



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Committee for the Environment

OFFICIAL REPORT (Hansard)

Road Traffic (Amendment) Bill: PSNI Briefing

25 September 2014

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY

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Members present for all or part of the proceedings:

Ms Anna Lo (Chairperson)
Mrs Pam Cameron (Deputy Chairperson)
Mr Cathal Boylan
Mr Colum Eastwood
Mr Alban Maginness
Mr Ian Milne
Lord Morrow
Mrs Sandra Overend
Mr Peter Weir

Witnesses:

Inspector Rosie Leech	Police Service of Northern Ireland
Superintendent Gerry Murray	Police Service of Northern Ireland

The Chairperson: I welcome Inspector Rosie Leech and Superintendent Gerry Murray. Thank you for coming. We have your paper. Please talk us through that and, afterwards, members will ask you questions.

Inspector Rosie Leech (Police Service of Northern Ireland): I have a few issues that I want to talk about. To date, there have been 58 deaths on Northern Ireland's roads this calendar year, and that is one more tragedy than we had in the whole of last year, when we had only 57. It is 58 deaths compared to 41 for the same period last year. We have seen 11 motorcyclists die compared to six in 2013. Six pedestrians were killed last year, and that has risen to 14 this year. The only road user group that we are seeing a drop in is cyclists, who have fallen back to one death this year against four last year. However, the overall trend of killed and seriously injured collisions and casualties continues to fall. We have had fewer people seriously injured and fewer slight injuries reported.

This road safety Bill provides an opportunity for the Assembly to bring some innovative ideas into practice in an effort to mitigate the risk posed by and to some of our most vulnerable road users. However, it would be remiss of me not to highlight the areas where we, as the enforcement body, feel that the measures either do not go far enough or could be achieved in a different way.

I am aware that you all have sight of the most recent response from the PSNI, and I do not propose to repeat all the comments therein, but I want to elaborate on some issues that bear fuller discussion.

The proposal to deal with lower-level drink-drivers by means of a fixed-penalty notice is of concern because of the apparently unwieldy process that will have to be followed, particularly in the case of the non-compliant recipient. The additional administrative burden that this will place on police is

considerable, further complicated by the fact that we will be in innovators in this regard. There is no existing model or computer software already in existence; so, on top of the already significant costs that we will face in procuring new breath-testing equipment capable of testing at the lower limits and at the roadside, we face software development costs. Our preferred option is to impose a shorter duration of disqualification with no requirement to retest at the end.

Omission of the statutory option from the Bill is a significant issue for police, particularly in light of the lower blood alcohol limits. It is our contention that the old safeguard required in the past has been superseded by advances in technology that should support its removal. After June next year, Northern Ireland will be the only country in the world to retain the statutory option. Practically, it will mean that the lower-end offender whom we detect as a result of our new random powers is likely to fail a preliminary breath test, but, in the time that it takes to either bring them back to a custody suite or get a roadside device brought to the scene, their level will be falling, and we will then find ourselves required to take blood or urine. The doctor is then summoned, which also takes time, and, ultimately, when the sample is obtained, the subject is now under the limit. The police patrol has been off the ground for one, two or even three hours, simply because the machine is not trusted to be right. If the Committee were to recommend that this issue be reviewed, I believe that it would be a relatively simple matter to reinstate this provision. We are also concerned that, if cases occur as above, public confidence in the police's ability to deal effectively with drink-drivers may be adversely affected.

I am aware that there has been some discussion about creating one limit at the lower level of 20 mg and that that has been mooted, however I wish to state on behalf of police that we do not favour such a move. We fear that that would distract and detract from the focus on the higher-range drink-drivers. It is important that we are seen to exercise our powers in a proportionate manner while prioritising attention to high-risk offenders, and it is equally vital for public confidence that we are not seen to be swamped by the number of drivers barely over the limit, thereby testing our capacity to enforce.

