

## Submission Document to Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport and Communications, Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> April 2024

### 1. Road Safety

In relation to Ireland's road safety performance so far this year, it is with great sadness that we acknowledge the tragic loss of life on Ireland's roads in 2023 and 2024. On behalf of myself and my colleagues in the RSA, I would like to extend my condolences to all of the bereaved families across the country at this most difficult time.

We also know that between 2019 and 2023 for every fatality on Irish roads, there were 9 serious injuries, many of which have devastating lifelong consequences, which are life-altering for both the person injured and for those who care for them.

#### **This year's fatalities/serious injuries**

Over the time period 1st January 2024 to 21 April 2024<sup>[1]</sup>, there have been 59 fatal collisions, which have resulted in 64 fatalities on Irish roads, which is 14 more deaths (+28%) compared to the same period in 2023. In addition, provisional data indicates over 300 people have been seriously injured in road traffic collisions so far this year.

Of the 64 fatalities in 2024, 26 were drivers, 19 were passengers, 12 were pedestrians, 5 were motorcyclists, and 2 were cyclists. This means that seven in ten (70%) of those who died were vehicle occupants, while three in ten (30%) were vulnerable road users.

Similar patterns from 2023 are continuing into 2024 in particular concerning passenger fatalities and fatalities among young people. In 2023 the monthly average was higher than in any of the previous 6 years at 15 deaths per month; in 2024 it currently stands at 19. In 2024, there has been an increase in the number of passengers killed (19), which has almost doubled compared to the same time period last year. We have also seen a continuing trend in deaths among young people as three in ten fatalities (30%) were aged 16-25 years. In 2023, there were 12 child fatalities (0-15 years) which was the highest than in any of the previous five years. This year 6 fatalities were aged 0-15 years. This year a quarter of fatalities (25%) occurred in the evening (between 4pm and 8pm), while over a third (36%) occurred late at night or the early morning (between 8pm and 7am).

#### **Importance of research**

It is crucial that we understand the profile of fatal road traffic collisions in more detail, in terms of the historic trend over the last 5 years, and specifically in terms of the road users involved, and when and where these collisions have occurred. This work is vital in informing the strategic targeting of enforcement activity by An Garda Síochána, and the appropriate targeting of our public education and awareness activities.

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<sup>1</sup> Figures are provisional and subject to change. Figures are current as of 9am 17 April 2024.

## Trends in 2023

### Overview

- There were 185 fatalities in 2023.
- Fatalities increased by 19% compared to the previous year. The last time a similar percentage increase was observed was in 1987 when there was a 19% increase in fatalities.
- Increases have been seen in fatalities in 4 of the last 5 years, and in serious injuries since 2014.
- The current trends must be reversed, in order to meet Ireland's target reductions in deaths and serious injuries by 2030.

### Road user types

- Fatalities among all road user groups increased in 2023, particularly among drivers, passengers, and pedestrians.
- In 2023, there were 68 drivers, 34 passengers, 44 pedestrians, 27 motorcyclists, 9 cyclists and 3 e-scooter users.
- The last time there was a higher number of pedestrian fatalities was in 2011 when there were 47 pedestrian deaths. Crossing the road was a factor in almost half of these pedestrian deaths in 2023.
- In 2023 there was an increase in passenger deaths of 12 compared to 2022.

### Day of week

The profile of when fatal collisions occurred in 2023 differs to when serious injury collisions occur, both in terms of time, and day. Any enforcement plan must consider both:

- Almost half (48%) of fatalities occurred between Friday and Sunday; the highest number occurred on Saturday (40; 21%), of which 19 occurred late at night (8pm-4am). While traffic volumes may be lower late at night and at weekends, the evidence suggests that these times can present greater risks in terms of drink and drug-driving and fatigue. Targeted enforcement and education measures need to be planned with this in mind.
- While over the course of the pandemic we had seen a reduction in fatalities over the weekend, in 2022 and 2023 we saw a return to pre-pandemic levels of fatalities over the weekend.

### Time of day

- The highest number of fatalities occurred between 4pm and 8pm (41), and between 8pm and midnight (41). The high numbers from 4pm to 8pm may in part reflect a particularly busy period on our roads, where traffic volumes are high, and there are more

opportunities for conflict. However, traffic volumes are typically low between 8pm and midnight, yet there may be more socialising.

- Of concern, a high number of fatalities occurred between midnight and 4am (32, 17%). This reflects a return to the pattern we had typically seen pre-covid where a significant proportion of fatalities occurred late at night/early morning.
- In particular, a notable number of fatalities occurred early morning Saturday into the afternoon (22 between midnight-2pm), and then Saturday night into early morning Sunday (20 between Sat 8pm-Sun 6am).
- By way of comparison, high proportions of serious injuries occurred in the afternoon into the evening (46%, 1pm-7pm).

### **Location**

- Tipperary (16), Cork (15), Dublin (15), Galway (12) and Mayo (12) saw the highest numbers of fatalities. Together they represent 38% of all fatalities.
- Rural roads with a speed limit of 80km/h or more account for 7 in 10 of all fatalities. We know that collisions at higher speeds on such roads are more likely to result in a fatal outcome.
- By way of comparison, just over half of serious injuries occurred on urban roads with a speed limit of 60km/h or less.

### **Age & Gender profile**

- There was a tragic loss of young lives on our roads last year, and in greater numbers relative to the previous 5 years.
- 12 children under the age of 16 were killed which was the highest number of child fatalities compared to previous 5 years.
- 48 teenagers and young adults aged 16-25 years died on our roads, representing a quarter of all fatalities (48, 26%), and accounting for the largest share of fatalities across the age spectrum in 2023.
- Deaths in this age group (16-25 years) almost doubled: 48 deaths compared to an average 25 over each of the previous 5 years.
- Almost a third (31%) of young people aged 16-25 killed were drivers.
- 11 unaccompanied Learner Drivers were involved in fatal collisions in 2023. This was an increase compared to the previous 4 years when there was an average of 4 unaccompanied learner drivers involved annually.
- A further third of fatalities (33%) were passengers. In the majority of cases where a young passenger was killed, the driver was also young (16-25 years).
- Overall, young road users aged 16-25 years represented large proportions of fatalities (26%) and serious injuries (22%) in 2023.
- Almost 8 in 10 of all fatalities (78%) were male, and this is a pattern we typically see year on year in Ireland, and is apparent across Europe, that males are at greater risk of dying in road traffic collisions than females.

