of governmental, societal, and discursive depoliticisation (Wood and Flinders, 2014) from both Conservative and Labour periods of government, as many organisations were accountable for road safety, at different levels and types of government. Kingdon's work as cited by John describes how organisations can "try to move or dump

problems” (John, 2012, p.159) to different levels of government, or different parts of government. It was suggested that the localism policy from 2011 signalled a different and radical shift in the approach to road safety and deliberately distanced central government from accountability (Academic 1). Whilst there was evidence to support this, devolved, structurally complex and uncoordinated governance arrangements were a feature throughout the research period, and this change in 2011, on its own, was unlikely to be the single factor to the development of road safety policy. The contributory role of policy entrepreneurs and networks was a feature throughout the research period. Policy actors have been effective in maintaining some visibility of the policy problem and keeping it on the agenda over time. But road safety networks have largely been ineffective when competing with the power and resources of the car lobby. This has been largely consistent throughout the research period, and whilst the numbers of campaigning groups and the immaturity of networks with differing agendas detracted from consistent messages, this had not completely hindered progress.

Political and organisational factors were considered in this chapter in isolation from the results from other chapters. Questions about the relationship with other findings and the relative importance in influencing the future of road safety policy remain. These are explored further in chapter 9 and drawn together in the final chapter (chapter 10).

## Chapter 9

### Future of British road safety policy

#### 9.1 Introduction

This chapter answers the last of the four research questions: ***what would need to change to develop future policy to address road deaths in Britain?*** The data is predominantly derived from two interview questions:

- *What action would need to be taken to develop future policy?* (15)
- *Which three policy interventions would you prioritise to improve road safety?* (18).

There were design issues with question 18 which are explored further in section 10.3.

The academic literature offers little insight into how to predict future policy, not least as Kingdon (1995) describes some elements of the development of multiple streams as random, unpredictable and ambiguous (p.189). Kingdon (1995) does, however, suggest that factors such as budgets, public acceptance and the distribution of resources can structure the system in predictable ways (for factors see chapter 8). Kingdon suggests that the political renewal cycle can be a catalyst for a challenge to existing policy, and if applied to road safety in Britain, an illustration was the end of the two year policy statement period in 2021 (DfT, 2019c), where pressure might have been exerted on the Government to respond or renew the policy approach. The renewal cycle had no impact, and new policy did not happen. He further suggests that changing the timing within cycles can be influential. By moving the timing within a policy system, the discussions about connected transport policy in the US were forced to be considered together, whereas previously they had not connected. This may be applied to, for example, road safety policy and active travel in Britain, which have, to a large extent been dealt with independently, where there would have been advantages in considering them together (Kings Fund, 2023). In 2021, these policy areas were held by different Ministers and the separation was maintained through the structural responsibility. Larger scale cycles may also impact on the opening of a policy window and Kingdon (1995) describes different types of government (he cites liberal and conservative moods, p.189), or periods of reform and consolidation as influential factors in contributing to the opening of policy windows.

The aim of this chapter is to evaluate areas which may have an impact on future road safety policy, and consider areas which may be beneficial in influencing policy change to achieve safe roads.

The results in this chapter are structured in three parts:

- Road safety interventions

- Organisational influences
- Future policy

## 9.2 Results

### 9.2.1 Road safety interventions

There was a wide range of views on areas which could best influence and improve road safety, and these have been divided into two groups. A strong theme was the difficulty in agreeing the priority areas of policy, as illustrated by this quote, in answer to question 18:

*“This is a question that comes up a lot! I actually do not know. I have no idea, no idea at all. I think I would just keep on looking at the data to determine how we're going to reduce the number of people killed and seriously injured” (Academic 3).*

They would not expand on this answer, other than to suggest that the complexity of road safety and the co-dependency between specific environmental or behavioural factors influenced their answer.

The range of responses which were intervention-based policy solutions include: behaviour change (Academic 4; PA N2); vehicle standards (Academic 5); crash investigation (NGO N3); and GDL (Politician N4; NGO N5). The two most frequently cited were speed management (Politician L1; PA N5), for example, reducing the national speed limit on single carriageway ‘A’ roads (NGO N7), and technology (PA N4). Views on technology included the need, in general terms, for the adoption of more technology and innovation (PA L2; PA L6); telematics (Academic 1); in car technology (PA L5; NGO L2) with intelligent speed assistance used as an example (Academic 2; PA N4); automated vehicles (NGO N2; PA N1; PA N5), and mandated dash cams (NGO N3; PA N4). There were limited references to issues such as community engagement (Academic 1); education in schools (PA L4); prioritising the safety of older people (PA N2); the need for improved and more accurate data (PA N4); or increased funding for organisations supporting victim groups (PA L1). This contributed to the theme that there was a wide range of views on *what* interventions could be influential in improving road safety. The *Safe Systems* approach is broadly supported, and outside of the five pillars, when alternative solutions were referenced, there was little consensus on which interventions should be prioritised, a feature which appeared across the decades of the research period.

### 9.2.2 Organisational influences

Interviewees suggested two organisational factors influenced policy development, and these are described separately from the interventions (above):

**Legal:** There were strong views on the need for much more radical changes in the law (NGO N7), with much stricter penalties (NGO L1) and parity with other crimes (PA L3). There was a

theme which described the current imbalance between the perception that drivers have a right to drive, rather than it being a privilege derived through assurance (learning, testing and enforcement) and driving within the law (PA L2) (see 8.2.2.1). It was suggested that the legal framework should be designed in the following way:

*“Lawful road user supportive legislation, so, things like exceptional hardship going, so if you’re lawfully using the road then we’re on your side” (PA N4).*

The removal of the economic hardship defence was suggested by other interviewees (for example, PA N2). Other areas suggested included an increased use of technology to support enforcement (Academic 1) and a much stronger focus on speed management with speed cameras and increased penalties (PA N4). Whilst this was the dominant view on the legal aspects of speed management there was a single alternative view that this area received too much attention, was over-simplistic and that: “we need to turn down the dial” (NGO N4) in what was described as an obsession with the current approach to speeding. Overall, clearer, and stronger penalties were advocated and legal frameworks for road crime should have parity with other crimes as a driving principle.

**Resources:** The need for increased revenue spending was identified (PA L7; PA L5), with a strong bias towards those working in local areas, rather than nationally. The need for capital or infrastructure spending was also identified (NGO N6), and specifically with reference to the physical environment (Academic 4), engineering, with redesigned junctions used as an example (Academic 5); the desire to redesign cities to be car free (NGO N1); and separating people, cycles, and cars (PA L2; Politician L1). The short term nature and the bidding mechanisms through which to secure funding, and the lack of long term infrastructure investment was criticised (PA, L5).

There was also a balanced discourse which accepted the positive influence finance and resources can have on policy development, but that this was only one of a number of factors important for progress (PA N5). There were suggestions the lack of resources can be used as a block to innovation or development (PA N4) or offered as an excuse for inaction (PA L3). Overall, the availability of funding and resources was described as a compelling factor in the ability of both national and local government to advance road safety. The reduction to road safety funding in 2010 was frequently cited as a major contributory factor towards the plateauing of KSI numbers in the following period.

Finally, in this section, there were views expressed which suggested that the answers to road safety were already known, and political and policy action was required:

*“So much is already known, but I think it’s really just about some clever people in the DfT sitting down with enough time to write it and then get it through the appropriate bits of Government machinery. The tricky bit is getting other*

*departments to buy into it, getting Treasury to buy into it and seeing it as something number 10 will expect to be delivered” (NGO N2).*

This suggests it was not that further work was needed to identify the policy solutions, it was the lack of political consensus on which policy solutions may be acceptable, and that whilst this position continued, the result was policy delay.

### **9.2.3 Future policy**

This section is structured into five themes which could drive change:

- Identify road safety as a policy problem
- Reframe the policy image
- Clear(er) national strategy
- Improved governance systems
- Policy entrepreneurs and visible leadership

#### **9.2.3.1 Identify road safety as a policy problem**

The academic language of public policy was rarely used in the interviews, but there was a clear theme which strongly suggested road safety was not seen as a policy problem. Kingdon (1995) distinguishes between a condition or a situation and a policy problem, where a condition only becomes a policy problem when politicians decide to take action. This was reflected by the views of interviewees. There were views from all interview groups which suggested that more needs to be done to change the perception of road safety within policy participants, the media, and the public (Politician N4) to acknowledge action needs to be taken:

*“We can only move it forward when there's a general recognition that the number of people that are killed and seriously injured on the roads each year is still a big toll” (Academic 3).*

The congested policy agenda and the lack of profile of the consequences of crashes was suggested as part of the explanation for road safety not being seen as a policy problem:

*“There's so much else going on and because the KSIs are not increasing, so they're always tragic when they happen, and as an MP they're always an issue when they happen to your constituent, but if overall they're not getting worse, it's not a news story. It's not a political priority” (Politician N3).*

This was expanded on to include the complexity and challenges of policy change in road safety:

*“It's a difficult task and it actually falls into the too difficult and not visible box ... [we need to] just accept we have a policy problem” (Academic 3).*

The influencing role of the media and the public's view of, and level of attention to road safety were the main findings. It was suggested there was a lack of interest, and the solution was: “Trying to get more people to care about it ... so it's seen as a problem area, and that's about communicating” (PA N2). In identifying what needs to change, this interviewee suggested:

*“Media attention, public attention, high profile championing of the issue by those who are trusted or regarded, I suppose those are the things that might make a difference” (Politician N4).*

The reluctance of the media to publish the science behind road safety (Academic 2), and a view that the media are not interested, for example: “it is not a news story” (Politician N3) feature strongly. It was also suggested that there was a connection between the lack of public and media discourse and the resulting inattention or inaction from politicians:

*“If people can be talking more about the stats, you know the evidence, like MPs, etc. And the media reporting on these tragic stories, then that's going to get more traction. I think the tragedy is out there, if that can be channelled and put into the public domain a lot more. Whether it's through politicians, whether it's through the media then that is going to get more traction” (Politician N5).*

It was suggested that the level of media attention in any policy area influenced politicians (PA L3), and: “politicians will want to react to something that is newsworthy” (PA L2).

A gap between what was reported as the public’s view and the actual view based on surveys was cited (NGO N6), and some parts of the media did not reflect the public mood (Politician N5). An example to illustrate this compared an article from a national newspaper, with survey results from the National Travel Survey. The newspaper article: *Speed cameras are being used to fleece drivers* (Daily Mail, 2020) which suggested antagonism from the public against this specific road safety intervention, but a national survey (DfT, 2020b) indicated that fifty-nine percent of the sample agreed that speed cameras save lives.

Whilst there was general consensus that road safety should be dealt with as a policy problem needing attention, there were those who were pessimistic this will happen (NGO N3), and that further small incremental steps was the predicted trajectory:

*“We need a step change, but that step change is probably never going to be socially acceptable or saleable, so it does need perseverance ... including making sure it's in the public domain and looking for where you can make a difference and sustaining investment, including more money, but it's a marathon, not a sprint. It's not a terribly sexy reflection” (PA N6).*

There was a theme on the need to identify road safety as a policy problem, and that the relationship between the public, the media, and politicians was influential (see Debinski et al., 2013). The main finding was that there was a fragmented or disconnected relationship between the public, where there was some evidence of support for improved road safety, and politicians. This was strongly influenced by parts of the media and marketing from vehicle manufacturers, which resulted in politicians being reluctant to introduce what were described as unpopular or restrictive policies.

