

# Road Casualties Around the World

*Sir Peter Bottomley MP*

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Rightly, many news stories inform us of what is wrong, bad or sad. We should not assume that generally everything is getting worse just because some things do. Where there are challenges, past progress should inspire us, drive us to achieve more.

At the weekend when travelling from the Arun parts of my constituency towards Worthing, I reflected on an A259 road casualty initiative that I campaigned for. It was introduced after two pensioners were tragically killed when an unqualified driver smashed into them as they crossed the road. I wish my efforts had had earlier implementation.

When coming down Durrington Hill from High Salvington, I was cheered by the speed limiting features that slow traffic. That scheme was delayed for reasons that I did not support. Then, coming along The Strand, I realised again the value of the safety humps that reduce the risks to vulnerable road users. Some residents twenty years ago were objectors. My guess is that several lives have been saved and many more injuries avoided.

One present day issue is how to have a safer footway by or very near Titnore Lane. The agreed proposal needs funding. An expert constituent thinks the County estimate is too high. We are encouraging joint examination, hoping for practical agreement. I suggest the speed limit is reduced to 40mph; there are sections of that road where a visiting driver can be tempted into a speed that is incompatible with dips, bends and constrictions.

These local issues were in my mind on Tuesday when the Commonwealth Road Safety Initiative was launched. The aim is to halve road fatalities and serious injuries by 2030, in just over 10 years. Every year 210,000 people are killed in road crashes in Commonwealth countries. This is the leading cause of death for children and young people aged 5-29. Fatality rates range from 3 to 35 in 100,000 population.

Our rate has been cut by two thirds in about thirty years since I had responsibility 1986-89. What did we do? I discussed matters with experts in and around government. I joined with activists in CADD, the Campaign against Drink-Driving and funded their literature. The broadcaster Nick Ross pushed persistently and still does: we serve together as vice-presidents of Road Smart, the Institute of Advanced Motorists, under Nigel Mansell. I think an advanced rider or driver knows when we make mistakes; we are not perfect.

Good habits can spread. Seat belts are used by most car occupants. Helmets are used by most cyclists, sensibly by choice. Abiding by speed limits is spreading. I judge it would be helpful if all are reviewed, adjusted if appropriate, cleaned and cleared of shrubs.

On alcohol, we avoided lowering the limit, we rejected mass random testing and we thought it wrong to raise the already severe penalties. The reasons? There was no obvious benefit in criminalising many more drivers when over half the 1,200 drink-driving deaths had drivers twice the existing level. Mass testing clearly involves 90 times as many alcohol-free drivers, not that any of them have ever complained as they see themselves as potential victims. As for penalties, the real existing one is death.

We did not do nothing. Hosts provided alcohol drink without being asked; passengers arranged to have safe drivers and drinking drivers decided in advance whether to drink or to drive. The results? Not 1,200 but 250 – still too high. Even better, 80% of the estimated deaths when the driver had alcohol below the existing limit also evaporated. Together we made great progress. That should inspire greater ambition: how about an eventual target of Zero?