

Opening Statement by Mr Sam Waide, CEO of Road Safety Authority to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport and Communication, Wednesday 24th April 2024

Good afternoon, everyone.

I would first like to express our thanks to the Committee for the opportunity to speak to you today on Ireland's recent road safety trends.

We are deeply saddened to acknowledge the tragic loss of life on Ireland's roads in 2023 and to date in 2024. I want to extend my condolences to the bereaved families across the country, in addition to those with serious injuries, which are life altering, both for the individuals and their families.

We last spoke to the Joint Oireachtas Committee in September 2023. We have now analysed collision data for that full year, and I would like to first outline key statistics from 2023. I will then discuss some of the emerging trends we have seen in 2024.

A total of 185 people were killed and 1438 were seriously injured on Irish roads in 2023. During this year, the monthly fatalities average was higher than in any of the previous 6 years, at 15 deaths per month.

In 2023 there were higher numbers of young lives lost than any of the past five years. Tragically, we lost 12 children under the age of 16, and 48 teenagers and young adults aged 16-25 years died on our roads.

47% of road deaths occurred late at night/in the early hours of the morning, an increase compared to 2022. 48% occurred during the weekend.

In terms of location, rural roads with a speed limit of 80km/h or more accounted for almost 7 in 10 of all deaths in 2023.

In a recent European Commission publication, Ireland was ranked in 6th place among the EU member states, in relation to deaths per million population for 2023, having been placed 3rd in the previous year.

Unfortunately, similar patterns in road user deaths in 2023 have continued into 2024. Provisional analysis of collision data from 1 January to the 21 April 2024 has indicated further fatality increases.

64 deaths have occurred on our roads this year to date, which is 14 more deaths compared to the same period in 2023. While the monthly average for fatalities last year was 15, this is at 19 deaths per month for 2024.

It is also important to acknowledge that over 300 people have been seriously injured in road traffic collisions so far in 2024, based on provisional data.

While it is not yet possible for An Garda Síochána to confirm the primary contributing factors to fatal collisions in 2024, our data shows that 25% of fatalities occurred between 4pm and 8pm, whilst 36% occurred late at night or in the early morning. Research suggests that these periods present greater risks in terms of driver behaviours like drink driving, taking drugs & driving and fatigue.

We know from international research and our Irish data that dangerous driver behaviours including speeding, intoxicated, distracted or fatigued driving and the non-wearing of seat belts are key contributory factors to road deaths. Global leaders at the Transport Research Arena last week in Dublin confirmed Ireland is not alone in facing road safety challenges. Few EU member states are currently on track to meet the target of halving the number of road deaths by 2030, as per a recent EU audit. A 1% overall decline in road deaths amongst the EU 27 was achieved between 2022 and 2023.

During the TRA conference, international experts emphasised that road safety requires funding and political support, critical to saving lives. They also acknowledged the essential role of education, technology, engineering and enforcement in improving safety on the roads, with many experts highlighting increases in dangerous road user behaviours post-pandemic.

In line with this, I would now like to talk to some of the key road safety initiatives needed to improve road safety in Ireland, and those being progressed.

Awareness and Education

The RSA's communications focus for 2024 is speed, distracted driving, drink driving and vulnerable road users (cyclists, older pedestrians and E-scooters). Some initiatives since the last Joint Oireachtas Committee appearance are set out below.

From late 2023 to early 2024, we developed a campaign with messages around dangerous road behaviours that targeted young people, particularly males. The campaign included nighttime radio and digital audio (to align with increased road risk times), using new digital channels, and geo-targeting and budget upweighting in counties where there were increased road fatalities.

Usage of historic hard-hitting adverts was key to our immediate response to Ministerial road safety priorities, and RSA ran:

- Siobhan and Gillian’s Crashed Lives adverts ran in tandem before Christmas,
- The award-winning “Anatomy of a Split Second” mobile phone distraction advert ran in January,
- Liz O’Donnell’s “Chairperson’s Leadership” message ran weekly from November 2023 to February 2024.

In November 2023 (and in March 2024), the RSA aired a new 30kmph campaign - reduction in urban speed potentially saving pedestrian and cyclist lives, especially those of children, and reducing serious injuries among these vulnerable road users, which predominately take place in urban areas.

Vision Zero’s aim is to eliminate all road deaths and serious injuries on Irish roads by the year 2050. The RSA ran a campaign over six months (September 2023 – February 2024), with three distinct phases to generate public buy-in to this national effort. The RSA also ran a brand-new radio and digital campaign called SAY IT with stations across the country.

We are currently running a hard-hitting campaign with Imogen Cotter outlining her experience of serious injuries and asking motorists to slow down and pass wide of vulnerable road users. The recent announcement of approval for RSA to invest a further €3m of our reserve funds, to increase awareness and education programmes, means the RSA has already upweighted campaigns such as the Imogen Cotter piece, in addition to targeting **speeding on rural roads (80Km/h)**, on drink driving and driving under the influence of drugs, and on the consequences of becoming a **disqualified driver**.

The RSA will hold its first ever Youth Representative Forum on 29 April to support these young participants on their road safety priorities and we thank

the Department of Children, Children's Ombudsman and many youth organisations for their support in this.

In May, RSA will air its new **e-scooters** tv-led campaign which will help all road users to understand how they can share the roads safely with e-scooter users, while also helping new and prospective e-scooter users to understand which Rules of the Road apply to them.