### 9.2.3.2 Reframe the policy image

Part of the suggested solution to identify road safety as a policy problem was to alter the language used and change the policy image (Politician N4; Belin et al., 2012). Chapter 7 suggested that the dominant policy image depicts road safety as largely solved, mainly accidental and so not preventable, and strongly influenced by the media and marketing depicting driving “posh and fast cars” as safe and exciting, but “totally ignore[s] the risk” (PA N4). The mismatch between the perceived level of risk associated with road travel compared with other forms of travel was identified as a factor influencing the image of road safety:

*“People don’t anticipate you can prevent [crashes], they just see it as an accident, and the terminology accident is our challenge, but the fact people refer to it as an accident gives a real indication as to why there’s not been the drive and energy and change that’s been needed” (PA N4).*

The role of the media in not prioritising road safety or in downplaying the level of risk was identified (PA N1) and it was suggested that being honest in the discourse about the level of risk was needed (Politician N3).

Presenting the road safety policy image as unpreventable is cited in this quote:

*“In terms of the way language is used, it’s the way it is in the media that makes people less concerned about road safety and they [feel] less concerned about it, and makes them think that you can’t do much about it. But you can. And if people, if the Government started using language like road danger reduction, which I think is quite powerful” (PA N2).*

It was suggested that how road safety was talked about, and the language used needs to change from the current image (Politician N4), described as dull, to “make it more sexy” (PA L2) by using language that “switches politicians on” (PA N3).

The potential impactful role of politicians was described as an important route to altering the policy image:

*“We need a senior politician to change and challenge the narrative ... [at] a very high level how people talk about this and calling out people who are making clearly ridiculous statements about their behaviour as if it were acceptable (Academic 2).*

As discussed in chapter 7 the role of language was important, and suggestions included using *crash* instead of *accident* (NGO, N5) and more radical suggestions were to ignore the language of road safety altogether and “ride on the coat tails” of active travel, sustainability, or environmental policy, as road safety was “not special” (PA N5).

### 9.2.3.3 Clear(er) national strategy

The discourse contained three main aspects: interviewees who challenged what was described as the ineffective (Politician N4) or absent national strategy (Academic 2) which was discussed in chapter 4, those calling for a bold and radical shift in policy, and those who described the suggested components should form part of an improved national strategy (see Wales, 2017).

There was wide ranging support that the approach needed to change and that “we [have] gotta shake it up” and start to be more radical, and move away from the views of “too many old fashioned traditionalists” (Politician N6). There was further evidence of the need for changes to how road safety had traditionally been advanced: the need for significant change (Academic 2), a new strategy that puts the voice of the victim at the centre (NGO N5) and a new strategy that signals that road deaths and serious injuries are preventable (PA N4). Wegman (2014) suggested a more ambitious strategy was needed which included aspirational targets.

This interviewee advised that lessons needed to be learned from previous successes and by looking at international comparisons:

*“Amongst the people who are trying to change this in a substantive way and recognises a problem, there's an absolute desire for significant and substantive change” but that the road safety community have not managed to persuade the vast majority of Britain’s public nor the politicians (NGO L2).*

This interviewee suggested the solution to reducing road danger was “simple” and consists of a new strategy which includes *Vision Zero* and targets (NGO N6). There were repeated references to the *Safe Systems* approach and the use of *Vision Zero* to improve road safety in the literature (8.1), and throughout the thesis. These were consistently referenced within the interviews as integral to future strategy, both from local (NGO L2; PA L7) and national policy participants (NGO N2; NGO N6; PA N4). However, there was little published evidence from within Britain that this approach had been successful.

The use of casualty reduction targets was a theme identified in the thesis, and was advocated from all interview groups as an important aspect of future policy to address the numbers of people killed or seriously injured (Academic 1; NGO N5; PA N4; Politician N3). There was a more nuanced discourse explored in 8.2.2, which suggested that targets alone were not the solution, but that targets with a series of other factors could significantly improve road safety.

This interviewee suggested previous gains were unlikely to have been the result of policy change or behavioural change and that:

*“Improvements in KSIs have been ... down to improvements in infrastructure and improvements to kit, vehicles, etc. and not a generalised improvement in the culture of road safety, and a generalised different view of road safety is what we need. I think we need a step change in the culture around it” (PA N5).*

They advocated for a radical national strategy which would signal the importance and prioritisation of road safety, which they suggested had been lacking, and a focus on behavioural changes.

There were calls for more radical strategies to stop road deaths which primarily were congregated around campaigning interviewees. For example:

*"I need everybody out of their cars. I need people to be on the bus, on their bicycles, safely walking and have an active travel approach and modal shift from cars to buses" (Politician L2).*

Suggestions included modal shift away from vehicles (PA L6), significantly less cars in cities (NGO N1), fewer cars generally (Politician L1) and the protection of vulnerable road users in designated road space (NGO N7). The general theme was to segregate road use, but some of these interviewees were strongly anti-car.

Finally in this section there were some views which suggested alternative strategies. This politician, whilst accepting the current approach was not working, suggested individual responsibility should form a major part of any new strategy:

*"It's the things that people are involved in themselves, and it's hundreds of thousands of ordinary people, making ordinary decisions, often in a better way, which makes a big difference" (Politician N1).*

This interviewee was optimistic that policy restrictions were largely unnecessary and that alternative policy drivers would be significantly beneficial to address the deaths and injuries on Britain's roads:

*"We're not gonna get down below 5 or 6 fatalities a day just by doing the same things more ... we need to be thinking more laterally about what's going to be different [and] there are two things that are changing the world of motoring, and they are the connected and autonomous world, and the zero emission world. Between them, even if we didn't care about road safety at all, the roads are likely to get safer because of those things. Because the scope for human error will be diminished" (NGO N3).*

These final two views were in the minority, with most interviewees advocating a more radical approach to road safety, including *Vision Zero*, targets and funding, but the level of confidence that automation or technology would address road danger was less prevalent in this thesis.

#### **9.2.3.4 Improved governance systems**

The consequence of complex and fragmented governance systems, and a weak relationship between the DfT and local government was identified and discussed in 8.2.1. Interviewees from across the interview groups suggested there needed to be improvements to governance systems and processes (PA L4; PA L6). Different suggestions were made about how to make improvements, with the lack of visibility of the policy problem within both national and local government identified as a contributing factor.

This interviewee, with decades of experience and close to government suggested:

*"I would actually have a vision and a target for Vision Zero, and I would put that up front. And I would make that a vision across all of government, not a DfT vision" (NGO N6).*

Improvements to better connect the departments within central government so that communication and joint policy was more likely was advocated (PA L7) and it was suggested

that a cross government board would improve communication and governance (PA N3). A further suggestion on how to improve governance systems and the visibility of road safety across government was the creation of a new road safety commissioner (NGO N5; PA N1). The HMIC roads policing report (HMICFRS, 2021) was used to illustrate the lack of urgency to implement solutions to improve the effectiveness of road safety policy and delivery in central government, some of which was concerned with governance issues. Interviewees were frustrated with the lack of any response from Government and pointed to a specific recommendation which would establish road crime as a new strategic priority within the Home Office, and so to PCC's and police forces (PA N1; NGO N5).

The need for improved governance and the problems from the lack of visibility was described in local government (see Bax et al., 2010). It was suggested that the wide variation in the effectiveness of local road safety partnerships could be addressed (PA N2), local processes across departments could be improved (PA L5), and more devolution could support the reduction of road danger (PA L5). There were suggestions the relationship between local and central government could be improved through more effective governance structures and processes (Politician N2), but there was little in the way of substantive suggestions or examples of what might contribute further.

In a critique of what was described as a lack of priority and a general failure of governance, though the quote is more generic, the interviewee described the "abandoning" of Local Authorities, poor communication, and minimal governance processes:

*"It's still a bit motherhood and apple pie. It's not as important as it should be ... and we say let's not be complacent. But really, we are complacent. We will do these small improvements all the time, but let's not take the bull by the horns on this one because we're doing fine, it's all going in the right direction generally ... but we could be doing a whole lot better" (PA N5).*

They suggested the reduced funding and the localism policy shift in 2010 impacted on the effectiveness of road safety, and it was also suggested that Government "needs to make decisions and stop delaying" (Politician N2).

### **9.2.3.5 Policy entrepreneurs and visible leadership**

The role of policy entrepreneurs, networks and coalitions, and policy actors was a strong theme throughout the theses (for example, 8.2.4). The language of public policy theory was rarely used, which is why CDA seeking to determine the meaning was an important methodological tool. Describing the "crowded field" (NGO N3) of advocates for road safety features strongly, and the "blurring of lines between a lot of the actors" (Academic 2) which resulted in diffuse power (Academic 4). It was suggested that having many networks or actors advocating for their own particular group or issue, whilst explicable, worked against defining a

clear policy problem and policy image. An example cited was that advocates for cyclist, pedestrian or motoring groups can produce differing and possibly competing problems to be solved (NGO N7). This interviewee suggested:

*"We don't do a very good job as a community ... [at] singing from the same hymn sheet and people will often not agree ... so, there's no momentum to change" (NGO N5).*

This was illustrated by this policy actor, close to government, who suggested that some of the relationships between Government and road safety groups were not good and that:

*"Motoring groups ... argue for stuff which makes it easier for drivers and that has a negative impact on road safety" (PA N2).*

Kingdon (1995, p.173 and 205) suggests that policy entrepreneurs, who are willing to invest time, money, energy, and reputations to promote a policy solution are an important factor in advancing policy. As policy solutions "float about" (p.116) being proposed, discussed, and proposed and discussed again, until they couple with a policy problem, the role of those advocating solutions is important. Interviewees question the degree of power and influence of those advocating changes to road safety policy and described a diffuse group often advocating for different solutions. Kingdon (1995) argues much of the policy process is determined by the connection of solutions to problems, and as politicians shift their attention between policy problems, the ability of policy participants to influence whether this happens or not is important. In road safety, whilst there were positive examples cited, for example the coalition which advocated for radical changes to the Highway Code, there remained a problem with the lack of power or influence of policy participants to advance road safety.

Interviewees frequently used the language of leadership to explain the role of policy actors, and this was consistent with much of the literature (for example, Coalition of road safety NGOs, 2021). A number of factors in relation to political leadership were identified in 8.2.3 including issues such as the high turnover of Ministers with the road safety portfolio, and the lack of visibility from Cabinet or Shadow Cabinet politicians. Some suggested that leadership: "has to come from the Prime Minister" (NGO N6), and as it was already known what to do, political leaders need to "get on with it" (NGO N2), but these views appear not to recognise the complexity of this policy field. This academic puts forward an approach which they suggested could be adopted by politicians:

*"A senior politician [needs] to come out and say OK, we're not taking this seriously enough and this many people are dying, this many people were injured. We know there are things we can do to improve it and we're going to. It's no longer acceptable to say it's OK to speed a little bit and it's no longer acceptable to have a pint and a half and then jump in the car. It all has to stop right now. That's what I would like to see" (Academic 2).*

This local policy actor suggested that local politicians were very cautious with what policy areas they selected to speak about, and suggested road safety was not visible:

*“Politicians don't like getting embroiled in things if they don't think they can make a difference. So I think we need to persuade them that they can make a difference” (PA L1).*

They suggested road safety was seen by some as an area to stay away from in order to avoid negative media headlines, and cited speed cameras and cycle lanes as examples. Generally, political leadership that was visible was advocated by all interview groups (for example: PA L2, 2021; NGO L2, 2021) as a method of ensuring road safety was seen as a policy problem and that introducing different language was needed to alter the policy image with all policy actors. Whilst political leadership was evident in the first phase of the research, especially focused around the 1987 and 2000 policy documents, the role of policy entrepreneurs was diffuse or not visible in the discourse in the later stage. The thesis did not engage with evaluating individual road safety community members or politicians engaged with road safety policy, and their roles as policy entrepreneurs or political leaders.

### 9.3 Conclusion

The last research question asked what needed to change to develop future policy to address road deaths, and the conclusions are set out in three parts: interventions, organisational factors, and policy drivers.