I move on to the issue of roadside access for police to driver licence records. The PSNI has been in discussion with the DVA about accessing its records in order that we can determine what type of driver we are dealing with and have the driving licence photo available to check identity. We need to know whether they are a vocational driver or a novice driver and whether they have any previous drink-driving offences or other fixed penalty points on their record that would dictate how we deal with them. As it stands, there is no argument that police should not have such access. It is purely technical obstacles that are proving to be a stumbling block, and it currently appears unlikely that access will be achieved before 2016. When it comes to enforcing the novice driver provisions, it will be vital that police can properly determine who is actually driving. We must also be able to ascertain passenger details but in a manner that does not damage community confidence or lead to accusations of heavy-handed or uneven-handed enforcement.

The PSNI is in agreement with the ethos of the passenger restriction provisions, and we feel that they have the potential to make a significant contribution to reducing death and injury among this vulnerable group of road users. We must ensure that our officers are properly equipped to exercise this power and that the members of the public involved have the means to comply with the legislative requirements. Whilst we welcome the proposed measures, we must ensure that they work in practical terms.

This concludes my prepared summary of the issues that the police wish to highlight. I am happy to take questions.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much for your presentation. That is very useful, rather than you saying that you support different clauses. I read through your submission last night. Can you elaborate a bit? You did not include very much in your submission about reinstating the testing.

Inspector Leech: The statutory option.

The Chairperson: Can you say a bit more on that? Obviously, the Committee can ask for amendments. Can you tell us more on that?

Inspector Leech: As it stands, as you will know, the measurement of breath that we use is 35 mg. The statutory option applies only when we are taking an evidential breath sample. It sits at 35 mg. Anybody who blows 35 mg, 36 mg, 37 mg, 38 mg or 39 mg is protected in law. It is protected in the legislation, and we will not enforce against those individuals. However, when people reach a reading of 40 mg to 49 mg, they currently have the option to elect for a blood or urine sample to be obtained.

That sample goes away for analysis to verify the machine reading. In practical terms, in reality, we very often have to call a forensic medical officer — a doctor — to the custody suite in order to obtain that sample, because blood is generally the option that is elected. As you have, no doubt, heard from your previous submissions and some of the expert testimony that you have received, alcohol falls away in the body all the time. The body metabolises it, and the level drops all the time so that, by the time the doctor arrives to take the blood sample from a person who, at that stage, is only marginally over the limit, the person is likely to be under the limit. Significant police time has been taken up by bringing a person to the custody suite, processing them and waiting for the doctor, only for the net result to be no prosecution and the person walking away.

The Chairperson: That is because of the time gap.

Inspector Leech: Because of the time gap. If that statutory option is causing a significant impact at 35 mg, you can imagine that, if we are going to operate at limits of 22 mg and 9 mg, which are the breath equivalent to the blood, the chances are that we will never catch anybody, particularly at 9 mg. You will always be in the position of having to arrest that person, even if you have roadside testing. Even if we are operating roadside testing, doing everything efficiently in terms of time and resource and the person comes back with a reading close to 9 mg — it will not be nine, because there will probably be that little bit of additional points added in — we will have to arrest the person, bring them to the custody suite and wait for a doctor to say, "Yes they're fit for me to take blood from them". All the time, the alcohol level will be dropping, and we will end up with no prosecution.

The Chairperson: A waste of police time.

Inspector Leech: Yes. Two tolerances and two margins were put into law and procedure 30 years ago, when the devices were very new to the market. We have had 30-odd years of very clear evidence provided by those devices, and the operating procedures of the devices have been tested at every court in the land. We are totally reliant on them, and it seems perverse not to take their reading.

The Chairperson: So you are saying that we should do away with that statutory option.

Inspector Leech: Yes.

The Chairperson: We will need to talk to the departmental officials on that. Thank you very much for clarifying that.

Mr Boylan: Thanks, Chair. I apologise for not being in for part of the presentation. I think the Committee, in good faith, is looking at the reduction to 20 mg. You are saying to us now that it would cause more problems for you, is that correct?