### Serious injuries (2019-2023)

- On average over the period 2019-2023, there were 9 serious injuries for every fatality on Irish roads.
- The profile of serious injuries by road user type between 2019 and 2023 was broadly similar to that of fatalities except for cyclists. While 5% of those killed between 2019 and 2023 were cyclists, 19% of those seriously injured during this time period were cyclists.
- The age profile of those killed and seriously injured between 2019 and 2023 was broadly similar, however a greater share of those killed were aged 66+ (24%) compared to those seriously injured (13%).
- While fatalities occurred mostly on high-speed rural roads (3 in 4), half of all serious injuries between 2019 and 2023 occurred on urban roads (53%). This peaks among cyclists (8 in 10 on urban roads) and pedestrians (9 in 10 urban roads).
- More than half (54%) of serious injuries occurred between 12pm and 8pm, (44% of fatalities). Compared to serious injuries, higher proportions of fatalities occurred between 8pm and 4am (33% vs 22%).

To compliment the information on serious injuries from Garda collision data, the RSA has also analysed serious injury data from hospitals in line with recommendations from the European Commission. This provides additional information of benefit to the RSA and stakeholders, such as detailed descriptions of injury types, length of time in hospital etc. In March 2024, the RSA published a report on cyclist serious injuries based on hospital data and will publish reports on other road user groups in the coming months.

### Longer term research on contributory factors and dangerous behaviours

It is too soon in the investigation process to identify the contributory factors to the fatal collisions that have occurred in 2023 and to date in 2024. However, looking at longer term international research and Irish data it is clear that speeding, intoxicated, distracted or fatigued driving, and the non-wearing of seat belts are some of the main contributory factors to death and serious injury on our roads.

Irish data from a range of studies, including self-report surveys, observational studies, qualitative research, analysis of coronial data and collision data show concerning levels of these dangerous driving behaviours, and in some cases, a deterioration. We know from the international research literature that highly visible enforcement is key to reversing these trends.

In terms of speeding, one in two drivers were exceeding 30, 50 and 60km/h speed limits in our 2023 free speed observational study. Self-report speeding behaviours and acceptability of speeding have been consistently high since 2020 and have yet to return to pre-Covid levels. In addition, our analysis of coronial data for driver deaths that occurred during 2015-2019 found that one in four (26%) were exceeding a safe speed in the lead-up to the fatal crash.

Regarding drink-driving, one in ten drivers have reported driving after drinking any alcohol in the last 12 months in 2023. These surveys have also indicated higher levels of social acceptability of drink-driving in recent years. One in four drivers also believe it is acceptable to drive short distances after having a drink and our analysis of coronial data found that 37% of driver fatalities that occurred in 2015-2019 had a positive toxicology for alcohol.

Drug-driving is another significant concern. 2023 data from the Medical Bureau of Road Safety indicates that drivers arrested for drug-driving are typically male, and under the age of 45. Cannabis, cocaine and benzodiazepines are the most commonly detected drugs.

Regarding seat belt wearing, a decline in driver (-4%) and front seat passenger (-5%) seat belt rates were recorded in our 2023 observational study. In addition, between 2019 and 2023, 23% of driver fatalities, and 21% of passenger fatalities were not wearing a seat belt at the time of the collision.

In terms of driver fatigue, in a 2023 self-report survey, one in five motorists reported falling asleep or nodding off while driving. Results from the 2023 E-Survey of Road User Attitudes found that 18% of drivers in Ireland drove when so sleepy they had trouble keeping their eyes open in the last 30 days.

High levels of mobile phone use have also been reported by drivers in Ireland. Survey research from 2023 has indicated that approximately one in five motorists are checking their phones while driving. One in ten report talking on a hand-held phone while driving, and one in ten report writing messages/emails behind the wheel. In addition, 9% of drivers in our 2023 observational study were using a handheld mobile device, a 3% increase from 2022.

Concerns were raised by a number of key stakeholders in relation to driver mobile phone use during the 2023 Annual Review meeting. In light of this, the RSA commissioned a qualitative study examining driver mobile phone use in Ireland last year.

Key findings included that driver mobile phone use stems from both conscious (e.g., low risk perceptions) and unconscious (e.g., dependence, habit) processes. In particular, young drivers perceived the likelihood of being detected by police as extremely low. Experts also highlighted the importance of detection and enforcement to reduce driver mobile phone use, potential technological solutions, and that a systemic approach is needed to tackle in-vehicle driver distraction overall.

It is important that we continue to concentrate our education and awareness initiatives on these dangerous behaviours. However, more, highly visible enforcement is clearly needed if we are to reduce these levels of traffic offending and save lives on Irish roads.

Deterrence theory states that people avoid offending due to the perceived consequences of doing so. Key factors impacting deterrence include the perceived certainty, swiftness and severity of punishment. More visible police enforcement improves perceptions of the certainty of being detected and punished when offending. This is critical, as ultimately, if drivers do not believe they will be detected when engaging in traffic offences, the swiftness and severity of punishment are less impactful.

This has been reflected in multiple RSA surveys and qualitative research studies. 66% of respondents to a 2022 in-depth survey on mobile phone use, for example, stated that the traffic rules for mobile phone use while driving are not being checked sufficiently. In a 2022 in-depth survey on speeding 'More Gardaí on the roads checking' was identified by 60% of speeding drivers as a reason they would stop engaging in this dangerous behaviour.

### **Drink-driving and the proposed Sale of Alcohol Bill**

In relation to drink-driving specifically, the RSA would like to note our concerns regarding the proposed Sale of Alcohol Bill. As set out above, Ireland clearly has a significant problem with drink-driving.

In light of these concerning statistics, the RSA is concerned that the proposed later licensing/opening hours for bars, restaurants and nightclubs will have a further negative impact on road safety in Ireland, particularly in the absence of significant increases in roads policing numbers. International research indicates that such extensions can increase drink-driving and increase road traffic collisions on rural roads.

As emphasised during the Annual Review meeting on the 18 January 2024, Irish road safety stakeholders already face significant challenges to reverse the increasing numbers of road user fatalities. We have also set ambitious national targets in the Government Road Safety Strategy (2021-2030) to reduce the number of road deaths and serious injuries by 50% by 2030, and achieve Vision Zero (zero deaths and zero serious injuries) by 2050.