**Interventions:** there were wide and varied views about which interventions could be adopted to reduce road deaths. There was an acknowledgement that it was known, to a large extent, what could improve road safety (NGO, N2), though not the relative effectiveness of different interventions, and little consensus on which road safety interventions should be prioritised, though *Safe System* approach was broadly supported. Possible interventions included, for example, the establishment of a national crash investigation branch (agreed by the Government in 2022) or restrictive measure to support young drivers, such as GDL. But there were two areas which were most dominant: speed management, for example, reducing the national speed limit on single carriageway ‘A’ roads (NGO N7), and the use of technology, for example, Intelligent Speed Assistance (Academic 2).

Some interviewees were from specific professional backgrounds, for example, police, civil servants, politicians, which was likely to have influenced their views, and interviewees from campaigning groups were influenced by the nature of their campaign (these are not named for anonymity reasons). These were important factors when considering the potential solutions. It was difficult to make definitive conclusions from this data, other than there was a breadth of views and a lack of consistent prioritisation on which approaches could be most effective in

reducing road danger. The wide range of suggestions of *what* to do to improve road safety aligns with the findings of Marsden and Reardon (2017) on wider transport policy, in relation to the dominance of discourse on interventions rather than on *how* to improve road safety.

**Organisational factors:** there were two areas which contributed to addressing road deaths: legal and financial factors:

- **Legal:** interviewees suggested tackling the perceived imbalance between the protections afforded to drivers, and the rights of victims or other road users, could alter the strength of the legal system to provide stronger deterrents. The increased use of the economic hardship defence for drivers who incurred additional penalty points above the maximum allowed before further action or disqualification could occur was used to illustrate this identified inequity. There was also a perceived lack of parity between road crimes and other crimes, and a reluctance by the Home Office to designate road crime as a strategic priority (this was adopted as part of the ***Strategic Policing Requirement***, Home Office, 2023). It was suggested a review of penalties across the suite of road crime tariffs was needed to improve equity and address the degree of deterrent afforded by the current legal framework.
- **Financial:** the availability or changes to funding was put forward as a determinant of the priority to which politicians view road safety and the impact on both local and national government. The reduced funding in 2010 was suggested to have contributed to the decline in the ability to prioritise road safety. To some this was a negative and direct comment targeted at road safety, but to others, it was a decision hidden within general government policy, and the consequences not considered (Hansard HC Deb. 2 December 2010, col.949). The impact that funding or changed funding had was consistent with both Kingdon (1995) and Baumgartner and Jones (2009) who describe the influence funding has on policymaking, and the relative priority afforded by politicians. Some interviewees drew a direct correlation between the reduced funding and the resulting decline in police numbers, road safety teams and policy and research teams, as a direct contributory factor which resulted in the plateauing of the numbers of those killed or seriously injured.

**Policy drivers:** there were five policy themes which, if addressed, could contribute to reducing road deaths. The findings derive from all data sources, and whilst there were some minor contradictions which are analysed in the individual sections of the thesis, the themes were clear. Each of these were discussed within the confines of this chapter, but expanded upon in the final chapter (chapter 10).

- **Identify road safety as a policy problem:** There were complicated relationships within and between the many different constituencies in road safety and these were explored

in chapter 4, chapter 5 and chapter 6. The heterogeneity and complexity of road safety detracted from the ability to see road safety as a policy problem, as there were numerous policy images (see Bliss, 2014). Road safety was not always seen as a policy problem, and there were a number of areas which could be considered in seeking to change this position. There was a disconnect in the relationships between the views of the public, how this was interpreted and reported by the media, which included strong marketing from car manufacturers, and the resulting muted reaction from politicians. Although there was interview data which suggested there was limited public concern for reducing road danger, there was also published data, for example National Travel Surveys (DfT, 2020b), which suggested there was concern from the public about road danger, and support for policy action. There was poor visibility of the degree of public concern in the “inbox” (Academic 2) of politicians, and this was influenced by the strength of car dominant narratives within the media and the policy monopoly of policy actors involved with defining the approach to road safety. Talking about road death, providing more visibility of the numbers of, and consequences on those killed or seriously injured, and redressing the imbalance of media coverage more strongly towards safety, were suggested as areas which could influence future policy.

- **Reframe the policy image:** Linked directly with the finding that road safety was not seen as a policy problem, was the policy image. The dominant image was one which was seen as largely solved, crashes were mainly accidental and so not preventable, driving was not perceived as risky, and as Britain had one of the best records globally, there was a resulting acceptance of the numbers of deaths and serious injuries. Altering the policy image, as illustrated by the effective change to how smoking was seen (chapter 7) could have a powerful impact on how policy entrepreneurs and politicians see the road safety issue and, over time, alter the policy response. Dorling (2010) described the numbers of injuries on Britain’s roads as the twenty-first century epidemic, but this framing was restricted to a small number of venues and whilst there was some evidence this was slowly changing, the dominant framing remained grounded in economic productivity and the freedom to drive (Elvik, 2002).
- **Clear(er) national strategy:** There was evidence that the approach had been largely ineffective since around the mid 2000’s (see 4.6), and interviewees argued that the slowing in the reduction, and then plateauing of the number of KSI’s was confirmatory. Britain signed up to the global road safety conference’s declaration (WHO, 2019) which placed the *Safe Systems* approach at the centre of policy. This did not translate into British policy and the dominant finding, though different descriptive language was

used, is that a new, bold, and radical strategy was needed which applies *Safe Systems*, *Vision Zero* and targets as central drivers within the strategy (see Johansson, 2009).

- **Improved governance systems:** Improvements were suggested to the systems and processes, including decision making, to increase the visibility and priority of road safety. Interviewees made a number of suggestions on how to improve cross government communication and decision making, the fragmented relationship between policy actors, particularly between national and local government, and the visibility of the numbers of people killed or seriously injured. These were discussed above (8.2.1). Securing more effective governance structures and processes may increase the possibility of cross government policy development, positively impacting on reducing road danger. However, as structural complexity and the high number of policy venues was a consistent finding throughout the research period, this policy driver may not represent the most compelling case alone.
- **Policy entrepreneurs and visible leadership:** Much of the discourse involved describing the problems of insufficient power, influence, and limitations to leadership in road safety, contrasted with the powerful and well-funded motoring networks. Future policy could be improved by recognising and improving the deficits and creating more effective coalitions. The conclusion was that these suggestions will not happen without the political will political leadership, effective coupling of the policy streams by policy entrepreneurs and the resulting prioritisation of road safety policy.

There was a relationship and co-dependency between the potential to identify road safety as a policy problem, the feasibility of reframing the policy image, the political enthusiasm to develop a national strategy, to modernise the governance structures and processes, achieve more effective coalitions, and secure political leadership to deliver it all. Whilst there were suggestions about how these policy drivers could be achieved, policy participants within their own venues should debate and agree how best to secure progress, and increase the visibility of the policy problem by talking about road death outside traditional venues.

In summary, there are changes which could further develop future road safety policy to address the numbers of people killed or seriously injured in Britain. There were suggestions on *what* interventions could be adopted in many areas, for example, speed management or licensing changes to support young drivers. It was not possible to identify which interventions could be the most effective, but it was clear there was limited consensus on prioritisation. Strengthening the legal framework to tackle the perceived imbalance between the protections afforded to drivers, and the rights of victims or other road users, and the influence that

reduced funding had on the ability of policy participants to prioritise road safety are important organisational factors. If improved, these could contribute to reducing road danger.

Finally, there was evidence that taking action in the five policy drivers could positively contribute to improving road safety. It was suggested that road safety should be viewed as a policy problem, with increased visibility, where crashes are based on known and preventable causes, where road danger is considered as a factor of road travel, and that the level of death and injury are not accepted. It was suggested that a new policy image could change the choices made by politicians. This new policy image could generate a changed discourse within the range of policy venues, resulting in a visible cross government national *Safe Systems* based strategy, with resources and targets, and modernised and effective governance systems and processes. If politicians could be persuaded of the potential to address road safety, influenced by effective coalitions and successful policy entrepreneurs, political will and leadership has the potential to be the final driver to prioritise road safety and save lives.

However, whilst there was evidence from other countries on how to influence the priority afforded to road safety, such as reframing road safety as *Vision Zero* which altered the policy image in Sweden (Belin et al., 2011); the power of community demand in generating political support for GDL in Australia (Hinchcliff et al., 2011); or the importance of effective governance from The Netherlands (Bax, et al., 2010), these areas remain untested in Britain. Kingdon's multiple streams (1995) provides a useful framework in which to analyse the development of road safety policy, and agenda setting, but has weaknesses in real world engagement (Howlett et al., 2015). Kingdon (1995) suggests that specific factors, such as the ones analysed in this chapter, and the specification of conditions that *must* be met, are "less fruitful than a question of odds" (p.208). There is a lack of involvement in *how* road safety policy is advanced in Britain, when compared with significant effort on *what* interventions should be promoted. Until the road safety community engages in *how* road safety policy can successfully compete with many other important policy areas, it is unlikely to persuade politicians it is worth the political capital of making what are seen as unpopular or controversial changes, even if they save lives.

## Chapter 10

### Discussion and Conclusion

#### 10.1 Introduction

This qualitative research set out to understand why certain decisions are made or not made, and how politicians work, over time, with policy actors to produce actions to improve road safety. It sought to understand whether policy on road death was prioritised, how the policy image was framed, whether political and organisational factors influenced policymaking and how to impact future policy. It used CDA to understand data from new interviews, Parliamentary debates, and policy documents, and analysed three case studies on macrolevel policymaking, rural road safety, and young driver safety. Kingdon's (1995) multiple streams model underpins the theoretical basis of the thesis, and it was used to understand agenda setting and policy formation. Analysis of the three streams enabled the study of where coupling of the streams occurred, or not, where policy change and stability from open or closed windows existed, and the role of policy entrepreneurs. The multiple streams model is criticised for its lack of *real world* engagement with agency, power, and complexity (Howlett, et al., 2014). So, in this thesis a range of alternative theoretical concepts from public policy, such as the policy image and policy venues from the punctuated equilibrium model, multilevel governance, and depoliticisation were integrated to strengthen the analysis.

A major strength of multiple streams as applied to road safety was basic simplicity: the definition of three independent streams, change and contingency (Knill and Tosun, 2012, p.257) which enabled the interpretation of the empirical reality of road safety in Britain over decades. Kingdon's model was a major step forward in understanding policy formulation (John, 2012, p.160) and enabled an effective and convincing explanation of why road safety policies developed in the way they did, did not develop, and also did not get on the agenda at all (Zahariadis, 2014). The main reflection on the MSM from this research was the reliance that Kingdon places on ambiguity, change and fluidity, and as such there was a lack of precision of where policies may have originated, that they emerge when the time is right, and they can often disappear as rapidly. Ascribing cause and effect or certainty to the research was not possible, but this was also why Kingdon's model was effective as it takes the messiness of policy development, with its complexity and unpredictability, as the baseline. As policy analysis has become increasingly more complex and contested, and with ambiguity as its analytical starting point "the MSA seems to have become more relevant and suitable than ever before for the analysis of policy making in advanced democracies" (Reardon, 2018, p.474). This simplicity and Kingdon's refusal to offer a rigid and inflexible conceptual approach allowed the

analysis of agenda setting, policy formulation and why policies can change or remain stable over time as applied to road safety policy in Britain.

This final chapter summarises the main findings and discusses the implications, it considers the limitations of the research, and concludes by applying Kingdon's (1995) problem, policy, and politics streams to policy on road death. It finishes with how this research contributes to the existing knowledge and suggests areas for future research.

