

Whitepaper:

The Global Language of Road Safety and Why it Matters



drivetech.co.uk



Foreword

Road traffic deaths and injuries can be prevented, they are not inevitable. Yet, in the UK alone, there are still in excess of 400 casualties, of all severities, on the roads every day. Globally, World Health Organization (WHO) research shows that deaths from road traffic crashes have increased to ca.1.35 million a year - that's nearly 3,700 people dying on the world's roads every day. It's important to stress that we don't have to accept these casualties as a consequence of using the roads, but we do all have to take responsibility to engender change.

Preventing incidents takes work from a range of sources, but there's undoubtedly a crucial role businesses can play. Key to increasing safety is how we communicate with other road users, specifically the language used. Therefore, how a business communicates road safety to its employees has a direct impact on how they behave.

Language is a powerful tool in the ongoing fight to improve road safety and reduce risk for businesses. The words we use to communicate have an impact on mindset, which is key to evoke behavioural change and consequently improve safety.

The fact that we can do something about road traffic incidents, and that each and every one of us can play a part, is an inspiring notion. Fundamentally, it is why I am so passionate about this industry – we can reduce risk and we don't have to move mountains to make change.

We have produced this white paper to inspire widespread thinking about one relatively small change, that we can all make, that will have a profound impact – the language used to communicate road safety to drivers. I hope it offers some food for thought and practical steps for reducing driving risk in your business.



Charlie Norman
Managing Director



The Reality of Road Safety Today

According to the WHO around 1.35 million fatalities are reported across the globe every year as a result of road traffic collisions. On top of this, between 20 and 50 million people suffer non-fatal injuries, many considered life changing. Shockingly, road traffic injuries are the leading cause of death for children and young adults aged 5 – 29 years (WHO).

The recent European Transport Safety Council (ETSC) Road Safety Performance Index (PIN) report highlighted that 22,660 people lost their lives on EU roads in 2019. That's 436 deaths a week and just a 3% decrease since 2018. There were 32 countries monitored by the PIN report and only 16 reduced road deaths in 2019, while figures increased in 12 countries.

There is not a single overriding factor responsible for causing road collisions. Indeed, if there was, we would be significantly closer to eradicating them entirely. What instead exists is a number of influences, some of which occur in isolation and others in combination, that lead to a crash. **According to the UK Department for Transport these include:**

- **Distance travelled**
- **The transport types used**
- **Behaviour of road users, including drivers, riders and pedestrians**
- **The mix of people using the road (e.g. different ages, levels of experience)**
- **External factors (such as the weather, road surface condition, time of day)**

Practically speaking, according to the WHO some of the most common causes of accidents include:

- **Speeding**
- **Driving under the influence of alcohol and other psychoactive substances**
- **Non-use of motorcycle helmets, seat-belts, and child restraints**
- **Distracted driving**
- **Unsafe vehicles**

While insight from the WHO suggests that the incremental increase in road deaths has slowed over the past decade, many suggest that change is simply not happening quick enough, while economic and social factors will continue to impact figures for better or worse.

As economies across the globe continue to suffer the widespread effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the impact of this scenario will play out further. Preliminary data from 25 EU Member States showed an average 36% drop in road deaths in April 2020 compared to the same month in the previous three years (European Transport Safety Council).

Furthermore, technology will inevitably play yet another key factor in the rate of deaths and injuries from road collisions. Drivers are already benefiting from automated driving systems, such as lane assist and blind spot sensors, but safety implications will change as we move up the SAE levels of driving automation towards fully autonomous vehicles. This highlights the need for drivers to receive ongoing education and stay abreast of technological and legislative changes.



The UK Picture

- **1,752** reported road deaths in 2019
- **25,945** serious injuries in road traffic accidents reported in 2019
- **153,158** casualties of all severities in reported road traffic accidents in 2019
- **56%** of fatalities occurred on rural roads
- **63%** of casualties occurred on urban roads

Department for Transport (DfT),
September 2020



The Global Language of Road Safety

How road safety is communicated to drivers is of great importance. Globally, one of the primary ways in which drivers receive information on road safety (the risks, fatalities and injuries) is via the media. Yet, the University of Westminster's Active Travel Academy has found that collisions and their causes are often misinterpreted or misrepresented. This confuses the public debate and works against tackling road crime and improving road safety.

