



# *Road Danger Reduction Forum*

## **A**n Introduction to Road Danger Reduction

Briefing paper ①  
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# *What is Road Danger Reduction?*

The road danger reduction approach to achieving safer roads seeks to reduce danger *at source*. This calls for a recognition of the fact that the principal source of danger on the road is motor vehicles.

Traditional approaches to road safety have taken casualty reduction as a measure of achievement. Initiatives, particularly in highway engineering, have been justified on the basis of predicted casualty savings.

The danger reduction approach presents a new perspective to road safety. Why should this new perspective be encouraged?

## **Vision**

The Road Danger Reduction Forum has a vision of:

- ⇒ All road users being able to travel where they choose with a minimum of threat from other road users.
- ⇒ All road users taking full responsibility for the effects their transport choices have on others.
- ⇒ An environmentally sustainable transport system which provides equity and accessibility for all road users, permitting no disadvantage for those who choose not to own a car.

The RDRF is urging local authorities to adopt its charter, which will help to provide a framework for transport related policies and strategies.

## **The Problem**

The casualty reduction effort has taken place against a backdrop of increasing car use. There are many reasons for the increase in ownership and use of cars. Changes in the economy and lifestyles have led to more motoring, less cycling, motorcycling and walking.

Although overall a reduction in fatal and serious casualties has occurred, part of this reduction is strongly linked with reduced levels of walking, cycling and motorcycling. It is therefore difficult to equate reduced casualties with safer roads. In fact, pedestrians, cyclists, older people, parents of young children and local communities in general are likely to perceive that there is now more danger on our roads. The volume and speed of motorised traffic are common daily concerns of the British public at large.

Levels of road accidents are therefore not alone an adequate measure of road safety. Why should people's perceptions matter?

## The broader dilemma

The need to encourage people to walk or cycle has been highlighted recently:-

- Following concern about the effects of motorised transport upon the environment;
- following concern about increased car use and lack of exercise.

This presents something of a dilemma when the roads are perceived as dangerous for pedestrians and cyclists. This perceived danger is one factor which deters people from the attractions of walking and cycling. Ironically, it is this avoidance of danger which has achieved some measure of casualty reduction.

Perceived danger does matter, because it affects people's behaviour.

## Perceived Danger

If a road safety strategy concentrates less exclusively on casualty reduction, and more on achieving an ethos of genuine road safety, it begins to develop meaningful links and share common aims with transport policy and health issues.

The key focus of the latter approach lies in considering the effects of perceived danger on human behaviour. The behaviour will in turn affect the actual safety outcome, depending on the road user type. For example:-

- measures to decrease perceived danger for car drivers

will result overall in greater hazards for the benign road users (pedestrians and cyclists). Car users are relatively well protected, and it is easy to fail to appreciate the hazards of speed presented to other people in the community.

- increases in perceived danger (from motorised traffic) will prevent people from walking and cycling, as these road users are vulnerable when out and about.

A fundamental concern is now the unequal risk levels experienced by different road users.

This imbalance needs to be addressed by concentrating efforts on basic road safety principles such as:-

- Minimising danger and risk levels to all road users by
  - reducing motorised traffic, and speeds
  - achieving a greater awareness of the risks imposed upon others by driving behaviour
  - giving full consideration to the needs of pedestrians and cyclists at all stages of transport planning, in order to decrease perceived danger for these benign users.

## **Road Safety Strategy**

In devising a road safety strategy, an emphasis should be put on the desired future vision.

A three stage process is recommended:-

- 1 Seek to define the basic objectives of road safety, which should operate as a central theme of transport policy and should relate to environmental and health issues. Develop a 'desired future vision.'
- 2 Set targets
- 3 Devise measures to achieve the targets.

In this way, the danger reduction approach is consistent with today's need for 'verifiable data' where appropriate.

# *The Charter*

- 1 Seek a genuine reduction in danger for all road users by identifying and controlling the principal sources of threat.
- 2 Find new measures to define the level of danger on our roads. These would more accurately monitor the use of and threat to benign modes (pedestrians, cyclists).
- 3 Discourage the unnecessary use of private motor transport where alternative benign modes or public transport are equally or more viable.
- 4 Pursue a transport strategy for environmentally sustainable travel based on developing efficient integrated public transport systems. This would recognise that current levels of motor traffic should not be increased.
- 5 Actively promote cycling and walking, which pose little threat to other road users, by taking positive and co-ordinated action to increase the safety and mobility of these benign modes.
- 6 Promote the adoption of the charter as the basis of both national and international transport policy.

## **The way forward**

The Road Danger Reduction Forum is a grouping of professionals from road safety and allied fields who wish to encourage critical analysis and promote the danger reduction approach through:

- occasional seminars and conferences
- publications of occasional research and policy papers
- a bulletin, which will be produced at least twice a year
- the promotion of the charter

By the end of 1996, 38 authorities had signed up to the charter, including 12 City Councils and 5 shire counties.

For further information about Road Danger Reduction, 'Is it Safe?', produced by the Forum in 1995 is available from the Secretariat, price £3.

If you are a representative of a corporate body which wishes to add its support to the charter, please contact the Road Danger Reduction Forum Secretariat, Ken Spence City of York Road Safety Unit, 9 St Leonards Place, York YO1 2ET.