## 10.2 Summary and discussion of findings

The chronological evaluation of the dynamics of change and stability on road safety, and the three case studies, undoubtedly benefitted from an extended period of time studied (thirty four years). Dudley and Richardson (2000) emphasise the importance of longer time periods and suggest at least a decade is required to fully understand policy change and stability (for a Swedish example, see Lieder, 2018). Given the length of the research period, it was not always possible to draw homogenous themes, as there were differences and some contradiction in specific periods, but clear themes emerged. This section is structured by the four research questions to summarise and discuss the findings.

### 10.2.1 Research question 1: has the political priority changed over time?

The political priority of road safety policy did change over time and there were two distinct, but not precise periods: one with policy change and one with largely policy stability:

#### 10.2.1.1 Open policy window

Between 1987 and around 2002 the policy problem was visible and accepted, policy solutions developed, political discourse was mainly constructive, and policy windows opened. Two influential and significant policies: *Road safety* (DoT, 1987) and *Tomorrow's roads* (DfT, 2000) resulted in clear cross-Government strategy which included casualty reduction targets and resources, and clear accountability processes which were sufficient to indicate the priority of Government. This resulted in the alignment of the many organisations with responsibility for road safety to also focus on improvements. Coupling of the three streams occurred and there was a significant reduction in the number of people killed and seriously injured.

#### 10.2.1.2 Closed policy window

Between around 2003 and 2021 road safety was largely unnoticed and not recognised as a policy problem, readily available policy solutions struggled to be accepted and there was policy inaction, and any progress was incremental. The politics stream flowed slowly or stopped with little political consensus and there was "no clamour for change from the public. Newspapers

weren't running headlines about the deaths mounting up, as they do with knife crime ... the news cycle barely stutters" (Barker, 2019), largely due to the framing of road safety as being solved, and crowded out by significant competing policy areas. The change between the two periods can be illustrated by, for example, comparing TC reports. Earlier reports offered less censure and used broadly supportive language, contrasted with the strong criticism and correspondingly negative and powerful language of later reports. The next two findings relate to this second period:

**Not a policy problem:** Kingdon (1995) differentiates between an issue, of which there are many, and a policy problem, where it is recognised as needing policy attention. The social and economic consequences of road crashes consistently formed part of the discourse, and the resulting issue of death and serious injury was recognised (see McAndrew, 2013). However, this was regularly followed by not recognising road deaths as a policy problem requiring policy attention. This quote from a Transport Minister, Nusrat Ghani (Conservative) was typical of all Governments:

*"Road safety is a top priority for the Government. Road deaths are a tragedy for all affected, and injuries can cause suffering and life-changing misfortune. Much of that harm is avoidable, and it is not an inevitable consequence of road transport" (Hansard HC Deb., 23 May 2019, c.913).*

In this debate, despite an assertion that road deaths were a top priority, no policy change followed, and this illustrated a pattern over time by all Governments.

**Policy stability dominated:** Policy on road death was characterised by infrequent and reducing discourse over time, with little political consensus and a failure to raise road safety up the political agenda. This was described by Louise Ellman (Labour) as "a national scandal that so many people die" (Hansard HC Deb., 2 July 2009, c.561). There were lengthy periods with limited or no policy activity on road death, and many occasions where policy proposals were suggested with no corresponding commitment to make decisions, described as: "Government has failed to grasp the nettle" (TC, 2012a: para:55). Road safety was not seen as a policy problem, and because of the limited political discourse, policy stability resulted where limited policy solutions were advanced incrementally: an example of Lindblom's *muddling through* approach to policy development. Policy delay, inaction and depoliticisation resulted as the three policy streams failed to couple, and in the 2010's, after decades of decline, the number of road deaths plateaued. There were also numerous references to a crowded policy field, for example, the aftermath of the financial crash in 2008, austerity, Brexit, and the global pandemic, all contributed to policy stability, with a failure to get the attention, or persuade busy politicians of the need to make policy change.

### **10.2.1.3 Rural road safety: an invisible issue**

The number of deaths and serious injuries remained disproportionately high on rural roads, though numbers continued to reduce, but there was limited visibility or recognition of the issue throughout the period studied. Rural road safety was largely ignored by politicians, policy entrepreneurs and academics, and was not recognised as a policy problem. In the limited discourse, it was framed as a complex area with an absence of knowledge, combined with a failure of all Governments to commission research to address the perceived gaps in knowledge. This framing was despite available solutions in technology, opportunities to invest in engineering and infrastructure, and in speed management. The reluctance to take action is illustrated by the abandoned rural roads speed hierarchy by the Blair Government. Policy solutions were seen as expensive or unpopular. The issue was not the absence of policy solutions, it was the failure to recognise rural road safety as a policy problem important enough to attract attention from politicians or the public. From the mid to late 2010's the limited discourse on road safety was dominated by smart motorway deaths, thus distracting the attention away further. The invisible policy image enabled politicians to avoid policy action as the policy window remained firmly shut and the lack of political priority did not change over time. Rural road deaths and serious injury remain disproportionately high.

### **10.2.1.4 Young driver safety: a revolving door**

The political stream significantly influenced whether and how young driver safety was approached. There was a repeated pattern over time, where there was acknowledgement there was a disproportionate risk to young drivers, and so an issue needing attention, policy solutions were debated and contested, but the policy window did not stay open long enough to secure policy change for solutions such as GDL. These periods were followed by inaction, delay, or incremental change (see Hinchcliff et al., 2011). Agreed interventions with a weaker evidence base were consistently favoured, for example, campaigns, over GDL, with a strong evidence base, and an optimism bias that technology, or the insurance markets would drive improvements. The perceived imprecision in the evidence was reinforced by misinformation and an implied lack of support for GDL, for example, promoting the negative views of fourteen young drivers (TC, 2021a), rather than supportive views from a large scale public survey (RACF, 2014b). Where evidence is seen as debateable and so insufficient to remove uncertainty, persuasion and argument, not facts, have been used to address ambiguity. The value and impact of evidence reduced, whilst the political discourse prioritised further learning and the freedom of young drivers, over protective licensing changes. This pattern did not fall along party political lines, but into a form that had support from backbench MPs from all parties and most TC inquiries, and opposition from all Governments to any form of GDL. Political concern

was that restrictive policy solutions would be unpopular, limit the freedom of young drivers and lead to negative impacts on the economic and social prospects of young people, despite little evidence (RACF, 2022).

The risk to young drivers was first identified in 1937, and GDL was first suggested as a policy solution in 1993 in the HoC. From this first suggestion by Lady Olga Maitland (Conservative) that GDL would address the disproportionate number of those killed or seriously injured, “stop them racing and showing off ... [and] ... discipline newly qualified car drivers” (Hansard HC Deb., 26 March 1993, c.1407-10), there was a clear pattern of delay and inaction. In relation to the wider field of transport policy, Marsden and Docherty (2014) suggest that policy change was characterised as being slow and incremental over long periods of time, consistent with the findings on young driver safety. Numerous and regular opportunities were available to politicians to implement GDL from all sides of the political divide. These opportunities were consistently not taken, and young drivers and their passenger deaths and serious injury remain disproportionately high. Unpopular policy solutions circulated around a revolving door.

### **10.2.2 Research question 2: do the views of politicians and policy actors on framing vary, and does any variation matter?**

Policy entrepreneurs can deliberately portray issues in certain ways to win support and allegiance to a particular perspective, and to persuade or justify a specific view (Schon and Rein, 1994), and the ways of framing road safety strongly influenced the discourse. Contrasting framing had a direct impact on how road safety was seen by politicians, policy entrepreneurs, the media, and the public. As far back as 1968 it was suggested that how road safety was seen was influential, and that: “when enough people in this country really want road safety measures, and say so, then road safety legislation will be introduced and will be enforced” (Cohen and Preston, 1968, p.230). The framing limits the scale of change needed and permits reluctant or preoccupied Governments to avoid the adoption of policy solutions which are perceived as controversial, unpopular, or expensive. There were three different and divergent ways to frame road safety:

**Framed as largely solved:** Throughout the research period, politicians have used international comparisons as a way to introduce speeches and frame road safety, describing Britain as having *some of the safest roads in the world*. Whilst this was an accurate description, based on aggregated data, this framing was used to distract from the need to take policy action or diminish the visibility of the number of deaths or serious injuries, particularly masking vulnerable road user groups, children or young drivers (over varying time periods). The problem was not the comparison, it was the lack of policy action: “it was the full stop after

that, and, you know, so what?" (PA N5). The reliance on market solutions, technology, and innovation, especially the framing of autonomous vehicles as the answer to road safety, further impacted this framing. Road safety was framed as largely solved or to be solved in the future by technology and automation, or unimportant, and overly complex, and this policy image developed to be the dominant framing.

**Unavoidable or inevitable:** Road crashes and the resulting casualties were framed as inevitable or unavoidable, and this language contributed to enabling politicians to avoid taking action as a result. Language was used to portray this policy image, and the use of the term *accident* rather than *crash* or *collision* contributed to this framing (Singer, 2022; Road Collision Reporting Guidelines, 2020). It was suggested that this dominant framing of deaths and disability as unavoidable was part of the explanation of why policy action was limited and why "deaths on the road have been treated as a species apart" (King, 2020, p.263), and so crashes were largely accepted by society.

**Dominant mobility framing at the cost of safety:** A further influence was the debate about the balance between mobility and safety (TC, 2007a). The powerful car-based political economy played a large part in this framing: "everything is given over to the thing that is stronger which is the motor vehicle" (NGO L2), and the strength and visibility of glamorous language, for example, about driving fast cars, promoted through advertisements and in the media, supported a car and mobility dominant framing (Svensson et al., 2014). It was suggested that politicians viewed road safety: "through a windscreen and from behind a steering wheel, rather than from ... the height of an eight year old child" (NGO N7). It is also suggested that decisions within society about transport were strongly influenced by unconscious bias favouring the driving of private cars and this results in the neglect of public health issues by individuals and politicians as they are not judged objectively (Walker, et al., 2023). The dominant mobility framing, compounded by the unconscious bias influencing policy direction, resulted in the demand for safe roads and the wider safety perspective being largely drowned out (Elvik, 2002). As a result of the importance of mobility, concern about the consequences of road crashes "has not been translated into pressure" (Plowden and Hillman, 1984, p.21).

### **10.2.3 Research question 3: which political and organisational factors contribute to the development of road safety in Britain?**

Political and organisational factors do contribute to the development of road safety, but some are more influential than others. The findings are summarised in two categories: i) those factors where there was an evidential change between the two periods, and so may be more impactful on the development of road safety policy; and, ii) those factors which were present

throughout the research period, which, whilst still relevant, may have been less impactful in influencing policymaking as a result.

### 10.2.3.1 More impactful factors

**Intra-Government coordination in strategy development:** The effectiveness of coordination across government departments to generate strategy was notable in the development of policy between 1987 and 2000, and in the production of wider policies to address, for example, the determinants of health in *Health of the Nation* (DoH, 1992), which included children involved in crashes. Government structures remained complex: “there's too many bits of Government that manage a little bit of road safety. And it's lots of little bits of something they don't think is important anyway” (PA L2), but the degree of communication and constructive cross department working positively influenced the prioritisation of road safety in the first period (see Lieder, 2018). This changed during the second period, and this contributed to periods of incremental policy change, or policy inaction. The lack of what Jones and Lucas (2000) call *joined up government*, and the absence of a whole Government approach (Koehlmoos, 2013) were reported to be important influencing factors.

**Visible and prioritised strategy:** In the first period, there was a clear articulation from central Government of the importance of road safety with visible leadership, which strongly influenced local government, crucially backed up with funding (see below). During the mid-2000's this changed and the controlling micro management of the Blair and Brown Governments, and the localism agenda from 2011 onwards which left local government feeling abandoned, were both criticised. Whilst *Tomorrow's roads* (DfT, 2000) had a major impact in its first period, the prominence waned and, over time, road safety became less visible and there was a shift from deliberate strategy led by Government to an approach, accelerated with the localism policy from 2011, to an emergent route to policy. The commitment to “look to fresh, alternative approaches to road safety” (DfT, 2015) and “we can no longer keep doing the same things in the same way if we want to improve” (DfT, 2019c) did not materialise. The response from local government was to prioritise competing policy areas. This change was also seen in relation to wider transport policy over the second period (Docherty et. al., 2018).