Inspector Leech: You are saying that you are looking at 20 mg across the board. I think that it would cause us considerable problems. If it were brought in with statutory options still in place, my goodness, we would be —

Mr Boylan: I am seeking clarification on that and asking your opinion on this matter. You are saying that if we remove the statutory option the current limit is fine, or are you saying that we should remove the statutory limit and move the limit down to 20 mg as well?

Inspector Leech: We are absolutely in agreement with the reduction as proposed by the Department. When we talk about breath and talk about blood, it all gets very confusing. We are absolutely in agreement with the proposal to reduce the limit to 50 mg of alcohol for a typical driver and 20 mg of alcohol for a novice or vocational driver.

Mr Boylan: That is grand. Sorry, I missed the start, and I wanted clarification.

Superintendent Gerry Murray (Police Service of Northern Ireland): The two levels will include one for a specified driver, and the categories for a specified driver will be novice drivers, learner drivers and those in authority such as taxi drivers, bus drivers and hire coach drivers.

Mr Boylan: That is grand. That is fine. Thank you very much for the clarification. There was great debate in the Chamber when we talked about quad bikes and helmets. My view is that you get no

second chances. If you are on a quad and you unfortunately have an accident and get a bang or a crack on the head, in most cases, there are no second chances. I take it that your opinion is that you support the idea. I know that some cases were made that they are in one field and go across the road into another field, but, from reading your briefing paper, I know that you certainly are in support.

Inspector Leech: Yes, and, subsequent to that briefing paper, I do not know whether anyone saw the story about a young lady called Rebekah Glass from County Tyrone. She was on the news recently, having suffered a head injury when the quad that she was on cartwheeled. I did not see the news footage, and I am not sure that it did justice to the disability that she has been left with. It really is tragic and all for want of a helmet. I do not think that there is any argument about it.

The Chairperson: It saves your life and stops you from sustaining serious injuries.

Inspector Leech: It preserves your quality of life.

Mr Boylan: That is in the Bill. We are only talking about the Bill at the minute. That is grand.

Mrs Cameron: That was another very interesting presentation. On the matter of restrictions on novice or professional drivers, I am thinking of a taxi driver who operates from his own vehicle. On an occasion where he is not working, how does he prove that he is not working? What level would the restriction be at? Have you any thoughts on how that might work or not work?

Inspector Leech: You are right to say that the taxi driver could be operating from his own vehicle, and, let us be honest, there are taxi drivers out there who are not compliant and who do not put their roof sign up, etc. So, it will be a question then of trying to ascertain whether they previously had a fare and where they have come from. It will be about observations and so on, but, hopefully, in conjunction with the taxis legislation that is inching its way forward, we will be able to cut down the numbers of illegal taxiing. I think that whether people are working at the time will then be apparent.

Mrs Cameron: You will be quite reliant on the taxi legislation going through to clarify some of those points.

On the maintenance of a logbook, your submission was very helpful. You talk about that being a sensible suggestion. Again, how effective will that be? There will be a lot of grey areas. It appears to be quite an easy thing to forge. I am not saying that parents would be irresponsible, but I am sure that some parents would happily fill it in and sign it off or whatever. How would that work out as well? How could you have confidence in the logbook if it can be easily filled out?

Inspector Leech: I go and talk to approved driving instructors at their forum, and they are very much for a lot of those measures. I think that they would probably be happy to play a part in this, in that they would ask to see the notebook at each lesson. I appreciate that there will be young people who are not having continuous lessons going forward. There is an expectation that 90% or more of our population are law-abiding and want to comply with what is required of them. We need to focus on that small number and encourage them to complete it properly. It is probably more for the Department and its testing authorities to gauge whether the book is being properly completed.

Superintendent Murray: The logbook would be for a short duration of 24 months. It is not as if it would be continuous. So, to go to that extent of fraud for only a short period, whatever the expense may be, may deter people. As the inspector said, the majority of people on the roads are law-abiding.

