

Age UK is the new force combining

AGE and **HELP THE AGED** WE WILL
Concern



Consultation response

Ref: 5711

Transport Committee inquiry into the Government's Strategic Framework for Road Safety

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Age UK is the new force combining Age Concern and Help the Aged. We are a national charity and social enterprise working to transform later life in the UK and overseas. Our vision is of a world in which older people flourish. We aim to improve later life for everyone through our information and advice, services, products, training, research and campaigning.

Name: Gemma Bradshaw
Email: gemma.bradshaw@ageuk.org.uk

Age UK
1-6 Tavistock Square
London WC1H 9NB
T 020 8765 7200 F 020 8765 7211
E policy@ageuk.org.uk
www.ageuk.org.uk

Key points and recommendations

In May 2011 the government published their Strategic Framework for Road Safety. This set out the vision for road safety and focuses on decentralisation and empowerment, alongside a workplan for action for all government, service providers and citizens. The Transport Select Committee are currently undertaking an inquiry into whether the strategic framework will fulfil the government's aims.

Age UK welcomes the opportunity to comment on the role of older people in this strategic framework. In this response we will be focusing on whether the measures set out in the action plan are workable and sufficient in relation to older people's mobility. We would like to highlight the following issues:

- The framework makes the connection between the importance of car travel and independent living. This needs to be clearly stated as a foundation for road safety interventions that affect people in later life.
- The process of ageing can lead to physical and mental decline that can have an impact on driving, however there are many misconceptions about the safety of drivers as they age.
- We support the idea of providing driving assessment and advice that gives people direct feedback, which helps them to drive more safely. The government should set out more clearly how they plan to work with the voluntary sector and training industry to deliver training schemes.
- The government could go further to support older people and their families if they consider they may stop driving. This decision can be a stressful event and the process of licensing and enforcement needs to be supportive and clear.

Is there a workable and sufficient action plan?

Improving road safety is vital for all road users, and initiatives to promote road safety will disproportionately benefit older drivers as a whole, given that for any accident an older person is two to four times more likely to be severely injured or to die as a result than is a young adult¹.

The government launched a Strategic Framework for Road Safety in 2011. The focus of policy change in this framework was on decentralisation and empowerment. The aim is to shift road safety from a national target driven agenda to be more closely led by local government and relevant service providers.

Local authorities should be best placed to understand the balance of road safety interventions that make sense for their local area. However, this decentralisation needs to be balanced with sufficient resources and powers to take action. There also needs to be clear national standards and principles, which can then be translated into local action.

For instance the strategic framework includes specific reference to older drivers. Age UK welcomes the connection that is made to the importance of car travel and

independent living. This needs to be clearly stated as a foundation for road safety interventions that affect people in later life.

Our towns and communities have increasingly been designed around travelling by car. This means having continued access to private transport is crucial for older people to get out and about. Research by Help the Aged explained the central role car travel had to many people's lives as it is available at any hour, provides door-to-door transport, and is often seen as a symbol of independenceⁱⁱ.

Currently, 79% of people aged between 60 and 69 hold a driving licence and 57% aged over 70ⁱⁱⁱ. The number of older people with a full driving licence has increased and this trend is likely to continue in the future. For instance, while fewer older women than men currently hold a licence this gap is likely to close as more women are likely to have driven throughout their life and will wish to continue.

Although research suggests the number of journeys decreases with age, car journeys are still the dominant form of travel for older people. Of all trips taken by people aged over 70, 63% are as a car driver or passenger; a further 21% are made by foot^{iv}. Car travel also continues to be regular, a total of 73% of respondents to a Help the Aged survey reported that they used their car 'every day or most days' and 23% 'several times a week'^v

Age UK recognises the process of ageing can lead to physical and mental decline that can have an impact on driving. There are also medical conditions, which affect your ability to drive. However, there are many misconceptions about the safety of drivers as they age. The media tends to emphasise one-off cases that show older drivers making mistakes and causing accidents. This caricature of poor and dangerous drivers does not reflect the diversity of older drivers' abilities and should not influence road safety strategy nationally or locally.

Statistics of road crashes of all severities show there is no age-related increase in the total number of incidents among the over 60s. Older drivers have far fewer crashes than younger drivers. Although 8% of drivers are over 70, they are involved in around four per cent of injury crashes; whereas of the 15 per cent of drivers who are in their teens and 20s, 34 per cent are involved in injury crashes. However, an older person's risk of being killed or suffering a serious injury as a result of a road crash is between two and five times greater than that of a younger person.^{vi}

Actions to continue to drive safely

Ability, not age, should determine whether anyone is deemed safe on the road. Any road safety intervention focussed on older drivers therefore needs to be proportionate to the level of risk. The emphasis should be on supporting older people to continue driving safely so that they retain their ability to get out and about.

The government's workplan focuses on the need to maintain and adapt their skills such as through education programmes for older drivers^{vii}. Age UK supports the idea of providing driving assessment and advice that gives people direct feedback, which helps them to drive more safely.

The government should set out more clearly how they plan to work with the voluntary sector and training industry to deliver training schemes. It is important that there is a good degree of national coverage so that everyone has the opportunity to benefit from this programme of work.

The government could go further to support older people and their families if they consider they may stop driving. It may be they simply need to make adjustments, such as not driving in the dark, or they may need to start thinking about using alternative forms of transport. This decision can be a stressful event and the process of licensing and enforcement needs to be supportive and clear.

The current DVLA process means that at the age of 70 driving licenses have to be renewed and individuals have to declare their “fitness to drive”. The licence is then renewed in this way every three years. If the DVLA have concerns about their fitness to drive they can seek further information from a GP or request a driving assessment takes place.

The previous government proposed consulting on the driving license requirements at 70 and health aspects, but this has not been taken any further^{viii}. Age UK felt that this would provide the basis for an informed debate on the support older people need to continue driving safely and when it is sensible to stop.

There needs to be a conversation with service providers involved in enforcement, including DVLA, health professionals and the police, to ensure that the process is non-confrontational and provides a supportive transition to alternative forms of travel.

ⁱ Help the Aged, Old Age – not the end of the road. 2008

ⁱⁱ Help the Aged, Old Age – not the end of the road. 2008

ⁱⁱⁱ As above

^{iv} Box, Gandolfi and Mitchell. Maintaining Safe Mobility for the Ageing Population” RAC Foundation

^v Help the Aged, Old Age – not the end of the road. 2008.

^{vi} IAM, Older drivers – safe or unsafe. 2010

^{vii} DfT. Strategic Framework for Road Safety. 2011

^{viii} House of Commons Library. Driving: Older drivers. Standard Note. 2009