**Availability of resources and casualty reduction targets:** The availability of capital and revenue funding, and the resulting capacity and expertise within road safety teams, and in the levels of commissioned research influenced the profile of road safety. Kingdon (1995) suggests that the availability or lack of funding is a strong factor indicating the degree of political will and interest. The introduction of targets in 1987 and 2000, and the associated accountability frameworks influenced the priority given to road safety. But the finding on targets was more nuanced, as the presence of targets was closely aligned with the commitment from

Government, clear strategies, and the availability of funding, and so it was difficult to identify the impact of targets independent of these other factors. However, the removal of targets was seen as “absolutely devastating” (Academic 1). The consequence of the combination of these three factors, a clear strategy, resources, and targets created a “flag around which people could gather” (NGO N3) which contributed to policy development. The diminution or absence of these factors in the second period contributed to policy inaction or *muddling through*.

**Political ideology (freedom and safety):** In the first period, there was robust debate and discussion about the acceptability of policy solutions, but this resulted in broad agreement that road safety was a policy problem needing political attention. In the second period, it became more complicated, and in both Labour and Conservative Governments, a more libertarian, freedom based approach dominated, influenced by the power of motor vehicles (Walker, et al., 2023). The resistance to change national speed limits and introduce GDL systems were examples. Towards the end of the period, the visibility and presence of the libertarian, freedom based political ideology strengthened, as illustrated by: “you just end up with a political philosophy that either says I prioritise individual freedoms over everything, or I don’t” (Academic 2), and the debate about prioritising the freedom of young drivers (TC, 2021a).

**Largely unsuccessful policy entrepreneurs:** The road safety community had some success in maintaining the visibility of road safety over time, an important factor in agenda setting within MSM, but less success in influencing the progress of road safety through the problem, policy, and politics streams. This was largely due to the high number of policy venues advocating individual and different policy solutions, thus detracting from a consistent policy image, and struggling to influence the politics stream. Immature road safety networks (PACTS, 2007) and less visible policy entrepreneurs were in stark contrast with the effective car lobby groups who had been more successful in maintaining relationships and influencing governments from all parties, which may constitute a policy monopoly. There were some examples which contradict this finding: for example, the early success of PACTS in influencing government on seat belts, or the coalition which formed to advance the revisions to The Highway Code in 2022. But, whilst the effectiveness of policy entrepreneurs was debated, it was clear that the lack of success in seeing road safety as a policy problem, and having unclear or contested policy solutions weakened the power of the policy image and so reduced the ability of policy entrepreneurs or networks to progress through the politics streams.

### 10.2.3.2 Less impactful factors

**Governance factors between agencies:** Complex organisational structures, high number of policy venues, and, complicated and weak multilevel governance, were present throughout

the research period, and so were less likely to have accounted for the change, as discussed above. These factors were referenced throughout the period as illustrated by: “more needs to be done to overcome the difficulties arising from the central government/local government split of responsibilities” (CoPA, 1988), and “there must be better co-ordination between Government offices and local authorities” (TLGR, 2002). The problematic influence of governance, and particularly the relationship between central and local government was cited, but the presence of these issues throughout both periods suggest it was less important to policy change or stability. Problems with governance were shown to be a part of the political environment, but given the consistency over time, were less important.

**Party politics:** Party politics was not a major influencing factor, but there were some contradictions about whether party politics played a significant role in agenda setting. There were two clear groups: campaigners, the minority, suggested it was a strong factor, whilst politicians and the wider policy participants, the majority, suggested it was not. What was more evident was that the views of backbench and opposition MPs and TC’s were frequently joined in opposition to the Government’s reluctance to introduce policy based solutions.

**Relationship between politicians, the media, and the public:** It was suggested that politicians made policy decisions, in part, based on their own assessment of selective information, for example, news reports, which might not be representative of public opinion. An example was resisting policies which target specific age groups (whether young or old) because they were seen as unpopular, controversial, or in this illustration, inequitable. There was a complex relationship between politicians, the media, and the public, and in 1987 road safety was described as not “regarded within ‘opinion forming’ circles ... as a particularly interesting or important one [and influenced by] the absence of any obvious manifestation of serious public concern” (DoT, 1987). The lack of visible public or media support for change was present throughout the research period, and contributed to how or whether politicians dealt with policies on road death, or not.

#### **10.2.4 Research question 4: what would need to change to develop a future policy to address road deaths in Britain?**

There were a wide range of views on what needed to change, ranging from the adoption of named interventions, organisational improvements, and the introduction of policy solutions.

**Interventions on *what to do are already known*:** There were wide and varied views about which interventions could be adopted to reduce road deaths, but there was an acknowledgement that it was known, to a large extent, *what* could improve road safety (NGO, N2). There was little consensus on the relative effectiveness of different interventions, and

which should be prioritised. Suggestions included the establishment of a national crash investigation branch<sup>5</sup> or restrictive measures to support young drivers, such as GDL. But there were two areas which were most popular: speed management, for example reducing the national speed limit on single carriageway 'A' roads (NGO N7), and the use of technology, for example Intelligent Speed Assistance (Academic 2). As with wider transport policy (Marsden and Reardon, 2017), road safety literature overwhelmingly contributed knowledge on *what* to do, but the literature was less effective in studying *how* policies are formulated or agendas set.

**Introduce Safe Systems and Vision Zero:** The strategic approach to road safety had been less effective since around the mid 2000's (see 4.6), and it was suggested that the slowing in the reduction, and then plateauing of the number of KSI's was a consequence. The further development of the 1990s *Safe System* approach in The Netherlands, and *Vision Zero* in Sweden had been followed and adopted in many countries, and by global organisations. In Britain, these approaches could be applied in order to alter existing practices to a new systems-based method of designing policy, the reintroduction of casualty reduction targets, and the prioritisation of clearer strategies (Wegman, 2014).

**Increase resources and funding:** The availability or reduction in funding was a determinant or consequence of the priority politicians gave to road safety and this had a significant impact on local and national government, and the wider road safety community, including research funding. The influence that funding has on policy change or stability, and the relative priority afforded by politicians is identified by both Kingdon (1995) and Baumgartner and Jones (2009), and was suggested as a major strand of future policy.

**Improve legal deterrents:** There was a perceived imbalance between the greater protections afforded to drivers, when compared with the rights of victims or other road users, and a lack of parity between road crimes and other crimes. It was suggested that this framing reduced the degree of deterrent and influenced driver behaviour, illustrated by the lack of strategic priority given by the Home Office<sup>6</sup>, the increased use of economic hardship to detract from legal consequences, and what were described as disproportionately low tariffs for road crimes.

**Increase visibility of road safety as a problem:** The heterogeneity and complexity of road safety detracted from the ability to see road safety as a policy problem, as there were competing policy images. The disconnect in the relationships between the views of the public, how this was interpreted and reported by the media, which included strong marketing from car manufacturers, and the resulting muted reaction from politicians, reinforced this image.

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<sup>5</sup> This was agreed by the Government in 2022

<sup>6</sup> Road crime was included as a *Strategic Priority* in 2023 (Home Office, 2023).

Talking about road death, providing more public visibility of the number of those killed or seriously injured, and redressing the imbalance of media coverage more strongly towards safety and the consequences of crashes on areas such as the NHS, were suggested as areas which could influence framing and impact future policy. Road safety was described as the “wallpaper of modern life” (NGO N3), and major disruptions to this framing were advocated to increase the visibility in Parliament and with the public, to generate “the political will to tackle it” (PA N4).

**Reframe the policy image:** Linked directly with the finding that road safety was not seen as a policy problem, was the policy image. The dominant image was that of being largely solved, crashes were mainly accidental and so not preventable, driving was not perceived as a risky activity, and as Britain had one of the best records globally, there was a resulting acceptance of the number of deaths and serious injuries. Dorling (2010) described the numbers of injuries on Britain’s roads as the twenty-first century epidemic, but this framing was accepted by a restricted number of venues and whilst there was some evidence this was slowly changing, the dominant framing remained grounded in economic productivity and the freedom to drive. In order to increase the political priority, the policy image needs to be clear, and more balanced.

**Improve intra government coordination:** As structural complexity and the high number of policy venues were present through the research period, this is unlikely to be the most compelling solution, though improvements between the centre and local government were suggested. However, improving the coordination and communication between government departments to generate joined up strategy, particularly with health and social care, justice, local government, policing and fire and rescue, and the treasury, were suggested as important changes to generate more effective strategy from across all Government.

**Power: leadership and policy entrepreneurs:** Much of the discourse described insufficient power and influence, and limitations to leadership in road safety, contrasted with the influence of powerful and well-funded motoring policy entrepreneurs (Hyder et al.,2012). The priority of road safety could be improved by the road safety community recognising and improving the deficits, and creating more effective coalitions and encouraging policy entrepreneurs with a clearer policy image, but this is challenging without the political will and prioritisation of road safety. There was largely a failure of policy entrepreneurs to couple the problem, policy and politics streams in the second period, and whilst there are specific examples cited of subject specific success: for example, the Highway Code changes in 2022, the power and influence of policy entrepreneurs was largely weak. Calls for political leadership were clear in the second phase. Reflecting on how road safety could be more strongly part of a

wider policy agenda – the ‘bigger picture’ - and changing the relationships within and between existing institutional venues may alter the balance of power relationships.

### 10.3 Limitations

Although the research design was effective and the research questions were answered, there were some limitations:

**Limited literature:** The limited availability of road safety policy literature was an issue, restricting wider references, and, there was no published comparative data on the views of politicians or policy participants, and so analysis was limited to the primary data collected for this research. This was especially evident from a British context.

**Data sources:** The choice to select debates from the House of Commons, policy documents, and interviews, resulted in less visibility of influential policy actors, policy entrepreneurs and the impact of leadership on developing road safety policy.

**Exclusions:** The consequence of the research design which focused on strategic policy was that other policymaking was excluded, for example, motorcycle safety or motorway safety. Ending the analysis in 2021 also excluded policy development and as 0 shows, policies such as the new Highway Code and a decision to create a road safety investigation branch followed in 2022. The limitation is that the thesis is not a full analysis of all road safety policy in the period.

**Interviewee selection:** The mix of interviewees, the balance between local and national actors, the balance between interview groups, the mix within each interview group and the political balance between the political parties were largely effective. However, the local politician group was under represented as only two interviews were held, though they represented different political parties and geographies. Despite applying the same degree of tenacity to the recruitment of local politicians, this is a limitation and the reasons for this should be understood (e.g. capacity, knowledge, or subject matter) to improve any future research.

**Time commitment from some interviewees:** There were time restrictions from some interviewees which necessitated the prioritisation of interview questions. The consequence was that some questions were omitted, for example, a subset of interviewees did not answer the embedded case study questions. However, all questions were asked of the majority of interviewees.

**Interview question design:** Three interview questions were problematic: questions 15, 17, and 18 (see table 3.5). When the questions were designed, there was less visibility of the theme distinguishing between *what* interventions may be beneficial, and *how* or *why* policies develop, or do not progress. Interviewees stated that question 18 (*which three policy*

*interventions would you prioritise to further improve road safety?*) was easier to answer, resulting in its prioritisation over question 15 (*what action would need to be taken to develop future road safety policy?*). The result was that interviewees focused much more on *what* policy interventions could result in improvements, rather than the policymaking process. Any future research would benefit from a strong focus on policymaking (*how*) rather than policy interventions (*what*), and so question 18 should be removed.