The RSA has undertaken an audit of its existing education services and interventions and is now developing a three-year implementation plan (2025-2028) to improve reach, impact and continuity. As an immediate step we are updating the existing teacher-led transition year programme, for rollout from September, working closely with the Departments of Education and Transport and other voluntary road safety educators. We are to roll out a pilot programme for festivals and colleges to reach students 18-23, including using our 360°-rollover simulator.

Further speed related actions

Speeding both increases the likelihood of a road traffic collision occurring, and the severity of injury sustained, should a crash occur.

- The Department of Transport are leading on the implementation of the recommendations of the speed limit review (Action 6 of the Government Strategy).
- The working group led by TII has commenced the development of Ireland's first ever national road safety camera strategy (Action 67). Three sites have been identified for the introduction of average speed cameras, and nine additional sites have been identified for additional static cameras.

Actions on legislation:

- The Road Traffic Act 2024 was enacted on 12 April 2024.
- This new legislation will initiate the process of coordinated speed limit reviews being conducted by each local authority, delivering safer default limits across the country.
- It will also facilitate the administration of multiple sets of penalty points where multiple traffic offences are being engaged in at the time of detection.

- In addition, it will make drug testing mandatory in the same circumstances where alcohol testing is mandatory.

Enforcement related actions:

Research clearly demonstrates that greater levels of high-visibility enforcement will reduce dangerous driver behaviours and collisions on our roads, and we urge sufficient resource for dedicated policing of our roads. We welcome the implementation of 30 minutes of high-visibility policing by uniformed Gardaí per shift.

Data Sharing for road safety

I would like to discuss with you today the priority activity which is being progressed in relation to the sharing of Road Traffic Collision data. This work has progressed in collaboration with other key agencies, with oversight from the Road Safety Partnership Board. The purpose is to ensure sufficient legislation is in place, to safeguard the continued sharing of detailed collision data. The Department of Transport has also engaged with the Attorney General's Office on this subject.

Whilst solutions were being investigated and progressed, the RSA did share key variables from the Road Traffic Collision dataset, which has continued to support the local authorities in their evidence-led decision-making.

As has always been the case, local authorities receive data on high collision locations for the national road network from Transport Infrastructure Ireland.

I can confirm that collision data provided to the Department of Transport is being centrally analysed by the Department. From this analysis, I am informed that "locations of interest" are notified to each local authority by the Department. The Department invites applications from local authorities for low cost safety schemes. In 2023, 55 locations of interest safety schemes were applied for and funded and in 2024 60 locations of interest safety schemes were applied for and are being funded and implemented in the current financial year.

In the coming weeks, RSA and others, including An Garda Síochána and the Department are working together with the preparation of the necessary submission to the Data Protection Commissioner (DPC), as part of the

process of legislating. I have included greater details on this work in our submission and my colleagues will be happy to answer any questions on this matter.

Updates on National Car Testing (NCT) & Driver Testing Services

During our visits to this committee, the performance of the NCT has been a topic for discussion. As committed, the service returned to within the Service Level Agreement (SLA) during the month of December and currently the booking lead time at the end of March was 15 days vs our SLA of 12 days. In addition, the number of customers on the priority waiting list has reduced from a high point from >65k in February 2023 to 4k as of the end of March 2024.

The RSA are now engaged with Applus to improve the customer experience, ensuring sufficient testing capacity, improved NCT website, a local training & education program and to identify new testing techniques to improve operational efficiency for the remainder of the contract term.

This committee previously engaged with me and my colleagues regarding the suitability of the NCT contract and term. I can confirm that an independent review of the contract and terms of same has taken place and have been deemed to be appropriate for the nature of the contract and my colleague Brendan Walsh will be happy to take any questions on this matter.

Driver Testing Service

I can confirm the actual number of learner drivers who are available, eligible and waiting for an invitation to book their driving test is 60,385, down from

71,932 in September 2023, a decrease of 16%. At the end August 2023, the waiting time for a driver test was 30.4 weeks. With the addition of additional driver tester, new scheduling technology and the commitment to deliver additional tests through overtime has resulted in a reduction in the waiting time to 15.6 weeks as of the end of March and as committed to this committee, the service will be back to its normal SLA by the summer of 2024.

In summary, we are deeply concerned about the high numbers of people who have died and been seriously injured on our roads to date in 2024, and this upward trend since 2023. We must reverse this trend together, and it requires immediate, collective action from all relevant agencies, with a cross-government approach, including key road safety stakeholders and communities, to achieve this. We are particularly grateful that our Chair and myself could meet with An Taoiseach Simon Harris last week to progress this. It is critical that road safety remains a priority investment for Government, and that increased levels of awareness, education, engineering and enforcement are implemented. Phase 2 of the Government's road safety strategy will be developed over the coming months, to ensure effective priorities helps to reduce fatalities and serious injuries beyond 2024.

This concludes my opening statement to the committee on requested matters. I would like to take this opportunity to thank my dedicated RSA staff who work incredibly hard, every day, during and after the pandemic, to improve safety on our roads. I am joined by my colleagues Brendan Walsh, Michael Rowland, Sarah O'Connor and Nessa Kelly and we are happy to take questions members may have in relation to our submission and my opening statement and other matters pertaining to road safety.

Thankyou.