I want to thank the Joint Committee on Transport and Communication for extending an invitation to me to speak on conviction rates for drink driving offences. I welcome the opportunity in the lead-up to Christmas to call on drivers not to drink and drive. Drink driving is a serious road safety issue. Those drinking and driving have killed and injured road-users and in the process destroyed families and communities. The relative risk of being involved in a fatal crash as a driver is up to 10 times greater for drivers with BACs between 0.05 and 0.07g/dL, compared with drivers with 0.00g/dL.

We know from a nationally representative survey of 1,000 motorists, conducted in November 2014 that 1 in 10 drivers (nearly 300,000 drivers) admitted to drinking alcohol before driving in the last 12 months; we know that 62% of drivers believe that it’s not safe to drive having taken any alcohol.

We can take from this that there is still ambivalence and in some cases contempt among some drivers about drinking and driving. We also know that among those who drink drive are more likely to speed which is another killer behaviour. Taken together this significantly multiplies the chances of a collision and the risk of injury or death.

There has been press comment in recent times about the rate of conviction in our courts of drink driving offences. This has led to unease about the effectiveness of law enforcement and concern that drink driving is being taken lightly. I have believed and said so in the media that some of the data quoted appeared to be out of context and was misinterpreted. I note that this position has now been clarified. A recent statement by the Courts Service clarifies the position and I will quote directly from that:

Recent reporting, and commentary on drink driving cases and conviction rates, has been inaccurate: simply due to the extrapolation of conviction rates from the wrong set of figures. This has distorted the actual outcomes in cases heard, and in no way reflects the conviction rates in the District Courts. Conviction rates are actually over twice the 40% reported and commented upon recently. In figures compiled over the past week by the Courts Service - it is clear that the average figure for convictions each year is between 85% and 88%.

The simple error people made in commenting on the recent figures, was made by comparing convictions to summonses requested, printed and issued - and then comparing them to the UK figures - which relate to cases actually heard and finalised - not the number of summonses in the system at one stage or another.

There are two important takeaways from this finding, one is our conviction rates compare favourably with UK rates and secondly it gives those caught a clear message if you drink and drive and end up in Court almost nine out of ten person will be convicted.

Road Safety Update November 2015

Chairman, if you would permit I would like to also give a brief overview of the road safety situation in Ireland at present.

As of 23rd November 2015, there have been 138 fatal collisions on Irish roads resulting in 144 deaths. This represents 26 fewer collisions and 34 fewer deaths (-19%) compared to the same day in 2014.
The average number of fatalities for 2015 to date stands at 13 deaths per month, compared to an average of 16 deaths per month in 2014.

Should the current trend of 13 deaths continue for November and December, the year could end with 156 fatalities, representing the safest year on record, bringing Ireland back in line with the longer term trend of decline observed since 2005. The death toll for 2014 was 193 deaths, and 188 deaths in 2013. The safest year to date was 2012, with 162 deaths.

As per the Road Safety Strategy 2013-2020, the target is to reduce deaths on Irish roads to 124 deaths or fewer by 2020, equivalent to 25 deaths per million population. The lowest fatality rate per million population was achieved in 2012 (35 deaths per million) but this rose to 42 deaths per million for 2013.
and 2014. In order to meet the target set for 2020, a 36% decline in fatalities is required between 2014 and 2020.

Reviewing the number of fatalities per month in 2015 to date, April 2015 was the safest month of the year (8 deaths), and this was in fact the safest month since November 2012. Compared to 2014, most months were safer in 2015, the only exceptions being July 2015 (20 deaths compared to 18 deaths in July 2014) and September 2015 (15 deaths compared to 11 deaths in September 2014). Note that while the Summer of 2014 was a particularly dangerous period on our roads, this danger period has not materialised to the same extent in 2015.

To date in 2015, 65 drivers and 24 passengers have lost their lives on Irish roads, compared to 75 drivers and 35 passengers over the same period in 2014. Overall, this represents 21 fewer vehicle occupant deaths compared to the same time last year. Sixteen of the 65 drivers (25%) killed and 8 of the 24 passengers (33%) were confirmed as not wearing a seatbelt at the time of the collision. Deaths among vulnerable road users (pedestrians, motorcyclists and pedal cyclists) represent almost half

*Note: 2014 and 2015 figures are provisional and subject to change.*
(46%) of all deaths on our roads to date in 2015, and while there has been an overall decline in deaths among VRUs since last year (down 17%), it is important to note that motorcyclists and pedal cyclists remain as high risk as last year, and the decline noted among pedestrians must be viewed in the context of us moving into late November/December when pedestrians out walking in the hours of darkness tend to be particularly at risk. Note that to date in 2015, there has also been a decline in deaths among children aged under 15.

Interventions which may have contributed to the overall decline observed to date in 2015:

- RSA International Conference on Child Safety in April 2015
- Transfer of RSA/AGS Go Slow Campaign to high risk period of Summer
- High profile launch of July Fatality Review
- Increase in penalty points for specific offences in August 2014
- Road safety has featured heavily in media reporting in second half of 2015 in particular
- New RSA public awareness campaigns

An analysis of the profile of road users killed shows that the following areas of intervention remain critical if the reduction in fatalities seen to date in 2015 is to be sustained in 2016:

- Highlight the contributory factors alcohol plays in fatal & serious injury collisions.
- Highlight motorcyclist safety in Summer months, with particular reference to speed control
- Promote wearing of high visibility clothing for pedestrians
- Continue to promote cyclist safety among drivers & cyclists
- Safe behaviour by younger and older drivers, particularly young males
- Reinforce the importance of wearing seatbelts
- Continue to reduce incidence of Learner Drivers driving unaccompanied
Finally, I say to drivers as we approach this festive season, please do not drink and drive and wreak havoc on families and communities this Christmas. I also appeal to passengers to step up and take responsibility to ensure friends, partners, spouses do not drive when they have taken a drink. Speak up, there is a collective responsibility when it comes to drink driving.