Question 17 on policy actors and policy entrepreneurs was too narrow (*do victim groups support the advancement of road safety policy or detract from it?*), and the specific reference to victim groups influenced some interviewees in this direction, rather than to a more generic inquiry about the impact of policy entrepreneurs or coalitions, though follow up questions sought to expand the interview. This interview question would benefit from the removal of the reference to one named group of policy actors: victim groups. For example, a question framed as: *do policy entrepreneurs or coalitions support the advancement of road safety policy and if so, how?* Finally, the research did not specifically inquire about autonomous vehicles and the potential influence technology might have on the focus or future of road safety policy, and future research may benefit from further exploration in this area (see 10.6).

#### **10.4 Kingdon and policies for road death (conclusion)**

The summary of the findings describing the two periods (prior to 2002 and after 2003), as set out at 10.2.1 are not repeated here to avoid duplication. The following conclusions are mainly based on this second period:

Road safety was frequently described as an issue, but was overwhelmingly not seen as a **policy problem**, though there were some limited examples. There had been regular but intermittent discourse, and also periods without any debate on the risks, consequences, and social and economic cost of road crashes, and the lack of issue recognition contributed to it being dealt with as a low priority. Following the policy activity around 2000, road safety was seen as having been addressed and fixed, and the fading from political attention contributed to it not being dealt with as a policy problem. Policy images affect whether policy issues are defined for policy action where change occurs, or not, resulting in policy stability (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009) or inaction. The institutional structure within which policymaking occurs is important to how an image is approached, and different venues are more or less favourable to a particular policy image. The road safety image was simultaneously framed as: Britain has *some of the safest roads in the world*, the issue had largely been fixed, and crashes were accidental and so unavoidable, which dominated; and framed as catastrophic crashes which cause death and disability, and impacted on many thousands of people each year. The receptiveness of varied policy venues to the different policy images is critical in policy development. Policy

entrepreneurs play an important role in advocating for their policy area, and increase the chances of moving up the policy agenda. But unequal power existed between policy entrepreneurs which can be characterised as those focused on mobility (car lobby) or car centric solutions (for example, automation) which were dominant, versus those who advocated for vulnerable road users and victims of road crashes. Policy entrepreneurs advancing the dominant policy image were more successful in influencing politicians. With notable exceptions, there was inconsistent visibility and influence from safety policy entrepreneurs which was influenced by, for example, descriptions of politicians interested in road safety as “eccentric [and] slightly odd” (Hansard HC Deb., 5 November 1997, c.238), and road safety was characterised as “unsexy” (PA L2), and a “Cinderella service” (Politician L1).

Yet, in the **policy stream**, there were numerous acknowledged and evidenced policy solutions available to politicians, and a breadth of knowledge of *what* to do to address road deaths. The policy solutions were largely known, and there were significant contributions to *what* needed to change to make roads safe, which are encapsulated into the *Safe Systems* or *Vision Zero* approaches. This abundance of *what* to change was analogous with the work of Marsden and Reardon (2017) who found that transport policy literature overwhelmingly contributed knowledge on *what* to do, but was less effective in studying *how* policies were formulated.

There was delay, slow progress, and failure to make improvements in policy specific areas such as speed, rural road safety, and young driver safety whilst solutions were debated and contested. Kingdon (1995) describes *policy soup* where ideas float around for long periods of time, where some survive and other do not, and in road safety it may be that the policy soup was stirred, but ideas not served. Instead politicians were persuaded by policy interventions with limited evidence or limited effect, such as the over-reliance and predominance of learning and testing policy solutions. Lindblom (1968) suggests that rather than a rational model of decision making, the policy process moves incrementally as decision makers make little effort to make rational decisions and *muddling through* is the response to problems. This helps to explain the rejection or delay of available and effective policy solutions over time. Some policy solutions have not been implemented even though they have intermittently returned for debate. This can be seen in discourse on the proposed reduction of national speed limits or the cyclical dialogue over three decades on proposals to introduce GDL, two policy areas which were not acceptable to any Governments.

Whilst it appeared on occasions that the policy window might open, an unwillingness to make decisions, a lack of commitment evidenced by the commissioning of new research, indicates that the solutions were not seen to be either effective enough or worth the political capital of change. This was not inevitable as can be seen from other countries which have, for example,

GDL in place. The limited impact of safety policy entrepreneurs and policy actors in uncoordinated networks played a role. But, as the policy problem was unrecognised by governments and seen as overly complex, and the domain of technical experts, there was no route to policy change, and policies were designed based on existing practices. It was not the problem; it was the lack of agreement on proposed solutions which delayed progress.

The key barrier, therefore, was in the **political stream**. Here, the trade-offs and power imbalance between mobility or libertarian principles and the dominance of the car in society, and safety, described as “a huge Goliath to fight against” (Academic 4), were sufficient to deter politicians, from all Governments, to recognise the problem as being worth resolving or the solution as worth owning. Limited demands from the public and the media enabled politicians to prioritise other policy areas over solving road deaths, as “road safety [was] not visible enough”(PA L6). There was a *pass the problem* response, described as the garbage can approach by Kingdon (1995), with governmental, societal, and discursive depoliticisation (Wood and Flinders, 2014) from Conservative and Labour administrations: “Government don’t see it as their statutory responsibility, and feel like it’s a local issue. Local decision makers think it’s an individual responsibility” (Politician L2). This was more obvious from 2011, where there was a rejection of casualty reduction targets, a tight fiscal environment, and the introduction of localism shifting accountability away from the centre, in order to distance the Government from the numbers of deaths, and in this context, there was no prospect of national leadership or change. It appears that road crashes causing death or disability are the only public health problem society and politicians accept, and this externality continues to be justified to maintain high levels of private car use for economic gain. The numbers of deaths and serious injuries influenced the political response as suggested by contrasting the first period with the second. In the earlier period the numbers of deaths were significantly higher and identified as a problem and policy windows opened. Whereas in the second period, with lower numbers of deaths, the policy problem was not acknowledged sufficiently and the number of those killed plateaued after decades of decline. It may be that there is a level at which there is an unspoken acceptable number of deaths which are tolerated. The political discourse in each period influenced policymaking and decision making, and resolving road death was frequently crowded out by alternative and competing policy priorities, and policy delay resulted. The churn in the political environment, and the frequent change of governments since 2008 resulted in regular changes to the Roads Minister role which had a negative impact on the ability to take action. Kingdon (1995) suggests that a change in personnel within government or a change of government can alter the agenda, particularly where policy areas have been neglected, but the politics stream develops independently of the other two streams and can be influenced by public mood, which had not been visible in road safety.

In summary, Kingdon (1995) suggests that the probability of policy change is increased when the policy issue is recognised as a policy problem, where acceptable policy solutions are available, the political discourse is constructive, and decisions are made. The coupling of the three streams, combined with productive activity from supportive policy entrepreneurs enables policy windows to open, which can result in policy change. This was largely the pattern in the first period, but in the second period, policy on road death was mostly inconspicuous. It did not progress within the policy streams, and they did not couple, many available solutions were seen as unpopular, controversial, or too expensive, political discourse was limited, and so agendas moved on, and road safety policy remained mainly stable, with minimal change. There was little broad-based demand for change from the public or the media. Even amongst the road safety community there was a myriad of policy ideas and venues which watered down the ability to apply political pressure. This was combined with a powerful and dominant lobby promoting mobility, the rights of the motorist, and the freedom to drive. Some framed Britain's position as one of the *best in the world* and so solved, whilst others used language such as *scandal* or *complacency* to describe policy inaction, suggesting policies were deficient or delayed. Whilst this dissonance existed, the numbers of deaths and serious injuries plateaued after decades of decline.

There remains a major challenge to generate ambitious change to make Britain's roads safe and stop road deaths. Until the road safety community engages more in *how* road death policy can successfully compete with other important policy areas and engage with policy issues, it is unlikely to persuade politicians it is worth the political capital of making what are seen as unnecessary changes, even if they save lives. To do this, the thousands of deaths and serious injuries needs to be recognised as a policy problem requiring urgent attention, yet with the current policy image, unsuccessful safety policy entrepreneurs or coalitions, a bias towards non-interventionist or technological solutions, a disinterested public and media, and little political discourse, there are limited routes to policy change. Kingdon (1995) suggests that effective policymaking can be both vague and imprecise, but further thinking, research and precision may help to see the development of policy to end road deaths and to finally escape from the revolving door of policy stability.

## 10.5 Contribution to knowledge

The contributions of this research were:

### 10.5.1 Data

The first to gather new primary interview data from policy participants on the views of road safety in Britain: including politicians, academics, policy actors from NGOs and from organisations including the civil service, police, and local authorities.

### 10.5.2 Method

In an under explored area, the first to apply Kingdon's multiple streams model of the problem, policy, and politics streams to agenda setting in road safety, over an extended period of time, to *how* and *why* road safety policies were made, not made or put on the agenda at all.

### 10.5.3 Findings

The first to identify two distinct periods of how road safety policy was approached and the framing and factors which influenced this finding. First, prior to about 2003 where road safety was seen as a policy problem, policies were debated and largely accepted, and the political discourse was conducive, resulting in open windows, policy action and a reduction in KSIs. Second, after about 2003, road safety was largely not seen as a policy problem, policies were contested as controversial, unpopular, or expensive, political discourse was reduced and less constructive, which resulted in policy stability or incremental change as policy windows remained closed as with rural road safety or did not stay open for long enough as with young driver safety, and Kingdon's garbage can was kicked down the road, and a plateauing of road deaths resulted.

## 10.6 Future research

These four possible areas of further research could add to the knowledge on how to address the numbers of people killed or seriously injured, and make Britain's roads safe:

- I. This thesis finds that road safety policy was largely not seen as a policy problem, as set out in chapter 10, and as the number of road deaths and serious injuries plateaued over the last decade, this high burden of road crashes remains neglected in health services research (Redelmeier and McLellan, 2013), and more could be achieved within public health (Christie, 2018). A consequence of road crashes is significant demand on a pressurised health and care system (Weijermars et al., 2018), and multi-billion pound financial costs to the economy (DfT, 2012; Wijnen and Stipdonk, 2019) as described in section 2.5.2. Further research on what factors contribute to improving intersectoral relationships between transport, health and public health could inform future road safety policy and reduce the demand on health and care services.

- II. This thesis suggested that the focus – politically and financially - on automation and technological advances may have become the dominant policy solution to address road safety, as discussed in section 7.2, despite unanswered questions on the benefits to safety, the economy, health outcomes or social equity (Milakis et al., 2017). Further research could explore the policy response to technological and policy based solutions, and ask why automation is seen to be a more promising solution and why this enables road safety to then be recognised as a policy problem.
- III. This thesis finds that road safety policy was largely crowded out from being a policy priority as set out in section 4.6, and this was partly due to the dominance of the political economy of car manufacturing and its contribution to economic growth (Wales, 2017; Walker et al., 2023). Further research on what characteristics policy entrepreneurs employ to effectively influence Government in complex networks could inform future road safety policy.
- IV. This thesis finds that road safety existed in a complex governance structure and the delivery of policy was through a multilevel, networked number of organisational venues, where aligning policy priorities was difficult, as set out in section 8.3. Further research exploring the factors which influence cross government or multilevel accountability, and whether more devolution or more centralisation, as explored in a Dutch context by Bax et al. (2010) would create innovation and prioritisation, and improve future road safety policy.

## Chapter 11

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<sup>7</sup> The first citation includes the interview (reference) year, the remainder do not.

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<sup>10</sup> The first citation includes the interview (reference) year, the remainder do not.

