Make Traffic Policing And Casualty Reduction A Priority, Says Charity, As Half Of Drivers Admit Flouting Traffic Laws

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A report released today (28 April 2015) by road safety charity Brake and Direct Line has revealed worrying and widespread disregard for traffic laws among UK drivers, with half (49%) admitting to breaking them.

Half of drivers who admit breaking traffic laws (25% of all drivers) say they do so through inattention, while the other half (23% of all drivers) admit doing so deliberately, because they think they can get away with it or do not agree with the laws. This makes it clear that more needs to be done both to enforce traffic laws, and to persuade drivers to buy in to the importance of complying with them.

With dedicated traffic police numbers being continually cut back in recent years [1], Brake is concerned that UK roads are becoming increasingly lawless territory. Police officers have reported that they have been forced to "retreat" from motorways, major and rural roads [2]. At the same time, road deaths and serious injuries recently increased by 4% after decades of reductions [3]. This follows government casualty reduction targets being dropped in 2010, against the advice of road safety experts including Brake.

Brake is calling on any new government to reverse this trend and make traffic enforcement a national policing priority, alongside giving greater impetus to bringing casualties down and making streets safer.

Other key findings from Brake and Direct Line's report on the state of UK driving include:

- UK drivers are more confident in the safety of their own driving than they were 10 years ago, with more than two thirds (69%) rating themselves as safer than most other drivers, up from half (50%) in 2005. Drivers judge each other more harshly than themselves, with the majority (58%) saying there are more dangerous drivers than safe drivers on UK roads.
- Young drivers (17-24) are most likely to rate their driving as safer than others, with three in five (58%) saying they are "much" safer. Given young drivers are proportionately involved in more crashes than older drivers [4], this suggests overconfidence is putting them at risk. Young drivers are more likely to rate the majority of other drivers as dangerous and to feel endangered by them, suggesting they may be more aware of bad habits that become habitual for experienced drivers.
- When asked what unsafe driving behaviours they witnessed most, distraction (such as from mobile phones) (71%), tailgating (71%), speeding (67%) and risking overtaking (66%) topped the list of UK drivers' concerns.

Find out more about the state of UK driving by viewing the full report here.

Julie Townsend, deputy chief executive, Brake, said: "As these figures make clear, law breaking on our roads is not just down to a minority but endemic. For whatever reason, many seem to feel they are beyond the law or that traffic laws are somehow optional. This represents a failure by government to ensure traffic policing is receiving adequate priority and to make clear the importance and legitimacy of traffic laws. Traffic laws exist to save lives and prevent injuries and terrible suffering. No matter how experienced or skilled a driver you believe yourself to be, you cannot break them safely.

"Whoever takes power after 7 May needs to make traffic policing a national policing priority, to ensure there is a strong deterrent against risky law-breaking on roads. We also need to see road safety given greater political priority, to set casualties falling once more and deliver safer streets for communities everywhere. That means reintroducing road casualty reduction targets, and working harder to win the ideological battle, to ensure everyone who gets behind the wheel understands why the rules exist and accepts their responsibility to abide by them and keep people safe."

Rob Miles, director of motor at Direct Line, commented: "Drivers continue to flout the rules of the road without realising the devastating impact their actions can have. Traffic laws are there for a reason and breaking them puts lives at risk.

"Breaking the law whilst behind the wheel can lead to a criminal conviction and being declined for car insurance, with even minor offences leading to fines and increased insurance premiums."

Brake campaigns for stronger traffic enforcement through its crackdown campaign. Tweet us:@Brakecharity, hashtag #crackdown. Read the survey report.

Facts

- Traffic police numbers in England and Wales have fallen by 23% in the past four years, from 5,635 in March 2010 to 4,356 in March 2014 [5]. This continues a trend, highlighted by Brake, which has been ongoing since at least 2008.
- It is not just overall numbers of traffic police that are falling, but their strength as a proportion of all police officers, down from 3.9% in 2010 to 3.4% in 2014 [6].
- The most recent national road casualty figures showed that deaths and serious injuries increased by 4% in the year ending September 2014, with deaths up by 1%. Child casualties also saw their first rolling year increase in 20 years [7].

About the report

These survey results come from Section 1 of Report 3: A risky business, part of the Direct Line and Brake reports on safe driving, 2015-17, released today (Tuesday 28 April 2015). The survey consisted of 1,000 drivers and was conducted by Surveygoo. See the report.