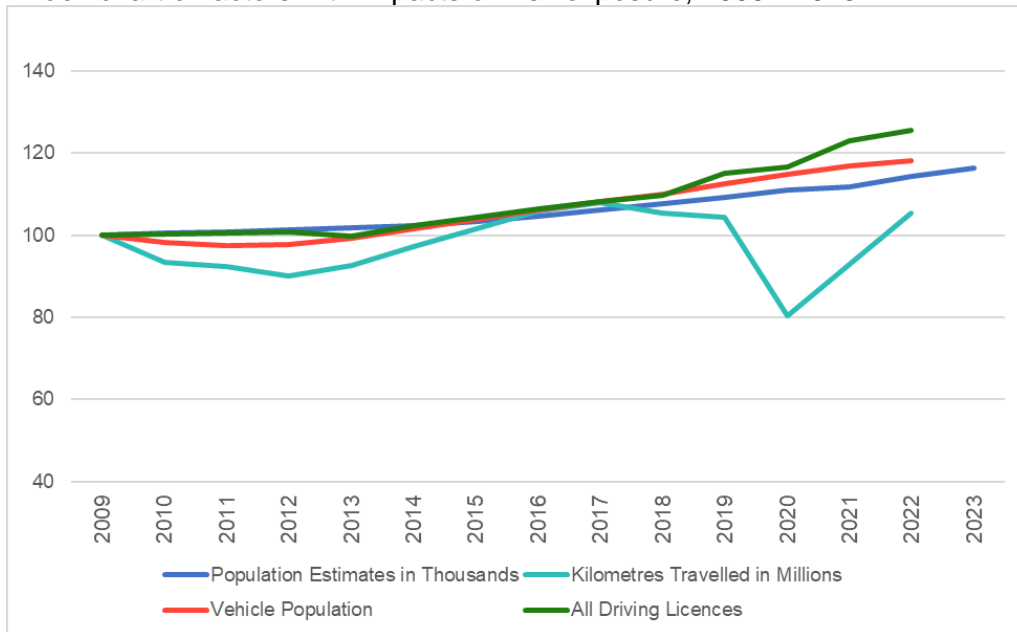
The RSA is concerned that this bill will jeopardise these efforts, increase trauma on our roads, and our ability to reach our national 2030 and 2050 targets.

We understand that the intention of this bill is to benefit the night-time economy. However, it must be recognised that the estimated cost of a single, fatal road traffic collision<sup>[2]</sup> is €3.6 million. It must also be recognised that this figure does not even begin to cover the terrible human and societal costs that the loss of a loved one in such devastating circumstances incurs.

**Risk exposure**

There has been incremental growth in all major factors that influence risk exposure (see Figure 1), that is overall population, vehicle population, driver licences and this growth is predicted to continue over the next decade. There were increases in fatalities in 4 of the last 5 years, and in serious injuries since 2014.

Figure 1. Index chart of factors with impacts on risk exposure, 2009 - 2023



As other indicators are rising, there have been substantial reductions in the numbers in the roads policing unit, from 1,046 in 2009 to the most recent figure of 627 (40% reduction, February 2024). This has the potential to reduce our ability to tackle Ireland’s rising fatality and dangerous behaviour trends. Consequently, fatalities and serious injuries in road traffic collisions are likely to increase unless road safety interventions are amplified to counter this growth.

The current trends must be reversed, in order to meet Ireland’s target reductions in deaths and serious injuries.

<sup>[1]</sup> Figures are provisional and subject to change.  
<sup>[2]</sup> Estimate is for the cost of a fatal road traffic collision in 2021.

## 2. Our strategic approach to road safety

It is critical that we implement an evidence-based approach to reverse the increasing numbers of road deaths that we have seen this year. Our Government Road Safety Strategy (2021-2030) is founded on the Safe System approach, which has been recognised as international best practice and critical to achieving significant reductions in road deaths and serious injuries. Our Strategy contains seven Safe System priority intervention areas, and our Phase 1 Action Plan (2021-2024), which is due to reach its conclusion later this year, includes a range of actions under each of these. The Phase 1 Action Plan is a comprehensive roadmap to reduce deaths and serious injuries on our roads in line with the Safe System approach, and includes short, medium and long-term road safety initiatives, many of which will be brought forward into the Phase 2 Action Plan (2025-2027) which will shortly commence development. While the RSA has lead responsibility for the implementation of the Strategy and Phase 1 Action Plan, cross-agency collaboration, transformational partnership-working and political commitment are essential to their success.

### Priority Focus Areas for 2024

The second Annual Review meeting of key Irish road safety stakeholders was held in January 2024. The focus of this meeting was to discuss the latest road safety trends and identify any additional complementary measures to the Phase 1 Action Plan to tackle any new and emerging concerns. A small number of new priority focus areas, in addition to those identified during the 2023 Annual Review meeting, were prioritised for implementation across 2024. These new items were then approved by the Road Safety Transformation Partnership Board and the Ministerial Committee. There are eight priority focus areas in total, and these include:

1. The use of technology and targeted enforcement to reduce traffic offending.
2. Conducting research to better understand driver behaviour and inform targeted interventions.
3. Enhancing the penalty points system
4. Driving for work
5. Reviewing the driver testing curriculum
6. Working collaboratively on the implementation of the recommendations of the Action 6 speed limit review
7. Development of a National Road Safety Camera Strategy, to identify the funding, partnership and governance arrangements required to support the management and implementation of road safety camera enforcement in Ireland.
8. Eliminate the incidence of learner drivers on their third or subsequent Learner Permit.

Addressing these priority focus areas in collaboration with key stakeholders, and in conjunction with the implementation of the Phase 1 Action Plan and Safe System approach, represents an effective, systematic approach to tackle the increasing number of Irish road deaths, and reverse this trend.



## Dangerous behaviours

Since the September JOC meeting a number of road safety initiatives related to dangerous behaviours have been progressed.

**Action 6 set out to review the existing framework for setting speed limits.** The working group set up to conduct this review delivered recommendations to the Department of Transport and the Minister. An Implementation Group has now been established, led by the Department of Transport, to oversee delivery of these recommendations within two years. Progress will be monitored by the Road Safety Transformation Partnership Board and reported on every six months for the duration of the task force.