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## Appendix A

### Invitation to join the research



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

**Institute for Transport Studies, Faculty of Environment**

To:

[Insert participant name]

From:

Ian Greenwood

Postgraduate Researcher

Institute for Transport  
Studies



*Email*



*Phone number*

[Date 2021]

#### ***The politics of road death research study***

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#### **Invitation to participate**

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Dear [insert name of participant]

In your role as XXXX [insert role] I very much hope you will agree to participate in this research study on *the politics of road death* in Britain. This study is being conducted to provide an understanding of the sensitive area road safety policymaking. The numbers of those killed or seriously injured on Britain's roads has not really changed over the past decade with significant devastation for those affected. The study will seek the views of politicians, those involved with road safety nationally, and in two defined geographical case study areas. The study will investigate the impact of policy choices and what could be done to contribute to eliminating road deaths in Britain.

[Policy actors]:

I understand you have an active involvement and interest in road safety. I would appreciate it if you could commit to being interviewed as your views would be extremely valuable in informing the research. I have attached the participants information sheet setting out more details of the study and what would be involved. This includes details of anonymity for the research and the need for a consent form (attached).

[or]

[Politician]:

I would appreciate it if you could commit some time to being interviewed as your views would be most valuable in informing the research. This research will study decision making, so I would request that you agree to be interviewed yourself, rather than a representative. I have attached the participants information sheet setting out more details of the study and what would be involved. This includes details of anonymity for the research and the need for a consent form (attached).

[Local participants]:

My plan is to recruit politicians and policy actors from [insert name of local area] so that I can compare local and national views, and the views between politicians and policy actors. So, I plan to interview some of your colleagues from your local area too. These results may help you in developing your own local plans.

The research is part of my PhD and is supervised by Professor Samantha Jamson and Professor Greg Marsden at the Institute for Transport Studies, University of Leeds and has secured ethics approval from the University of Leeds.

In considering your involvement in what is an important and useful area of research, if you had any additional questions to help you decide, please do get in touch either by email or phone. I would like the interview to take place during the remainder of 2021 and I can be very flexible in working around your diary. It should take less than 60 minutes.

I very much look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

**Ian Greenwood**

Postgraduate Researcher

Institute for Transport Studies



*Email*



*Phone number*

Incl: The *politics of road death* research study: Participation information  
 The *politics of road death* research study: Consent form

This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee, University of Leeds

[AREA 19-172]

## Appendix B

### Participant information sheet



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

Institute for Transport Studies, Faculty of Environment

#### *The politics of road death research study*

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#### Participant Information

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It is important for you to understand why this research is being done and what it will involve before you decide whether to participate. Please take time to read the following information and ask me if there is anything that is not clear, or if you would like more information.

#### **What is the study about?**

This study is being conducted to provide an understanding of road safety policymaking and the numbers of people killed or seriously injured in Britain, a sensitive area of policy. The numbers of those killed or seriously injured on Britain's roads has not changed over the past decade with significant devastation for those affected. The study will inform policymakers about the impacts of their choices and what could be done to contribute to eliminating road deaths in Britain. The study will seek the views of politicians and those involved with road safety nationally, and in two geographical case study areas. The study will investigate the impact of policy choices and what could be done to contribute to eliminating road deaths in Britain. This research is conducted by Ian Greenwood at the University of Leeds.

#### **Why have I been invited?**

You have been approached because you are involved with, have many years' experience of and /or have responsibility for road safety, and you have valuable experience to inform the research study. The study is focused on people who have responsibility for decision making and those who influence decision making.

#### **What are the possible benefits from taking part?**

First, participating in research can be interesting and you will be asked about your views on road death policy, and this may enable you to look at this policy area differently. Second, my goal is to generate research outcomes that are genuinely effective in supporting road safety policy that is useful to you, your community, and to others doing work to eliminate road deaths in Britain. Third, the research may generate new insights that support your own work in how you deal with road safety within your organisation or local area.

#### **What will I be asked to do if I take part?**

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in an interview which will last less than 60 minutes, which will be recorded. I will ask you questions about the relative priority of addressing road death, whether this has changed over time, your views of road death policy, what factors might influence road death policy and what would need to change in order to develop future policy. I may ask you to engage with a follow up interview or seek clarifications

after the initial interview. I am interested in your views, so there are no right or wrong answers.

**Do I have to take part?**

No. It is completely up to you to decide whether you take part or not. Your participation is voluntary. If you do decide to take part, this information sheet is for reference, and you will be asked to sign a consent form.

**What if I change my mind?**

You are free to withdraw at any time during your participation. During the interview you are welcome to ask me to move on if there is an area you do not want to talk about. You can also pause or stop the interview or withdraw from the interview. If you want to withdraw from the study, please let me know within two weeks after the interview, and I will extract any information you have contributed and destroy it. After two weeks, the anonymised data will be used in the analysis.

**What are the possible disadvantages and risks in taking part?**

There should be no disadvantages. I only ask you for your time and to share your views. Due to your role there is a small risk that you or your role may be identified. I will do everything I can do to minimise this risk. If this risk appears possible, I will agree a specific approach with you before taking any action.

**Will my data be identifiable?**

Only myself and my supervisors will have access to the views you share with me in the interview. I will keep your personal information confidential (e.g. your contact details, name and other information that can identify you). I will not share it with others. I will remove any personal information from the written record. For further information about how the University of Leeds processes personal data for research purposes and your data rights please visit our webpage: <https://dataprotection.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/48/2019/02/Research-Privacy-Notice.pdf>.

All reasonable steps will be taken to protect your anonymity. When writing up the findings from this study, I will reproduce some of the views and ideas you shared with me. I will mostly use anonymised quotes so that you cannot be identified. If your exact quote could give away your identity, I will contact you for further consent (or not) to use the quote.

**How will the information you have shared be used and what will happen to the results of the research?**

I will use the information you share with me for academic research, which will be used to generate: i) my PhD report, ii) recommendations for policy, iii) articles for academic journals, iv) reports or articles to share the insights gained from this work.

**How will my data be stored?**

Your data will be stored in encrypted files that only the researcher and supervisors will be able to access on password protected computers. I will keep data that can identify you separately from your views on the study. In accordance with University of Leeds guidelines, your data will be kept securely for a minimum of ten years.

**Who has reviewed the project?**

Professor Samantha Jamson and Professor Greg Marsden supervise the PhD, from the Institute for Transport Studies. The supervisors together with the Research Ethics Committee, both at the University of Leeds have reviewed and approved the study.

**What if I have a question or concern?**

The study is managed by Ian Greenwood, postgraduate researcher (email), Institute for Transport Studies, University of Leeds, Leeds, LS2 9JT or *phone number*). If you have questions or are not happy with anything that happens, please contact me. If you want to talk to someone other than myself about the study, please contact Professor Samantha Jamson – *email*, or Professor Greg Marsden - *email*. If you have any concerns or a complaint that you wish to discuss with someone who is not involved in the research, please contact: Clare Skinner (Head of Research Integrity and Governance) - *email*.

**Ian Greenwood**

*Email*

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**Thank you for considering your participation in this study**

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This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee, University of Leeds

[AREA 19-172]

## Appendix C

### Consent form



**UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS**

**Institute for Transport Studies, Faculty of Environment**

*The politics of road death research study*

**Consent Form**

**Please complete and keep a copy for your own records**

The research study is being conducted by Ian Greenwood, a postgraduate researcher at the Institute for Transport Studies, University of Leeds (*email*).

Supervision for the study is by Professor Samantha Jamson (*email*) and Professor Greg Marsden (*email*) at the Institute for Transport Studies, University of Leeds.

**Please tick each box**

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet about this study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily.	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I understand that my participation in the interview is voluntary and should I not wish to answer questions during the interview, I can decline. I am free to withdraw at any time during my participation in this interview and within 2 weeks after I take part, without giving any reason. If I withdraw within 2 weeks of taking part in the interview my data will be removed and deleted.	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I understand that any information given by me may be used in reports, publications, or presentations by the researcher, but personal information will not be included, and I will not be identifiable. Further consent will be sought before any identifiable quote is used.	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. I understand that interviews will be recorded and transcribed, and that data will be protected on encrypted devices and kept secure. All internal study documentation is similarly saved securely.	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I understand that there may be the need for follow up to seek clarifications. There may also be the need for a further interview which will be subject to additional consent.	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. I consent that my contact details may be held for purposes of follow-on research.	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. I agree to take part in the research study.	<input type="checkbox"/>

Name:

Date:

2021 \_\_\_\_\_

Signature

For further information about how the University of Leeds processes personal data for research purposes and your data rights visit <https://dataprotection.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/48/2019/02/Research-Privacy-Notice.pdf>.

**To be completed by the researcher:**

I confirm that the participant was given the opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

**Signature of Researcher:**

**Date**

10 May 2021

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**Please keep a copy of this form and the original will be kept securely by the researcher**

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This study has been approved by the Research Ethics Committee, University of Leeds

[AREA 19-172]

## Appendix D

### Coding framework with nodes and definitions

Node and sub node	Description (or further sub codes)
<b>Car manufacturers and traffic</b>	
Advertising, gaming, films	References to where advertising, marketing, media occur.
Attitude of MPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Support of motoring</li> <li>• Critical of the impact of motoring</li> </ul>
Car dependence, dominance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• References to the dominance of motoring and car-centric views</li> <li>• Specific references from car lobby, car manufacturers or political supporters</li> <li>• 'War on the motorist' reference or implied and enjoying motoring</li> </ul>
Traffic demand	Where traffic demand is related to the safety of travel
<b>Coalitions, policy entrepreneurs (Q17)</b>	
Influence - distracting or negative contribution	Views of influence from all policy participants
Influence - positive contribution	Views of influence from all policy participants
<b>Connection to active travel and climate change</b>	
Active travel	
Climate change	
Congestion, air quality, health impacts	
<b>Economics of impact of crashes</b>	Specific references to economic cost of crashes - macro level
<b>Enforcement and roads policing</b>	General issues relating to enforcement,
Policy	Specific references to the Home Office, Roads Policing Review, or policy related issues
<b>Evidence, science, or research</b>	
To advance an argument	
To detract from an argument	
<b>Factors (Q12)</b>	
Data or information	Data, STATS19, accuracy, availability, weakness
Finance or resources	All financial or resource references
Recession	Specific references on any impact of recession or economic trends

Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Within Government</li> <li>• Between venues</li> </ul>
Leadership	<p>Specific references to where leadership is included in a debate or report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strong - evidence of positive leadership</li> <li>• Weak or absent - calls for leadership</li> </ul>
Legislation	Any references to where legislation or the law impacts on policy.
Public opinion	All aspects including positive and negative views, including community engagement
Random - right people, right time	References to the randomness or unpredictability of change
Skills, capacity, people	General references to skills, capability, expertise, knowledge, experience, turnover etc.
Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Positive, present, impact</li> <li>• Negative, missing, weak</li> </ul>
<b>Focus (Q6)</b>	<b>Since the 1980s, do you think the focus on road safety policy has changed over time?</b>
Crowded policy field	Reference to other policy areas taking demanding the time from politicians: e.g., Covid, Brexit
Personal experience of road crash	Individual, family, or close friends
Policy windows	All references to agenda setting, policy formulation and open windows
Post 2010 flatlined KSIs Q9	Specific references to the KSI numbers in the 2010's
Priority	The degree of progress or not
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avoidance or forgotten</li> <li>• Connection between policy and activity</li> <li>• Delay or distraction</li> <li>• Not a priority or calls to do more.</li> <li>• Prioritised</li> </ul>
Talk About Road Death	Evidence of where road death is not discussed, lack of visibility
Variation	Any examples of where variation exists between venues – e.g., LA's, police
<b>Framing (Q3)</b>	
Accepted by society	References to where road death appears acceptable
Accident	The use of the description to imply inaction or unavoidability or inevitable
Best in the world	Reference to the quote and comments on the implication
Cinderella or lacking in profile	Visibility, reputation of road safety