Full results

Q1: How do you think the safety of your driving compares with other drivers on the roads today?

- 0% said they are much more dangerous than most drivers (0% 17-24)
- 1% said they are slightly more dangerous than most drivers (0% 17-24)
- 29% said they are about average (19% 17-24)
- 30% said they are slightly safer than most drivers (23% 17-24)
- 39% said they are much safer than most drivers (58% 17-24)

Q2: In the past 12 months, what has been your impression of the standard of driving on UK roads?

- 1% said the roads are full of safe drivers (0% 17-24)
- 41% said there are more safe drivers than dangerous drivers (20% 17-24)
- 43% said there are more dangerous drivers than safe drivers (68% 17-24)
- 15% said the roads are full of dangerous drivers (12% 17-24)

Q3: In the past 12 months, how often have you felt endangered by the behaviour of other drivers?

- 2% said every time I drive (0% 17-24)
- 14% said most times I drive (24% 17-24)
- 56% said sometimes (51% 17-24)
- 24% said rarely (19% 17-24)
- 4% said never (5% 17-24)

Q4: In the past 12 months, what kinds of unsafe driving behaviour have you witnessed and been concerned about?

- 71% said distraction (e.g. by mobile phones, eating/drinking, or any other activity at the wheel unrelated to driving)
- 71% said tailgating/driving too close to other vehicles
- 67% said speeding
- 66% said risky overtaking
- 59% said turning, pulling out or changing lanes without looking properly
- 39% said drifting/swerving across lanes or straddling more than one lane
- 38% said running red lights
- 29% said road-rage
- 18% said poor vehicle maintenance
- 2% said none of the above
- 0% said they don't know

Q5: Breaking traffic laws: which statement is most applicable to you?

- 51% said: I never break traffic laws (60% female, 42% male)
- 24% said: I break traffic laws sometimes because I'm not paying attention (23% female, 26% male)

- 12% said: I break traffic laws sometimes because I think I can get away with it (8% female, 16% male)
- 9% said: I break traffic laws sometimes because I think the laws are wrong/unnecessary (6% female, 13% male)
- 2% said: I break traffic laws frequently because I think I can get away with it (1% female, 3% male)
- 1% said: I break traffic laws frequently because I'm not paying attention (1% female, 1% male)
- 0% said: I break traffic laws frequently because I think the laws are wrong/unnecessary (0% female, 0% male)

Brake

Brake is a national road safety charity that exists to stop the needless deaths and serious injuries that happen on roads every day, make streets and communities safer for everyone, and care for families bereaved and injured in road crashes. Brake promotes road safety awareness, safe and sustainable road use, and effective road safety policies. We do this through national campaigns, community education, services for road safety professionals and employers, and by coordinating the UK's flagship road safety event every November, Road Safety Week. Brake is a national, government-funded provider of support to families and individuals devastated by road death and serious injury, including through a helpline and support packs.

Brake was founded in the UK in 1995, and now has domestic operations in the UK and New Zealand, and works globally to promote action on road safety.

Follow Brake on Twitter or Facebook. Follow Julie Townsend on Twitter.

Road crashes are not accidents; they are devastating and preventable events, not chance mishaps. Calling them accidents undermines work to make roads safer, and can cause insult to families whose lives have been torn apart by needless casualties.

Direct Line

Started in 1985, Direct Line became the first UK insurance company to use the telephone as its main channel of communication. It provides motor, home, travel and pet insurance cover direct to customers by phone or on-line.

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End notes

[1] Figures were released by the Ministry of Justice in response to a parliamentary question from Jack Dromey MP to Michael Penning MP, Minister of State for Justice, 2 February 2015

[2] Dramatic rise in road deaths as numbers of traffic police fall, The Independent, 1 February 2015

[3] Increase in road casualties should be wake up call for politicians, says charity, Brake, 5 February 2015

[4] Drivers aged 17-19 only make up 1.5% of UK licence holders, but are involved in 12% of fatal and serious crashes. New research highlights need for graduated driving licensing, Transport Research Laboratory, 2014. See Brake's young driver fact page for more information on this issue.

[5] Figures were released by the Ministry of Justice in response to a parliamentary question from Jack Dromey MP to Michael Penning MP, Minister of State for Justice, 2 February 2015

[6] Ibid

[7] Reported road casualties in Great Britain, provisional estimates: Jul to Sep 2014, Department for Transport, 5 February 2015

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