Mrs Cameron: Finally, on the issue of photographic ID and how you prove age ranges, 14-year-olds, for example, will not carry ID. I do not even know whether any such thing exists for that age group. Also, you mentioned ascertaining step relationships when surnames are different. It seems that quite a bit of detective work will be required to enforce this legislation.

Inspector Leech: We have some concerns, but I do not want to be overly negative about that. We see the carloads of young people, and, unfortunately, when they are together, they just cannot turn the volume down. Everything is full-on, and an inexperienced driver will be distracted by the chatter and the music in the car, and all that is a very toxic mix. Over the years, we have had just too many collisions occurring with full carloads of kids. I think that the principles and the ethos behind it are very sound, but we will have to work through some operational difficulties. We and the Department have

had discussions about that. We bring our views very much to the fore with it, and we let it know about the practical difficulties that may be encountered, but it is determined to try to find a way round that.

Mrs Cameron: So, overall, you are, by the sounds of it, very much in favour of passenger restrictions.

Inspector Leech: Yes. It is only for a short period of six months. It is to allow young drivers to gain some experience driving on their own when they do not have a supervising person beside them. We know from statistical research and studies that, very quickly, their skill level rises to that of the general population and that they cease to be a high-risk driver. Within less than 24 months of passing their test, they are level with the rest of the driving population.

Superintendent Murray: If you look at the statistics for 2008-2012, you see that, although 10% of our driving population are young persons, 43% of people killed in that period were between the ages of 17 and 24. If you look at the Swedish model, you see that, once they get past the two years, their expertise in driving increases, as the inspector said, and they become the norm. The main factor that we are worried about is that two-year period from the time that they get a licence. There will be issues and problems. It will not be plain sailing. We will be able to work through them with the Department.

The Chairperson: The law will help to change public attitudes. I think that, sometimes, young people are under pressure to take a lot of friends. They say, "Oh, you have the driving licence. Now, you have a car. You have got to take us to Donegal". Parents can then say, "No. Only one friend is allowed to go with you". It is about changing that attitude and reducing it. Gradually, people know that you are not allowed to do it, so they do not do it.

Superintendent Murray: The other pressure, as soon as you have got your provisional licence, is to get your test. From the minute you get your provisional driving licence, it will be 12 months before you are even tested. So, the enthusiasm will be — can I say — controlled. Although you will get the provisional driving licence earlier, at sixteen and a half, the minimum age you will be before you actually sit your test will be seventeen and a half.

The Chairperson: Ultimately, you are testing the skills. You are not depending totally on the logbook to say whether they are allowed to sit the test. It is about how they drive on the day, what skills they have and what experience they demonstrate during the test.

Superintendent Murray: Correct.

The Chairperson: I suppose that that is one way of looking at it. You would have quite a difficulty trying to check whether every logbook was genuinely filled in.

Mrs Overend: Thank you very much. It has been very interesting. I keep saying this, but I am new to the Committee, so I am just getting my head round all of these things. Pam mentioned what I was concerned about. As someone from a rural constituency, I passed my test five weeks after I was 17 years old, and I was very proud of that. Those are the sorts of things. In the rural community, young people really need their car to get around, especially the young farmers' clubs. They might have a very active social life, but a lot of it is very serious stuff as well. They have public speaking and group debating competitions. Young farmers might get a bad name, but they are not —

Inspector Leech: I was a young farmer. I understand. *[Laughter.]*

Mrs Overend: You are on my side then.

Inspector Leech: I am.

Mrs Overend: Thank you for that. *[Interruption.]*

Mr Boylan: I want in on that point, but continue.

Mrs Overend: OK. We want to help our young people but we do not want to restrict them. I was just wondering whether you have other suggestions. I appreciate how difficult it is to enforce the number of passengers, the ID, etc. Have you other ideas?