It's long been acknowledged that media reporting influences public opinion but, unlike with other subjects, there have been no guidelines on how media should report on road collisions. To improve the public debate around road safety, The Active Travel Academy (ATA) has drafted recommendations for the UK's first media reporting guidelines which were published for consultation. These look to address how people view their own and other road users' responsibility. They will be revised once the findings of the consultation are published but there's a lot that can be applied from this thinking to how businesses communicate road safety.

- **Impartiality:** Publishers must not use the term accident when describing road collisions – collision, or crash, are more accurate, especially when the facts of the incident are not known

- **Discrimination:** Publishers must avoid using negative generalisations of road users, and must not use dehumanising language or that which may incite violence or hatred against a road user in comment and news coverage
- **Accuracy:** Coverage of perceived risks on the roads should be above all accurate, based in fact and context. Publishers should make mention of human factors in a collision, and avoid reference to personal protective equipment, such as hi-vis and helmets, except when demonstrably relevant
- **Reporting on crime:** Publishers must avoid portraying dangerous or criminal behaviour on the roads, such as speeding, as acceptable, or those caught breaking the law as victims

Fundamentally, the ATA highlights that the word accident evokes apathy and acceptance. There should be no acceptance of road danger.

It's simple, language matters. It must promote responsibility and inspire positive action. All businesses should evaluate how they communicate road safety to employees, whether it's about commuting to and from work or driving for work. This needs to involve all aspects of an organisation, from the people at the top, through to HR, health & safety and facilities.

Language two-ways

To encourage employees to change their behaviour, businesses should be communicating both ways. This means inviting drivers to have their say. Is there something that occurs in your business that is impacting how they drive, how they feel, how they react in certain situations? It's an opportunity to assess how clear your policy is and if anything needs reviewing.

Businesses need to make sure their driving for work policies are:

- **Clear** – avoid the use of jargon, unnecessary acronyms and ensure language isn't open to misinterpretation
- **Positive** – don't just focus on what drivers should be avoiding, what should they actively be doing to reduce risk
- **Visual** – images and bold graphics help people retain key information
- **Delivered in multiple formats** – text, video, static graphics, email etc. will all have different impacts with individuals, so include a mix
- **Repeated** – reinforce important points regularly and update information



A Global View

The world is a much smaller place than it once was, as international travel, technology and the media seamlessly and immediately connect lives across borders. The issue of road safety spans the globe, meaning it is imperative that deaths and fatalities decrease in every country for the safety of its residents and travellers, whether they are for business or leisure. On a basic level, everyone deserves to feel safe.

To shine the spotlight on road safety globally, the United Nations declared 2011 – 2020 the Decade of Action for Road Safety.

A global plan was developed by the UN Road Safety Collaboration to drive action across five key policy pillars:

1: Road safety management

2: Safer roads and mobility

3: Safer vehicles

4: Safer road users

5: Post-crash response

The target was set to halve the number of road-related deaths and injuries in that time. Despite growth in population and motorisation across the decade, the increase in road deaths did slow, although the target was not met. In February 2020, out of the Third Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety came the 'Stockholm Declaration', which saw an agreement for a new global target to reduce road traffic deaths by 50% by 2030. The Towards Zero Foundation is backing this with its #50by30 campaign. This new target and a new decade of action will help save 675,000 lives a year.

The Towards Zero Foundation has highlighted that countries that have achieved the biggest reductions in road fatalities have shown that the most effective strategies are those which anticipate the likelihood of human error. This is a recognised system

known as The Safe System approach, which to a great degree accepts human error and recommends that road planning and infrastructure is central to reducing road deaths and serious injuries.

The approach calls for safe roads and roadsides, safe speeds, safe vehicles, and safe road users to be addressed to eliminate fatal crashes and reduce serious injuries. This widely recognised approach does rely on investment in infrastructure which can be costly, so influencing road users remains critical.

To make a real change to road safety levels strategic partnerships will remain key. At the start of 2021, EuroRAP (the European Road Assessment Programme) announced the official launch of 20 national programmes which will work towards the implementation of both the United Nations and European Commission goals on road safety.