**Action 67 has an objective to further develop camera-based enforcement.** Under an extension of this action, a cross sectoral National Road Safety Camera Strategy Working Group was set up earlier this year with TII as Chair. The primary objective of this group is to provide direction, knowledge, and guidance from key stakeholders to assist the development of the National Safety Camera Strategy. The strategy will recommend the funding, partnership and governance arrangements associated with the management and implementation of camera enforcement in Ireland. In addition, there will be an extension of the average speed camera network in the coming months. This is due to commence with the piloting of new average speed cameras on three new sites on single carriageway roads. The trials are currently being developed through the TII, AGS, GoSafe and the relevant local authorities (Mayo CoCo, Cavan CoCo and Monaghan CoCo). The three locations chosen for the trial are based on similar criteria used by Transport Scotland i.e. roads that have a high number of speed related collisions. The sections of road identified as part of the trial are:

- N5 Swinford Bypass
- N3 between Belturbet and Cavan Town
- N2 Carrickmacross

It is anticipated that the infrastructure (poles, safety barriers, signage, electric connections etc.) for the Average Speed Safety Camaras will be in place by July this year and that the cameras will be in operation by September. In addition, the locations for a further 10 static cameras are due to be confirmed at the next meeting of the Safety Camera Project Board on 26<sup>th</sup> April.

There has also been confirmation of continued funding to support an additional 1,500 GoSafe camera van hours per month until October of this year.

The **Road Traffic Bill 2024** was published in January and has been passed by the Dáil and the Seanad. This bill will facilitate the administration of multiple sets of penalty points where multiple traffic offences are being engaged in at the time of detection. This bill will also make drug testing mandatory in the same circumstances where alcohol testing is mandatory.

The RSA welcomes the recent announcement that all uniformed Gardaí will now conduct **30 minutes of high-visibility roads policing** per shift and will be using social media and radio in the coming weeks to support and raise awareness of the implementation of the 30 minutes of high-visibility policing by uniformed Gardaí. An **increase** in Garda member numbers dedicated to roads policing is still urgently needed if we are to reverse Ireland's fatality trends and reach our 2030 and 2050 targets, however. Research clearly demonstrates that greater levels of high-visibility enforcement will reduce dangerous driver behaviours and collisions on our roads.

We are also upweighting our campaigns and education initiatives to target the dangerous behaviours and support Garda enforcement more broadly, as set out below.

### 3. Campaigns and Education

#### Concerns about Youth Fatalities

Over the last number of years, we have moved to investing a significant amount of our budget to specifically target much of our advertising to reach young people, in particular young men, with a focus on video on demand, social and digital.

As a result of the funding of immediate measures, the RSA spent significantly on youth and regional advertising across Spotify (in-car usage specifically), night youth radio, podcast hosting and special youth-orientated media partnerships, and a focus on digital and social channels (including Youtube Music, Twitch and TikTok). The RSA used existing hard-hitting radio adverts like Gillian Treacy's ad about losing her son Ciaran, adverts on speed and seatbelt usage designed for young men, and created two new radio adverts (Ghosted – on mobile phone usage, and an advert connecting the impact of drugs on driving ability).

This youth-orientated audio campaign featured increased spend in counties where the RSA has seen increased levels of fatalities and we utilised geo-targeting on the digital channels to steer more advert frequency to those five counties – Tipperary, Galway, Mayo, Cork and Dublin.

The RSA has commissioned research to assess the impact of this digital and audio campaign and that is due back in coming days.

The RSA also engaged with the USI and localised student unions, to create a series of videos in advance of Christmas 2023, highlighting peer voices in road safety, as well as attending USI events to brief Welfare Officers on the work. The RSA provided air fresheners for cars with a mobile phone safety message for students, alongside bike lights and other high visibility materials. The RSA has also brought its shuttle to campuses in recent months and is planning an ongoing campaign with the USI use their leadership and influence to improve youth road safety outcomes.

In addition to the above measures, all RSA campaigns from September to now have included young males as a specific target audience and all campaigns have involved specific media buying to target young males.

## **Communications and Education Interventions around Dangerous Behaviours**

(SAY IT campaign, education programmes and RSA support of advocate stories underpin all dangerous driving behaviours)

### **Drink-Driving**

September 2023 – Present:

- Trebling of the planned spend on the December tv drink driving advertising.
- Inclusion of drink driving audio advert in youth-orientated audio and social media.
- Purchase of new Oculus headsets to expand delivery of our existing Consequences (drink-driving) intervention in campuses across Ireland (Q4 2023 – Q2 2024).

Forthcoming:

- Production and roll out of new advert on drink-driving, targeted at young males
- Festivals, colleges and Gamerfest engagements

### **Seat-Belt Wearing**

September 2023 – Present:

- Inclusion of seatbelts audio advert in youth-orientated audio and social media.

Forthcoming:

- Re-running another burst of the seatbelt advert in July 2024 – significant upweight possible as a result of Government funding 2024.
- Rollout of rollover simulator for summer festival is being explored as option.
- Public tender for the roll-over simulator experiential intervention designed to encourage seat-belt wearing.

### **Distracted Driving - Mobile Phone Usage**

September 2023 – Present:

- Ran award-winning Anatomy of a Split Second mobile phone advert in January 2024.
- Creation of new radio advert on mobile phone distraction in youth orientated audio campaign - "Ghosted".
- Inclusion of new mobile phone distraction audio advert in youth-orientated audio and social.
- Created new accompanying digital and out-of-home asset in bus shelters and major transport hubs in December 2023 and January 2024.
- Used our washrooms advertising packages across sports and entertainment location to promote mobile phone advert – always on.
- Used extensive live sports package advert bookings to showcase mobile phone advert – January 2024 to present.

Forthcoming:

- Used extensive live sports package advert bookings to showcase mobile phone advert – remainder of 2024.
- 2024 Conference on distracted driving, with focus on mobile phone distraction.

## **Drug-Driving**

September 2023 – Present:

- Creation of new radio advert on drugs.
- Inclusion of drug driving audio advert in youth-orientated audio.
- Production of a new drug driving advert planned in 2024, as a result of Government funding announcement in April 2024.
- Planning for a new educational initiative on drug-driving for 16-25 year olds in 2025.