Inspector Leech: There have been lots of other ideas. Over the years, we have done all sorts of landscape reviews and looked at some of the measures that had been taken in other parts of the world. For one reason or another, those have all been ruled out. Night-time curfews were not seen to be acceptable. There have been other suggestions over the years. We have tried to come up with something that is not unduly or prohibitively expensive to deliver, be it further training after they pass their test, and so on, and, to date, none of those suggestions have been acceptable. So, I think we need to come back to the fact that, by far, the majority of collisions when someone is killed or seriously injured (KSI) occur on rural roads. Whilst it is not that young farmers peak the fatality numbers, certainly young people in rural communities do. There is that reliance on cars, which I absolutely understand. Everybody is very impatient at that time of their life. They want to get their test and get on the road. As the superintendent said, it is about trying, if they are learning over a longer period and building up the skills, to moderate that excitement of getting the test a wee bit. It might all help.

All that having been said, we are seeing that young people's involvement in fatal crashes is coming down, which may be something to do with the testing regime, wearing their seat belts more or cars are safer. I have the figures, but you do not want to be bored with all of this. Last year, 216 injuries resulted from collisions involving drivers under 25. That is down from a baseline figure of 428 in the mid-2000s. So it is coming down, but it is beholden on us to look for ways of improving that.

The Chairperson: With rural driving there are also all sorts of other risk factors: narrower roads, more bends and poor lighting on top of inexperience.

Mrs Overend: As a rural driver, I would say the opposite. There are so many different risks when you are coming into the city. I know people who will not drive in Belfast.

The Chairperson: From a rural area?

Mrs Overend: Yes.

Superintendent Murray: Over the two years, it is about training and education. It is about keeping them focused on the highway code; learning about having control of the vehicle; and learning the braking distances, so that they repeatedly return to the Highway Code. Whereas, in my day, you did the Highway Code until you were asked the three questions on your test, and after that you never looked at it again.

Mrs Overend: There are a lot of people coming down the motorway in the morning who could learn about braking distances. Anyway, that is another matter.

The Chairperson: It would help to reduce insurance costs for young people. The rate of insurance for people under 25 is just so prohibitive.

Inspector Leech: It may end up that some of the measures that I have mentioned, such as night-time curfews and so on, may be financially — young people may be driven to self-impose those curfews, because insurance companies are offering discounts to young people if they do not drive at night-time. They have identified risks. The black box technology has been adopted by quite a number of young people, and they are getting significant discounts on their insurance, all of which works to our benefit.

The Chairperson: They have to drive at night some time. You cannot ban them forever.

Inspector Leech: No. Again, it would be only six months.

Lord Morrow: Thank you, Inspector. Fifty-eight road deaths: obviously this figure is going in the wrong direction. About 10 or 14 days ago, I listened to a senior police officer comment following another fatality, and I think that he cited four reasons for that: driving under the influence, not wearing seat belts, speeding and driving without due care. I hope that I am not misquoting him, but I think that was what he cited. Of the 58 road deaths this year, which is one more than —

Inspector Leech: The whole of last year.

Lord Morrow: — the whole of last year. How many of those road deaths were alcohol-related?

Inspector Leech: I am sorry, but I am not yet in a position to answer that because all of those are either under criminal investigation or for the coroner.

Lord Morrow: What about last year, then? Did you say that there 41 in total last year?

Superintendent Murray: It was 57 last year.

Inspector Leech: I have it here somewhere. Last year, 14 people were killed where at least one person involved was over the blood:alcohol legal limit — 14 out of a total of 57.

Lord Morrow: I noticed that you were specific in using the words "legal limit".

Inspector Leech: Yes.

Lord Morrow: How many — maybe it is an unfair question, but —

Inspector Leech: It is an unfair question, because I cannot — *[Laughter.]*

Lord Morrow: I think that you have anticipated what is coming, have you not?

Inspector Leech: I cannot tell. I mean —

Lord Morrow: I think then that it tells us something again. First, we are still losing this battle of "Don't drink and drive". At least, I think that anyway. Somehow we do not seem to be able to get that message over. Now, can you tell us anything in relation to age groups? We have been concentrating considerably on a certain age group. Can you tell us anything there?