Looking ahead, it is difficult to make direct comparisons on road safety between different countries, as reporting varies, but the WHO reports on road fatality and injury rates globally show us that everyone has a part to play in improving safety. One of the key learnings from the first Decade of Action for Road Safety was that stronger global cooperation and engagement was needed. This largely comes down to communication, language and driving behavioural change. It goes without saying that the importance of language is global.

Expert Insight

Dr Shaun Helman, Chief Scientist: Behavioural and Data Sciences, TRL, shares his professional insight into the importance of language and context in relation to road safety.

“It has never struck me as acceptable that every year, many millions of people across the world must die and suffer life-changing injuries because they needed to use a road to exercise their freedom of mobility.

“And yet, we sometimes talk about it as if it is inevitable. Drivers (including some working in road safety, based on conversations I have overheard at conferences) joke about ‘taking a few too many risks’ behind the wheel. The media casually reports on (some) road collisions, but rarely with the shock and seriousness reserved for train or plane crashes. Popular culture glamorises speeding, car chases, aggression behind the wheel, and even crashes.

“The systems, processes and procedures that set the context in which road safety is expressed aren’t much better. Businesses have by default rigorous risk assessments for working in an office, but inadequate management of work-related driving risks. There is a common public perception that ‘speeding a little bit’ is not too bad (even though it still raises risk for everyone). We have mobile phone laws which reference ‘holding a device’ as the illegal reference point when driving, which in turn legitimises the equally risky act of using a mobile device hands-free. Speedometers on vehicles go up to speeds far in excess of realistic speed limits on public roads.

“We need to do better, and I would contend that an important part of this is the way we talk about road safety and road risk. It all needs to change. This is not just about the words we use either. A great deal of debate has focused on whether we should ever use the word ‘accident’ in road safety, the argument being that this is fatalistic, and makes it sound like the outcome is outside of our control completely. My personal opinion is that this argument is incompatible with the safe system approach, which explicitly accepts that people make mistakes (read ‘accidental behaviours’). What is much more important is the broader context. Whether we are talking about ‘accidents’, ‘crashes’ or ‘collisions’ we need to adopt a mindset in which such events (where they involve serious injury or death at least) are seen as completely avoidable. And this means a completely different narrative.

“We need to start calling out poor driving behaviours as unacceptable, always. Speeding? Drink driving? Talking on your mobile phone while driving? These are all sub-optimal choices, and you should not be proud of your behaviour. Drivers must accept responsibility for knowing that their actions have consequences, instead of perpetuating an acceptance that crashes are inevitable.

“And it isn’t just drivers. Running a business in which people need to drive? Have policies that influence the decisions drivers

make and ensure that the safety culture in the business extends to driving. Many drivers don’t consciously think of driving on a daily basis as a risk, but it is exactly that. And it is one that can be controlled with better business policies that explicitly promote safe driving over productivity.

“Finally, in line with the safe systems approach, we need to move away from simplistic language and thinking. Collisions are almost always a result of multiple failings within the system. Has a pedestrian or cyclist been killed or seriously injured in a collision with a motor vehicle? Stop worrying about whether they were wearing high visibility clothing or a helmet, and instead be outraged that the road system enabled a set of circumstances in which a driver who made a mistake, or maybe even made a poor but deliberate decision, could cause someone to die.

“The ‘heavy lifting’ in improving road safety will be achieved by taking a holistic, system-based approach. It will involve making sure that all the actors within the system – road users, educationalists, policy-makers, researchers, emergency services and so-on – are focused on doing what they can to ensure that the whole road transport system is designed to remove the risk of serious injury and death when single points of failure occur.

“We need to ‘walk the walk’. But in order to do that, we also need to ‘talk the talk’ to set the expectations, and the broader context in which ‘the walk’ can happen.”

Dr Shaun Helman is an applied cognitive and social psychologist working in transportation and behavioural science for over 20 years.

TRL is a global centre for innovation in surface transport and mobility. Its mission is to create clean and efficient transport that is safe, reliable and accessible for everyone.

To find out more visit www.trl.co.uk



Dr. Shaun Helman
Chief Scientist, TRL



The Role of Driver Training

The importance of prioritising road safety and the language used to communicate it is clear, the collision figures speak for themselves. One of the key steps businesses can take to positively improve the language of road safety in their organisation, reduce risk and keep employees and other road users safe, is to provide comprehensive driver training.