## **Speed**

September 2023 – Present:

- Inclusion of speed audio advert in youth-orientated audio and social.
- Driving for Work webinar in November 2023.
- 30km town campaign in November 2023 and March 2024.
- Child Casualty report launch in November 2023 – focus on slowing down in urban areas.
- Imogen Cotter campaign in November 2023 and April 2024 – focus on slowing down.
- The RSA's Annual Conference covered serious injuries and included a panel on e-scooters, ahead of the RSA's new advertising campaign on e-scooters in November.
- Partnership and advertising/PR support for An Garda Síochána Slow Down Days.

Forthcoming:

- New campaign on rural speed to be produced and rolled out in Q4 2024.
- New campaign highlighting impact of being disqualified as a driver to be produced and rolled out in Q3 2024.

## **Bank Holiday PR Engagement**

We have had six launches since we last met the Joint Oireachtas Committee in September:

- The October Bank Holiday launch took place on Kildare St and focused on pedestrian safety, illustrating the potential impact of slowing down as reducing fatalities and the severity of serious injuries. We worked closely with Vision Ireland to also represent why pedestrians with disabilities may require more time and care from motorists.
- The Christmas launch took place at the National Rehabilitation Hospital where we launched the 30k campaign. The campaign focused on using the voices of those who have experienced serious injury to connect with people about the potential impact of a collision.
- We announced the end of year figures on New Year's Day, with a research report,

- For St Brigid’s Day, we worked with An Garda Síochána and Limerick University marketing students to talk about young people and their usage of the roads – this PR engagement led to a lot of discussion of RSA communications and adverts, allowing for us to outline our changed communications strategy.
- An Garda Síochána mounted a checkpoint on the Conyngham Road for the St Patrick’s Day launch which focused on intoxicated driving, and brought our SAY it campaign to life. To target all audiences, the RSA also worked with joe.ie to create a video showing the impact of impairment through a vox pop style video of students in DCU using “beer goggles”, which was shared directly to joe.ie’s audience.
- Finally, Imogen Cotter was the face of the Easter launch which took place along the bank of the Grand Canal, communicating the need for motorists to slow down and take greater care of vulnerable road users. The RSA also launched research on serious injuries in cyclists over the Easter weekend and engaged with media extensively around this.

### **Irish Road Safety Week and other RSA Events**

World Day of Remembrance – In November, President Michael D Higgins at Áras an Uachtaráin hosted the RSA and the families of those killed or seriously injured in road collisions to mark World Day of Remembrance for Road Traffic Victims. The RSA joined forces with members of An Garda Síochána, local county councils, emergency services and victim support groups. Those who have died on our roads were remembered at a series of services held around the country.

Road Safety Week – In October, the RSA encouraged people to support Irish Road Safety Week and get involved with events in their local communities. Throughout the week the RSA organised and participated in a series of Road Safety Week events. These included Tyre Safety Day in association with the Irish Tyre Industry Association; the RSA Annual Conference which looked at serious injuries and featured national and international speakers; and National Child Safety Day when the RSA launched its Child Casualties report; visits by the Shuttle interactive unit to Cork, Kildare and Tipperary; and StreetSmart road safety school visits in Kerry.

Leading Lights – In December, the RSA hosted the fourteenth annual Leading Lights Awards at the RDS in Dublin. The awards recognise and honour the contribution made by individuals, groups and communities from all over Ireland in reducing serious injuries and deaths on our roads. Clodagh and Méabh White from Roscommon won the ‘Gertie Shields Supreme Award’ in road safety for 2023. The mother and daughter were chosen as the overall winners by the judges for their tireless awareness efforts and contribution to road safety since their own personal experience in a car collision in 2016. The award was presented to Clodagh and Méabh by Minister of State for Transport Jack Chambers.

## **RSA Social Engagement**

RSA socials channels are used to promote road safety awareness, education and information to a variety of audiences. One of our recent successes is our learning to drive/driver safety video content which is aimed at younger drivers. This short-form video content is placed where our target audience is: TikTok and Instagram. This content includes teaching people how to drive safely, where to find information for their driving tests, and how to pass the test safely. Our short-form road safety content aims to give quick and clear messages that engages audiences which will make them want to learn more. In particular with Tiktok, once people consume videos on a particular topic or from a particular account, they will be served more similar videos – so if people consume or like RSA content, they will be served more road safety related materials.

We've also worked with several advocates recently to help deliver road safety messages to key audiences. These advocates have shared their stories and have gained a lot of traction through peer-to-peer engagement. We've also worked closely with An Garda Síochána who help deliver road safety messages ahead of bank holidays, with UL students who created road safety campaigns, at the Young Scientist Exhibition, and ATU students for Christmas road safety messages.

We've recently collaborated with Kildare and Cork County councils on a campaign which aims at raising awareness for drivers to be extra careful around schools by working alongside school wardens. Our education doesn't stop there, with new video content created at UCC to help promote our RSA Shuttle and get more colleges and schools availing of the service.

Our RSA campaigns also help us reach new demographic with 30k Town, Vision Zero and SAY It also being promoted across our socials. We've recently collaborated with JOE.ie to help reach newer audiences with an interview style video using RSA 'beer goggles' to tackle intoxicated driving for St Patrick's Weekend.

## **Partnership Strategy – 2024**

Transformational partnership and working in collaboration across key road safety stakeholders is essential to stem the increase in fatalities this year. The RSA has completed a series of partner interviews to support us in prioritising partnership work going forward. The next step is for assessment of all existing and past partnerships to ascertain their impact. From there, we will create a long-term partnership strategy, focusing on working with these stakeholders and new external partners (including media partners) to make each partnership as effective as possible.

## **Shock Road Safety Adverts**

There is frequent political and media discussion surrounding value and impact of “threat appeals”, in other words, what are described as “threat-based, graphic advertisements, aimed at deterring risky driving behaviours”.

The RSA engages carefully when considering the role of threat appeals:

- We have to be very careful with threat appeals – the evidence show that they have less impact than we might imagine, particularly where we’re targeting a young male audience.
- Young men are very exposed to violence and gore in action and horror movies and through gaming. While other people respond with shock to more graphic road safety adverts, young men are not as shocked, in our experience.
- Even where they experience immediate shock or horror at these adverts, Dr. Rachel Carey’s research shows that this does not translate into actual sustained behaviour change.
- Rachel indicates that there is more room around reflecting serious injuries than deaths and that has informed our work over in the last year - investing in our most impactful advert to date – Siobhan’s Crashed Lives advert, and the new advert with Imogen Cotter that is live right now.
- Victim testimony can be more impactful than shock tactics – as evidenced in Siobhan and Gillian’s adverts in the Crashed Lives campaigns. When we hold focus groups with the public and with young people, they do reference these adverts.