Inspector Leech: First, to say that we are losing the battle is not necessarily representative of the facts. Of all of the preliminary breath tests that we conduct, which vary between 35,000 and 45,000 a year, approximately 8% result in a failed test — ie, someone being over the limit. So 92% of drivers are heeding the "Don't drink and drive" message. By far and away the vast majority of people who are breathalysed blow zero. There are then a few percentage points representing people who have some alcohol present but not enough to be over the limit. For example, last year, 25,000 people blew zero, 430 failed to provide and another 1,350 passed the test. A further 182 were borderline but below the limit, and we warned them. We advise those people not to continue driving, because they do not know whether their alcohol level is on the way down or is still rising. There were 2,941 people who failed the preliminary breath test.

Lord Morrow: You do a blitz around Christmas time. Do you breathalyse all drivers who are stopped?

Inspector Leech: No, we do not breathalyse all drivers, because we do not have those random powers as yet. We have to either suspect alcohol, we have to have witnessed a moving traffic offence or they have to have been involved in an RTC.

Lord Morrow: I have never been breathalysed in my life.

Inspector Leech: Because we would have no reason to suspect you. You see how well we apply our powers.

Lord Morrow: I must say, you show great discretion.

I think that driving instructors have mooted the idea of reducing the age for driving to 16 and a half. How do you feel about that?

Inspector Leech: That refers to starting to learn to drive. I do not see any significant disadvantage to learning at 16 and a half as opposed to 17. In the United States, there are quite a number of states where they can start at 16, and I think that maybe there are a few states even lower than that.

The Chairperson: Australia, too. I think it is 16.

Inspector Leech: There is no significant risk factor between a 16-year-old and a 17-year-old.

Lord Morrow: How many learner drivers and restricted drivers were involved in any of the four issues that the inspector talked about? I was surprised to hear that people do not wear seat belts.

Superintendent Murray: It is starting to creep up again.

Inspector Leech: One of the reasons why the DOE did its advert was because of the police observation that, although the survey shows that there was a 96% compliance rate on seat belt wearing, that is done during the daytime in urban areas. It does not take account of night-time driving in country areas, where you maybe have more passengers than you have seat belts, never mind the fact that the kids in the back — or adults in the back — do not want to wear their seat belts. This year, we have seen fatal road traffic crashes where the car occupants have been expelled from the car, and that is a clear indicator that they had not been wearing their seat belt. They would probably have survived if they had. It does not cause the collision, but, when it goes wrong, there is no protection.

The Chairperson: I have seen that there is now on television a repeat of quite a few of the adverts on the consequences of not wearing seat belts. I find it difficult —

Lord Morrow: I wanted to ask about the 35-to-39 and 40-to-49 figures, but I will refrain because time has gone.

Mrs Cameron: Another couple of things. I meant to ask you about drink-driving. I believe that most drink-driver offenders are caught the morning after.

Inspector Leech: No, absolutely not, not by a long stretch.

Mrs Cameron: I am trying to remember where we got that from. I think that we got that from the people who did the course.

Inspector Leech: They really could not have said that most people were caught the morning after; that is patently not true. It might be the wee small hours; it might be 5.00 am or 6.00 am.

The Chairperson: They said that it was possible.

Inspector Leech: It is possible, and we have detected people the morning after, but I do not want to overplay or overstate it.

Mrs Cameron: It would be good to look back on that evidence session, because I got the impression that they were saying that the majority of the people who come to them were caught the morning after.

The Chairperson: No, I do not think that they said "majority"; I think they said "some". It is the time taken to reduce your blood level. If you drink until 4·00 am and then go out to work at 7·00 am —

Mrs Overend: Sorry, may I intervene? Maybe it is because the level of alcohol in their blood is over the limit by a smaller amount, so they have more of an opportunity to go on the course than someone who was caught the night before, because their level is higher. Would that be the case?

Inspector Leech: No, the course is open to everybody.

Mrs Cameron: Sandra talked about driving to Belfast and the different types of driving. It is very difficult, as a young person or as an adult, to drive without feeling pressured to drive faster, because most people around you are quite aggressive in their car. They drive too closely behind you, and you feel like you are not going fast enough, even though you might be sitting at the limit. There is an awful pressure on everybody to drive faster than they should.