Complacency	Reference to the quote and comments on the implications
Complexity, and unclear messaging	References informing the framing as complex
Consequence of framing	Does it make a difference? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No</li> <li>• Yes</li> </ul>
Language unclear or too complex	
Language used to change the narrative	
Not seen as a real crime	References to where this is seen as a detriment to how policy is addressed
Preventable or inevitable	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inevitable</li> <li>• Preventable</li> </ul>
Right or privilege debate	References to where this is seen as a detriment to how policy is addressed
What to call road safety?	Alternative views, does it matter, conference.
<b>Freedom vs safety (Q5)</b>	
Balance or neutral	Reflected, commenting on the need for a balance in the relationship between safety and freedom
Consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom</li> <li>• Safety</li> </ul>
Towards freedom view, libertarian	Reflecting views where freedom takes priority over safety
Towards safety view	Reflecting views where safety takes priority over freedom
<b>Future (Q15)</b>	
Leadership	
Resources – finance or personnel	
Radical change needed	Need for a much more radical and less incremental reaction to the policy problem
Strategy	
Vision Zero - unrealistic	All general references to the policy area called Vision Zero or Safe Systems
Disagreement	
Support	
<b>Governance (Q8)</b>	
Accountability	References to the impact in any part of the system
Local national relationship Q8	General views and implications

Contradictory messages from Government	References a contradictory stance from central Government – further evidence?
<b>Health and public health</b>	
Consequence and cost of KSI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Individual</li> <li>• Health and care system</li> </ul>
Health of the nation	Specific reference to HoN
Public health	General references to role, involvement, or lack of involvement
<b>Media</b>	
Influence	Reference to where the media has had direct or indirect influence
Lack of engagement or interest	References about the opportunity for the media to engage, but a failure to do so.
TV, film & gaming influencing attitude to driving	Impact on film or TV on road safety
<b>Politics and party politics (Q14)</b>	
A factor in influencing policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No</li> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• Contradictory</li> </ul>
Connection between public, media, and politicians	References that make direct
Political	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Neutral</li> <li>• Not a vote winner</li> <li>• Timing and election cycle</li> <li>• Turnover of ministers</li> </ul>
Wider political impact	E.g., PCCs, Mayor, and others
<b>Risk</b>	
Comparisons to air crash, maritime	
Comparisons to rail crashes Q16	
Crash investigation	All references, except those specifically named as a top three solution to the policy problem.
Micro mobility & gig economy	
Perception of risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Risky</li> <li>• Not risky</li> </ul>
Risk and responsibility	References to whether responsibility is attributed
Risk identified in crashes	Specifically identified as an issue
Safety culture	Evidence of where the attitude between modes differs
<b>Rural roads (Q11)</b>	

Complexity or do not know what to do	
Definition - unclear	Lack of clarity or specificity of what constitutes a rural road
Hierarchy	References to the proposed rural roads speed hierarchy
Policy delay	Evidence
Policy problem – not seen	Evidence
Policy solution - speed management	Evidence
Policy solutions - infrastructure, or engineering	Evidence
Policy solutions - other	Evidence
Public demand for change,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No</li> <li>• Yes</li> </ul>
Risk, impact, and scale	References to whether these factors are present
<b>Speeding and speed limits</b>	
Rural speed limits Q13	Specific references to rural roads
Speed reduction objections	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Objection</li> <li>• Support</li> </ul>
Speeding impact	General comments
<b>Targets (Q7)</b>	
Balanced commentary	Seeing the pros and cons of targets
Consequence of targets or no targets	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No targets</li> <li>• Targets</li> </ul>
Views	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opposition</li> <li>• Support</li> </ul>
<b>Technology, innovation, automation</b>	
<b>Top three policy interventions (Q18)</b>	
Behaviour changes	References to any type of behavioural change
Data improvement and accessibility	
Financial	Evidence funding would have influence
Governance improvements	Local, national, multilevel, any ideas
Interventions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Crash investigation</li> <li>• GDL Speed management</li> <li>• Technology</li> <li>• Vehicle standards</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul>
Leadership	

Legal	
Policy image reframing	
Strategy	Suggestions for clearer and bolder national policy, including Vision Zero and Safe Systems.
Other suggestions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Community engagement</li> <li>• Education and training in schools</li> <li>• Older people focus</li> <li>• Research</li> <li>• Testing – stricter</li> <li>• Victim services funding or support</li> </ul>
<b>Young drivers (Q10)</b>	
Alcohol	References to whether this was a factor
Driving test and learning	Learning or training Probationary period Testing
Education, employment, or social restrictions	Mix of economic, educational, or social rationale for not supporting the GDL policy
Experience and confidence	Of the young or novice driver
GDL attitude	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balanced</li> <li>• Dissent to GDL</li> <li>• Fear of being unpopular</li> <li>• Support for GDL</li> </ul>
Insurance and technology	References to where suggested as an alternative solution – e.g., premiums, black box
Policy delay	References to whether this and where this was perceived as an issue
Restrictions - consequences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Night</li> <li>• Passenger</li> <li>• Vehicle type, engine size</li> </ul>
Risk and causation, including KSI	All areas of risk, death, serious injury and where there is causation included
Schools, education, curriculum	Value, effectiveness

## Appendix E

## History of road safety policy interventions (car)

Year	Road safety measure (car related)	Legislation or source
1885	Karl Benz developed a gasoline-powered automobile (patented in 1886)	
1903	UK driving licences were introduced but no test was required	Motor Car Act (1903)
1930	Introduced an offence to drive, attempt to drive or be in charge of a motor vehicle under the influence of drink or a drug to be incapable of having proper control of the vehicle	Road Traffic Act (1930)
1931	Introduction of The Highway Code. Introduction of age restrictions and a test for disabled drivers which was the first UK driving test	Road Traffic Act (1930)
1934	Introduced 30mph speed limits in built up areas as a trial requiring Parliament to review annually	Road Traffic Act (1934)
1935	Voluntary testing was introduced (March), followed by compulsory testing (June)	Road Traffic Act (1934)
1937	Speedometers were introduced	Road Traffic (Speedometer) Bill
1957	The 3-year driving licence was introduced	Road Traffic Act (1956)
1960	MOT introduced for cars only and known as the "ten year test". 30mph speed limit made permanent	Road Traffic Act (1956)
1962	Changes to the driving test and the first official driving manual was published called 'Driving - the Ministry of Transport Manual'	Vehicle and Driver Licences Act (1969)
1965	All new cars required to have seat belt anchorage points for the front outer seats. Driver and Vehicle Licensing Centre created. 70 mph speed limits on all roads - except 30 mph (temporary)	Road Safety Act (1965)
1965	Traffic Signs Regulations and General Directions introduced. The law that sets out the design and conditions of use of official traffic signs that can be lawfully placed on or near roads in Britain. The regulations resulting from the review of British road signage conducted by the Worboys Committee	Traffic Sign Regulations and General Directions
1967	Requirement that all cars sold in Britain must be fitted with front seatbelts. MOT reduced from every ten years to 3 years. 70 mph on motorways made permanent. Drink-drive laws with the legal limit of 80mg alcohol in 100ml blood. Introduction of breathalyser testing	Road Safety Act (1967)
1973	Temporary lower speed limits were imposed as part of the energy conservation programme: a 50 mph speed limit was introduced on all roads including motorways	Motorways Traffic (Speed Limit) Reg. 1973 (SI 1973/2059) and Fuel control (modification of enactments) (speed limits) Order 1973 (SI 1973/2051)
1974	Statutory responsibility for road safety placed on Local Authorities	Road Traffic Act (1974)

1974	The 1973 temporary speed limit reduction ended (May)	Motorways Traffic (Speed Limit) Regulations 1974 (SI 1974/502)
1974	In December, speed limits on single carriageway roads reduced to 50 mph and on dual carriageways reduced to 60 mph (temporary)	HC Deb 9 December 1974, cc38-44
1977	The national speed limit on dual carriageway roads was restored to 70 mph and on single carriageways the limit was raised from 50 mph to 60 mph	HC Deb 6 April 1977, c1198; and HC Deb 6 April 1977, c519W
1980	Consolidation with the management and operation of the road network in England and Wales, with amendments to earlier pieces of legislation, relating to administrative changes with, for example, changes of highway authority, to include new unitary councils	Highways Act (1980)
1983	It becomes compulsory for adults and children to wear front seatbelts in the UK (3 year trial period)	Motor Vehicles (Wearing of Seat Belts) Reg. 1982 (SI 1982/1203); and Motor Vehicles (Wearing of Seat Belts by Children) Reg. 1982 (SI 1982/1342)
1987	All cars sold in the UK required to be fitted with rear seatbelts	Transport Act (1985)
1987	First casualty reduction targets. Reduce the annual number of casualties by the year 2000 by one third compared with the average for 1981-1985 (DfT, 1987)	Road Safety: the next steps (1987)
1988	Defined dangerous and careless driving. Driving without a license or insurance and driving whilst disqualified. Revised driving test	Road Traffic Act (1988)
1989	Wearing rear seat belts becomes compulsory for children under fourteen	Motor Vehicles (Wearing of Seat Belts by Children in Rear Seats) Regulations 1989 (SI 1989/1219)
1990	Driving Standards Agency created (DSA). DVLC was renamed the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA).	Road Traffic Act
1991	Legal requirement for seatbelts to be worn by all rear-seat passengers, including adults. Automatic speed cameras introduced. A new offence of causing death by careless driving while affected by drink or drugs created	Road Traffic Act (1991)
1996	A separate written theory test was introduced	DfT
1996	Consultation on whether to have another target beyond 2000 which concluded with overwhelming support for another target	Road Safety Casualty Reduction - targeting the future (1996)
1998	White paper on integrated transport which included future approach to road safety	A New Deal for Transport (1998)
1999	Revised Highway Code and revised driving test	DfT
1999	If a newly qualified driver receives six penalty points within two years of passing, the licence is automatically revoked, and the driver must pass the full test again	Road Traffic (New Drivers) Act 1995

2000	White paper setting out wide ranging road safety improvements, including casualty reduction targets	Tomorrow's roads: safer for everyone (2000)
2002	Hazard perception testing introduced to the driving test	DfT
2006	Legislation following the 2000 white paper "Tomorrow's Roads – safer for everyone". Aim to improve road safety and achieve casualty reduction targets of 40% of KSI and 50% reduction for children by 2010. Created a new criminal offence of causing death by careless, or inconsiderate, driving; increased the penalty for use of a hand-held mobile phone or similar device.	Road Safety Act 2006
2006	All children would have to use a restraint appropriate for their size and would no longer be able to use an adult seat belt	Motor Vehicles (Wearing of Seat Belts) (Amendment) Reg. 2006 (SI 2006/1892)
2010	Government commissioned report recommended lowering the limit of 80mg of alcohol per 100ml of blood to 50 mg of alcohol per 100ml: this was not implemented	North report
2014	Scotland (only) reduces blood alcohol level to 50 mg per 100ml	Road Traffic Act 1988 (Prescribed Limit) (Scotland) Regulations (2014)
2014	DSA and the Vehicle and Operator Services Agency merged to create the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA)	DfT
2018	Learner drivers were allowed to take motorway driving lessons for the first time with an ADI and driving a car with dual controls	DfT
2020	Consultation on a revised Highway Code including a new hierarchy of road users	DfT implementation 19 January 2022
2021	Consultation on making handheld mobile phone use while driving illegal	DfT implementation 2022
2021	Consultation on increasing the maximum penalty for causing death by dangerous driving and causing death by careless driving under the influence of drink or drugs from 14 years to life imprisonment	Police, Crime, Sentencing and Courts Act (2022). Implementation July 2022
2021	Consultation on a Road Safety Investigation Branch (requiring primary legislation)	DfT – awaiting primary legislation.