From our focus groups with young men and our work with psychologists, we have pulled out a few key insights:

- Positivity bias – believing inherently that the most positive outcome will follow our actions is particularly strong in young men, whereby they simply do not believe that a fatality (or a serious injury to a slightly lesser degree) can happen to them.
- Over-confidence in driving capability – we all over-estimate our driving skills and young men over-index there. They feel comfortable to speed or drive in a more risky way, because they believe that unlike others, they are good drivers who can handle it if anything occurs while they are on the roads
- The shock of news of a collision or a threat appeal advert is very short-lived and does not have lasting staying power with this cohort.
- Young people and young men in general reject and do not place trust in “authority figures” or experts, preferring to trust peers or influencers – which inherently poses a challenge for threat appeals (which are based on a premise of the RSA – literally the authority – telling young men what to do).
- Things that can have an impact include engagement from close friends or family (mothers and girlfriends have been particularly called out), influencer marketing undertaken in an authentic way, attention-grabbing adverts, digital content, in-person victim testimony through education interventions, and even humour.
- Adverts that move away from the moral argument, that present the consequences of a collision or disqualification can also be impactful.

The RSA is cognizant that we are going to have to work very hard to counteract fragmented media consumption, lack of engagement with traditional news or media channels, and general behavioural trends among young men in particular and this step-change is built into our communications strategy 2023-2027.

We have to be brave enough to create new adverts, events or initiatives that will challenge the public and young men in particular in new ways – our upcoming e-scooter advert relies on

humour and memorability, our current 30km advert relies on pressing a positive motivational button that makes driving more slowly in urban areas something people want to do (using music to rewire people's brains when they see a 30km sign).

Reflecting the consequences of a collision (like Imogen or Siobhan's advert) will continue to play a key role in our strategy, but it won't do the work as a standalone approach.

#### 4. Data Sharing for Road Safety

In 2020, the RSA became aware that the Road Traffic Collision Data should be treated as personal data and processed in accordance with Data Protection Law's and Principles, including the requirement for the RSA to have the appropriate legal basis to underpin the receipt and onwards sharing of the data. Up to that point An Gardaí Síochana and RSA had considered the collision data to be pseudo anonymised. However, it became apparent that linking together of certain data attributes and reviewing these in conjunction with other information e.g. media reports, could lead to indirect identification of a person. The RSA had concerns in relation to the legal basis to allow continued receipt and sharing of the collision data. As Data Controller, once we identified the issue, the RSA immediately took actions to investigate this matter, including consulting with legal advisors on a proposed legislative approach to address gaps identified in relation to the receipt and sharing of collision data. The Department of Transport also later engaged with the Attorney General's Office on this subject.

While solutions were being investigated and progressed, the RSA did share key variables from the Road Traffic Collision dataset, which would have supported the local authorities in their evidence-led decision-making. We acknowledge that local authorities did not receive the full collision dataset from the RSA since 2019. However, in 2022 the RSA provided the LGMA with 8 key variables for the years 2016-2020 for dissemination to Local Authorities. In addition, in 2023 the RSA provided the LGMA with 8 key variables for collisions that occurred in 2021 and 2022, for wider dissemination to local authorities.

We would also emphasise that there were other processes in place for the local authorities to receive collision data to inform their work. Firstly, local authorities received data on high collision locations (formerly known as blackspots) for the national road network from TII.

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.



The RSA is currently working closely with key organisations to resolve the data protection issues and to establish a firm legal basis for the resumption of collision data sharing with local authorities, though safeguards on the sharing of personal information mean that this is a complex issue to resolve. A cross-Government group is being led by the RSA to resolve the issue of data sharing as a priority, and extensive work is ongoing in this area. This includes several workshops between the RSA and An Garda Síochána, which collects collision data in the first instance, in December, January, February, March and April to review each of the 161 individual data fields in the collision data set, to establish the proportionality and justification for sharing specific elements of the collision data. In addition, several bi-lateral meetings have taken place between RSA and representatives from Local Authorities, Department of Transport and other Road Safety Strategy organisations, to progress the onward sharing by the RSA of the RTC data.

As part of the process of legislating to address the gaps identified, the Dept is required to consult with the DPC on the proposed legislation. That process is underway, and the RSA and others are supporting with the preparation of additional materials for submission to the DPC. This will take place in the coming weeks, as soon as the collective work has been completed. With ongoing efforts in various workstreams and the recent commitment from the Taoiseach to expedite necessary legislative amendments facilitating the receipt, processing, and onward sharing of collision data, it is hoped that the sharing of collision data with local authorities and other public sector organisations will be able to resume later this year.

## 5. Operational Services

### The National Car Testing Service (NCTS)

The Road Safety Authority has overall responsibility for the operation, oversight, development, quality assurance and delivery of the National Car Testing Service (NCTS). The NCT was introduced in 2000 and, over the past 23 years, it has played an important role in improving road safety in Ireland. It has also played a vital role in protecting the environment as the NCT also enforces regulations around vehicle emissions.

Following a procurement process run in accordance with EU procurement rules, the contract for the provision of the service for the period June 2020 to June 2030 was awarded to Applus Inspection Services Ireland Ltd.

The service is provided at 50 test centres nationwide and there are plans to open new centres in an additional 4 locations, to cater for increased demand. These centres are planned in Co Clare; Dublin North; Co Cavan and, Co Cork. Separately, 7 centres were refurbished last year (Drogheda, Dundalk, Kells, Carlow, Cahir, Sligo and Letterkenny). An additional test lane was installed in Deansgrange. This brings the total number of test lanes nationwide to 112.

The responsibility for the operation and delivery of the NCT service lies solely with the Contractor, Applus.

The RSA's statutory obligations in respect of the NCT are to exercise a supervisory and oversight role to ensure the service is provided in line with the service's Project Agreement. The Project Agreement specifies the performance standards for the contractor and covers such matters as

premises, test equipment, staff, test arrangements, facilities management, information technology, risk management, media and marketing, and customer service.