Inspector Leech: I think that everybody is feeling the pressure of modern life and squeezes and being asked to do more at work, and that pressure spills into behaviours. Everybody is trying to multitask. They check their Facebook while driving and do all these foolish things. It is proposed in the learning-to-drive agenda that young people will be allowed to train on dual carriageways and drive

at higher speeds, and that they will not be restricted to 45 mph. I think that that is really positive and sensible. That is the giving. We may be taking away some permissions for a short time, but we are giving them other permissions.

Mrs Cameron: I suppose that it is not appropriate to ask you if we are doing enough to try to ease off on that pressure; it is probably more for the Department. If everybody slowed down a bit, it would make an awful difference on all of the roads. People would not feel the need to drive so fast if everybody was driving a bit slower.

Inspector Leech: That is what we try to do, as do the safety cameras, and that is what the education course is about. People seem to take that message on board.

The Chairperson: I want to come back on the question Pam asked about proving the ID of young passengers. I do not think you answered that. You said that not all 14- to 20-year-olds would have an ID with them in the car. How can you prove that the person who comes into the police station later on is the same person?

Inspector Leech: I do not want to be negative about this, because the Department and ourselves have worked at and discussed these provisions a lot. Picture the scene, however: you have a young driver with three or four people in the car with him and you ask him who he is and if he has his licence with him. He answers, "No, I don't have my licence". He does not have to carry his licence. He says, "I'm Billy, and I'm 20. I'm out of my probationary period". But he is not Billy at all; he is wee Jimmy, the younger brother, but he adopts his brother's identity. We give him a producer and say, "Produce your driving licence at your nearest police station inside seven days". So the big brother comes along, produces his driving licence and says, "I was stopped the other night." Who is to say that that is who was stopped and that the restrictions did not apply?

That is why access to the driver licence record at the roadside would be helpful. We have all these electronic devices that mean that we should be able to view the record and view the photograph that is supplied when they get their driving licence. We can then look at that and say, "You are not Billy, you are Jimmy. You are restricted because you are still a novice driver, because I can see here that you passed your driving test on this date", and we are able to properly ascertain that.

We still have some concerns about identifying passengers, but I think we will win that. That roadside access is just taking a bit longer than we would have liked. The issue of the passengers, how we identify them and how we establish their relationship to the driver is something that has not yet been resolved.

The Chairperson: So it will be 2016 before you can get that roadside access.

Inspector Leech: It appears so. The DVA is creating a new computer system that will allow that access to be more readily delivered.

The Chairperson: It can be so difficult to tell the age of young people, whether they are 17 or 21.

Inspector Leech: Correct.

The Chairperson: When girls have make-up on, they can look as if they are 21 or 22 when they are only really 15.

Inspector Leech: Yes.

The Chairperson: OK. Thank you very much indeed.

Mr Boylan: Hold on a minute, Chair.

The Chairperson: Oh. Cathal wanted to come back. Sorry.

Mr Boylan: I thought that we were dealing with the Bill first, because this is the most important part.

At the meeting last week, we requested that you come along and deal with the 58 road deaths. It is very concerning. While I agree with you about having access and all the things you have said about wee Billy and everything else, I am still looking at a document that states that 16 people aged 65-plus were killed this year, 23 people aged 25 to 64 and 16 people aged 16 to 24. As road safety spokesperson for my party, I am very, very concerned that the message does not seem to be getting through.

In the round, we had a discussion there for 10 minutes, and members have asked very serious and important questions, but I am very, very concerned about that number, because we have spent millions of pounds over the last number of years. We were doing really well in getting the numbers down. When you are standing in a crowd of 100 mourners outside a house after a young lad of 18 years of age has been thrown out of a car, that is when you see the reality.

Inspector Leech: Absolutely.

Mr Boylan: Whilst I agree that some of the elements that we are bringing forward in this Bill will help, I am concerned that we need to look again at why we are not getting the message out. The 58 road deaths tell me that, somehow, in some way, we need to look at something different.