“The need to improve road safety does not end with the driving test, nor does it exclude those who drive professionally. Employers have a major potential role to play in improving safety on the roads through ensuring that their staff are properly prepared and motivated to drive and ride safely and that they are using safe vehicles. Around one in three of all injury collisions on the road involve people ‘at work’ at the time which underlines the scope for improvement.”

The Department for Transport,
Road Safety Statement 2019

Where to start

A fleet risk health check is the best place to start when looking at how to increase the safety of driving for work. This can be done through a professional provider, such as DriveTech, or by a business itself if resources allow. It should look to analyse:

- **Policies** – what is in existence, is there a fleet safety policy, how are policies communicated and are there any gaps now or looking ahead (are electric vehicles covered, for example)?
- **Drivers** – is the right documentation on record for all drivers and have they been trained? Are there any potential risks that need addressing?
- **Vehicles** – are they equipped with the necessary safety features and are maintenance services up to date?
- **Journeys** – what are the nature of journeys completed, what risks are posed by the demands and nature of journeys made, what pre-planning is completed?

Types of training available

There are different types of training available to suit different business needs and driver requirements. Often, a combination of methods is the best approach and this will be identified from a fleet risk health check.

E-learning modules – these can be selected to suit individual drivers and prove effective in both meeting gaps in training and refreshing knowledge. They can be as short as two minutes in length and carried out on a range of devices.

Workshops – group ‘classroom’ sessions can take place face-to-face or virtually and are fully-interactive to engage drivers.

On-road – in-vehicle training with a coach and a personalised approach will have maximum impact on driver safety and performance.

Whatever combination of training is undertaken, it’s important to positively reinforce what’s learnt over time. This can be done using engaging visual techniques such as infographics and short videos to regularly prompt drivers with visual language to keep road safety top of the agenda.

Preparing for change

Training needs to be ongoing to account for changes, such as the introduction of electric vehicles, autonomous vehicles and legislative and regulatory updates. For example, the UK government recently consulted on proposed changes to The Highway Code to improve safety for vulnerable road users including cyclists, pedestrians and horse riders and this may bring about changes all drivers need to be aware of.



Conclusions

The reality of road safety rates from across the globe is stark. There is still a long way to go to prevent unnecessary lives from being lost. Even in the UK, with one of the better road safety records, still around five fatalities are recorded every day on the road. More must be done.

From the top down, we need to lead by example and communicate road safety to drivers in an impactful, positive way that not only gives them the right tools to drive more safely but encourages behavioural change. This communication needs to be regular, relevant and responsible.

Language is key to this and through actively assessing the words used to communicate to drivers, businesses can reduce their exposure to risk on the roads. This paper has highlighted how a straightforward switch in the way road collisions are communicated may lead to an increase in driver responsibility and therefore safer driving.

We must all remember that the world doesn't sit still and neither can driver engagement and training, it must be ongoing to adapt to changes globally. The automotive landscape is evolving at pace. We are less than a decade from the government's 2030 date for the electrification of vehicles and, alongside this, autonomous technology is rapidly advancing. These changes will require adapted communication and training for drivers for optimum safety. On a wider social and economic level, the global pandemic and Brexit are making their mark and we don't yet know the longer-term impacts.

It comes back to the pertinent reminder at the start of this paper, road deaths and injuries are not inevitable. Together, let's look at language and we can speak to and coach drivers in way that will generate responsibility and real change.

Sources of Further Information:

-  www.who.int
-  www.gov.uk/government/organisations/department-for-transport
-  www.towardszerofoundation.org
-  www.eurorap.org
-  www.etsc.eu

Contact Us

DriveTech UK & DriveTech International

Fanum House, Basing View, Basingstoke
Hampshire, RG21 4EA, UK

T +44 (0) 1256 610907

E tellmemore@drivetech.co.uk

Although this whitepaper is designed to provide accurate and authoritative information with regard to the subject matter concerned, the authors and their organisations accept no responsibility for errors and omissions. No part of these pages may be reproduced without the written prior permission of DriveTech.

drivetech.co.uk