The RSA also works with its parent department, the Department of Transport, in assisting them in relation to the development of policy around vehicle roadworthiness and vehicle standards, which is a key factor in road safety in Ireland.

To assist the Authority in carrying out our supervisory role, we appointed a Supervision Services Contractor (SSC), Deloitte, to carry out certain supervisory services on its behalf. This involves monitoring the contractor's achievement of performance and service levels and reporting on these regularly to the RSA.

The performance tracking that we monitor includes:

- Average waiting times nationally and at individual test centres
- If a customer waits more than 28 days for a test, that they are offered a free test, within certain parameters.
- That the test operations ensure that testing is conducted consistently and that procedures protect test integrity.
- An analysis of test results to identify trends and/or anomalies relating to the test results achieved within individual test centres, test lanes, or by individual vehicle inspectors.
- That more than 90% of telephone calls to the call centre are answered within fifteen (15) seconds.
- That customer satisfaction and mystery shopping surveys are undertaken and that findings meet the standards required.
- That operational audits are undertaken, including covering a wide range of factors including premises quality and maintenance, test equipment calibration and maintenance, IT systems, staff qualifications and training, customer service, call centre performance and complaints handling processes.

Another structural approach to performance monitoring and oversight that the RSA has put in place is the appointment of AA Ireland as Technical Inspections Services Provider. They regularly monitor the delivery of the service at the 50 test centres nationwide and at the contractor's headquarters. This includes observing tests and conducting independent tests.

In 2023, the AA carried out more than 3,950 observed tests and more than 3,000 independent tests. The results show that more than 99% of testing is carried out correctly.

The RSA and the SSC have regular meetings with Applus including.

- twice weekly update meetings
- Monthly supervision meetings
- six monthly contract review meetings attended by the senior directors of both Applus and the RSA.

In 2024 as of the end of March, the AA carried out more than 1100 observed tests and more than 700 independent tests. The results show that more than 99% of testing is carried out correctly. The RSA has met the contractor on a weekly basis, over the past year, to facilitate introduction and monitor progress on changes to work practices to increase capacity following the disruption

of Covid and other challenges faced by the service since mid-2022. A number of measures to improve capacity have been discussed and approved including:

- Extending the operational work hours
- Temporarily amending the vehicle inspector qualifications to QQI Level 5
- Introduction of paid overtime
- Facilitating the recruitment of vehicle inspectors from outside the EU (Philippines)
- Temporary secondment of vehicle inspectors from a sister company in Spain

It is acknowledged that Applus are not currently meeting the waiting time service level due to the demand and capacity issues, with Q1 representing 40% of annual demand and recovery is expected to return the service to the SLA of 12 Days in Q2 2024. But it is important to reflect that there are a number of key service levels which are being met in full and exceeded in some cases including customer satisfaction, telephone response times and test accuracy.

Turning to the issue of the backlog itself, it is no exaggeration that the service has faced some serious challenges due to the impact of COVID, which caused significant staff absenteeism levels at test centres and in the call centre. There were also very high levels of customer no-shows and late cancellations. Reduced availability of new cars has meant there are more older cars in the Irish fleet. This means there are circa 1.6m cars to be tested at NCT this year up from 1.5m in 2022.

Taken together, these issues have caused a backlog to build as Applus did not manage to carry out as many tests as planned in 2022 or 2023. This backlog has carried forward into 2024 and has reduced the YTD average lead time for an appointment for a test, which is currently 15 days. Before the pandemic the waiting time would have been less than 12 days.

**Vehicles Due for Testing**

<b>Vehicles Due</b>				
<b>Quarter</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
<b>Q1</b>	468,464	571,790	525,079	581,031
<b>Q2</b>	294,268	275,308	307,221	290,633
<b>Q3</b>	353,611	352,802	362,896	373,656
<b>Q4</b>	288,878	273,038	254,150	269,566

**Appeals process**

Where a customer has been refused a test certificate, they have the right to appeal the decision through the independent appeals procedure. The first level for pursuing a complaint is through the NCTS internal appeals process. The relevant complaints form is available at the local NCT Centre or the NCT Complaints section can be contacted on (01) 413 5994.

There is an independent appeals process available to anyone who considers that the test has not been carried out correctly. Where a customer believes they have been unfairly denied an NCT certificate, they have the right to appeal the decision. The first level for pursuing a grievance is through the NCTS internal appeals process.

If a customer is dissatisfied with the outcome of that process, they may pursue the matter through the Independent Appeals Board operated by the Automobile Association (AA) on behalf of the RSA. To pursue an independent appeal; forms may be obtained at the local test centre or by contacting the independent appeals board directly. The AA is completely independent in the provision of this service. Their contact details are (01) 617 9000 or email [technical@theaa.ie](mailto:technical@theaa.ie).

### Driving Test Service

Turning to the Driving Test Service at the end March 2024,

- 21,537 had been scheduled to sit a driving test in the following four weeks.
- 60,385 learner drivers were waiting to receive an invitation to book their test.

Separately, 53,038 customers were issued with an invitation to book a test date by the RSA but did not use that invitation within the 10 days provided.

Lastly, while a further 30,029 learner drivers have applied for a driving test date, they are not eligible to sit a test, usually because they have not completed their 12 mandatory lessons, or the six-month rule applies – whereby they cannot sit a test in the first six months of having received their first learner permit.

Therefore, to be clear the actual number of learner drivers who are available, eligible and waiting for an appointment to sit a driving test is 60,385.