Inspector Leech: I do not want to decry where we are this year, because 58 is 58 too many, but, looking at the trends of people killed and seriously injured, it is moving down in a steady line. There is a steady downwards trend. The good year that we had two years ago was a blip. That was the dip. In some of those deaths, it is on a knife-edge as to whether they survive or they die. We had a good year, but we would attribute that good year to a lot of other external issues as well.

It is not all about the advertising, it is not all about the policing and it is not all about those things that we are doing collectively. The economic environment has a part to play. We know, anecdotally, that in some of the rural towns where young drivers would have gathered in the car parks in the centre of town and done their procession around town and sat and revved their engines and so on, that has stopped. That stopped three years ago, because they had no money to fuel their cars; they were even selling their cars. That problem melted away in some areas.

There is an issue with the miles travelled, in that people are travelling maybe more slowly to conserve fuel. There are also fewer commercial vehicles on the road, and all of those factors come into play when we are looking at the trends. There has been scientific and academic research done into that, indicating that that is one of the significant factors at play. Our really good results are the blip. The downward trend is there, and we are working collectively to try to keep pushing it down.

The Chairperson: I am sure that weather conditions play an important role.

Inspector Leech: We generally find that, when weather conditions are benign, that is when people do not take the care.

Mr Boylan: I agree with you. We certainly did do well for a while, but I am concerned about all of the things that we have talked about — drink-driving and everything else. You will get the stats at the end of the year. Unfortunately, I thought you might have had them today. I do not want to put you under pressure. Speed, due care and attention are still the major things.

I am looking at E district, which I am concerned about because it is in my area, where there have been 15 road deaths. We still come back to the rural issue, unfortunately. Are we still saying that it is rural roads, mostly late in the evenings or weekends? How can we bring that together? Do you know what I mean? I have to state on record, as well, the random checks and all — for other reasons, we are a bit concerned about it from a party perspective. Not the principle of stopping people for drink-driving, but for other reasons, we are slightly concerned that the conditions may not be right. I want to ask about the rural roads and the weekends issue. It is all right showing an advertisement of somebody not wearing a seatbelt or somebody using a phone, but, in all of that we are still getting —

Superintendent Murray: We are using a number of avenues to try to get to everyone in Northern Ireland, but if you look at a map of Northern Ireland and at the 58 deaths, it is a scattergun pattern. If the majority of deaths were happening in E district — your district — then we would put more proactive marked and unmarked vehicles from the roads policing unit there to identify the causes and the specific drivers we are looking for, but we have limited resources to use in a maximum time period to get into areas.

E district is climbing and we are putting resources to it, but, at the same time, when we look towards Derry, we see that there is a climb starting there. Behind us, as the arrowhead from roads policing branch, are districts. More and more districts are being trained on the laser and with regard to looking for the areas where there would have been roads policing units for the speed. We are putting layer upon layer there. Even cross-border, we are now having meetings with our colleagues across the border and have introduced three cross-border operations specifically related to seat belts, speed, detection of alcohol and inattentiveness through the mobile phone.

We are addressing it. Fifty-eight deaths are too many deaths. We just have to hope that the message will get through to those who are the hard core, small numbers as they are. The majority of motorists on the road are law-abiding. It is about picking those who are not and dealing with them through prosecution.

Mr Boylan: Maybe, as part of this discussion, the message will get out. This is the first time in a long time that we have had an opportunity to talk to you in relation to it. I think that, unfortunately, we have to use the stick approach.

Superintendent Murray: Absolutely.

Mr Boylan: There is no carrot in it. Unfortunately, it is not working.

Inspector Leech: That is why ACC Martin, who I think Lord Morrow referred to, has said very publicly that the gloves are off and we are going to enforce. That is what you should expect when you are stopped. Do not expect to be given a discretionary disposal or advice and warning; it will be enforced.

The Chairperson: Thank you very much indeed, inspector and superintendent.