**DRIVER TESTING APPLICATION VOLUME BY COUNTY AS AT 31/03/2024**



County Name	Scheduled	Waiting	Paused	Not Eligible	Total
Co. Dublin	7,423	22,342	16,707	9,086	55,558
Co. Cork	1,929	6,427	5,454	3,262	17,072
Co. Kildare	836	3,469	2,283	1,335	7,923
Co. Galway	1,111	2,590	2,420	1,489	7,610
Co. Waterford	804	2,123	1,899	1,180	6,006
Co. Limerick	1,090	2,091	2,310	1,231	6,722
Co. Westmeath	613	1,873	1,780	828	5,094
Co. Meath	796	1,860	1,636	1,013	5,305
Co. Donegal	515	1,838	1,197	723	4,273
Co. Tipperary	581	1,643	1,655	1,207	5,086
Co. Louth	768	1,540	1,982	791	5,081
Co. Kerry	614	1,466	1,567	907	4,554
Co. Wexford	692	1,390	1,977	1,172	5,231
Co. Offaly	435	1,238	1,268	712	3,653
Co. Kilkenny	410	1,024	838	459	2,731
Co. Mayo	422	934	1,190	622	3,168
Co. Carlow	344	873	1,131	730	3,078
Co. Clare	429	870	1,105	605	3,009
Co. Cavan	227	867	733	483	2,310
Co. Wicklow	265	796	805	402	2,268
Co. Laois	319	788	719	476	2,302
Co. Sligo	319	585	694	326	1,924
Co. Longford	133	516	459	248	1,356
Co. Roscommon	164	495	460	305	1,424
Co. Leitrim	150	399	425	217	1,191
Co. Monaghan	148	348	344	220	1,060
Grand Total	21,537	60,385	53,038	30,029	164,989

At the end March, the national average time to invite for a test is 15.6 weeks. The service level agreement that is in place with the Department of Transport is to maintain an average waiting time of 10 weeks. Where a learner driver fails their test and reapplies, we endeavour to invite them to book another test date 6-8 weeks after their failed test. Those waiting for a truck / bus or motorcycle test are invited 10-12 weeks after applying.

To put this in context, the RSA is currently providing an average of 5,800 tests per week.

The backlog of applications which built up throughout the pandemic were effectively cleared earlier in 2022 and new demand was being met within expectations up until July / August 2022.

Since then, unfortunately, there have been challenges to meeting increased demand. These challenges included,

- reduced workforce owing to staff retirements and contracted staff reaching the end dates on their contracts;
- a need for dedicated training of staff to conduct tests in higher categories to meet the demand for truck, bus and motorcycle tests;
- a 28% increase in applications for a driving test in 2022 with a further 16% increase in 2023 and 4% increase in Q1 2024 when compared to Q1 2023.
- there has also been a significant increase in the number of learner permits issued across all age groups but particularly those aged 17-20 and 30-39 since mid-2021.

To meet increased demand, The Driver Testing Service was given sanction by the Department for up to an additional 75 temporary driver testers.

An open recruitment campaign to hire these additional testers took place in 2023 when 41 additional testers were recruited, trained and started testing.

The Driver Testing Service currently has 125 permanent and actively testing staff and 39 contracted driver testers available to it to conduct driving tests.

The RSA have agreed with the Department to monitor the application trends over the duration of the sanction and if we need to reassess the level of permanent Testers we will do so during the duration of the sanction. Whilst trends suggest a new demand level will be sustained into the future, this does require analysis to support the request for additional headcount in 2024 and beyond. From October 2023 started to see improvements in waiting times and a normal service level will be achieved in the summer of-2024.

### **Requests for Urgent Tests**

In relation to requests for urgent driving tests: if a customer is a Critical Frontline Worker employed by the HSE, a private hospital or the emergency services and need to drive in the course of their duties they may submit a request using the form on the RSA website. If that request is approved, then the customer will be prioritised.

In the interest of fairness and transparency to all customers, invitations to book a test slot are issued in strict rotation, with those who applied and are eligible being invited first. Where a customer has previously failed their car test and reapplied, these are fast-tracked and sent a

new booking invitation 6 to 8 weeks after their previous test, this is longer in some centres with particularly high demand.

While driving test appointment slots are only available to those who have received an invitation. Any cancelled short notice slots are automatically available for take up by anyone who is eligible to take a driving test. If a person is looking for a driving test slot at short notice, they will be able to see any available slots over the next 5 days.

If a driving test is cancelled at short notice, this appointment is made available to the general public on the [MyRoadSafety](#) portal.

As CEO of the RSA, I wish to acknowledge the frustration and confusion that customers have experienced as a result of the delays in securing a test appointment for the Driving Test Service and the National Car Test Service. I want to apologise to customers for this. The message I wish to tell our customers is that we are doing everything we can to return the services to normal and I want to thank you and to ask for your continued patience as we work to reduce waiting times.

## Commercial Vehicle Testing

148 privately owned businesses are CVR test operators authorised to carry out CVR testing in the State. CVR tests are carried out by 547 authorised CVR testers. It is a stable, resilient, and flexible network with 96% test accuracy, a good geographical spread and capacity. There are 289 authorised testing lanes, 171 of these are Light Commercial Vehicle (LCV) lanes and 118 are Heavy Commercial Vehicle (HCV) lanes. There are circa half a million full CVR tests carried out each year on 14 different vehicle test categories. The first-time pass rate for HCVs is 76% and for LCVs is 63%. LCVs represent approximately 80% of the tests carried out in CVR testing centres. 148,644 commercial vehicle tests have been carried out between January and March 2024. There are no significant backlogs in the CVR testing network.

### **Current CVR test operator authorisations:**

107 x HCV, 143 x LCV, 42 x Fast tractors, 32 x ADR (carriage of dangerous goods), 5 CVR test operators are HCV CVR test operators only and 41 are authorised as LCV only CVR test operators, 102 CVR test operators are authorised as HCV and LCV CVR test operators.

### **Improvements to testing centres**

A strategic review of commercial vehicle testing carried out in 2019 recommended standardising and improving the standard of CVR testing premises across the testing network. As a result, CVR test operators have been required to upgrade their premises to a common standard in order to renew their authorisations to 18/03/2034. SI 475 of 2022 set out the standards required and provided additional time for CVR test operators who were renewing their authorisations to comply with the requirements. All required improvements will be in place by 19/03/2027, an example of these include but are not limited to, drive-throughs on all test lanes, standardised HCV pits and lifts to replace LCV pits. The upgrades and renewal of authorisation process is progressing well.

**Number of CVR testing centres and CVR testers by County March 2024**

	Testers by County	Test Centres
County	Number	Number
Co. Carlow	10	3
Co. Cavan	17	5
Co. Clare	12	3
Co. Cork	74	22
Co. Donegal	20	4
Co. Dublin	100	22
Co. Galway	27	7
Co. Kerry	16	5
Co. Kildare	23	7
Co. Kilkenny	20	5
Co. Laois	8	3
Co. Limerick	23	7
Co. Longford	12	2
Co. Louth	12	4
Co. Mayo	24	6
Co. Meath	20	4
Co. Monaghan	9	3
Co. Offaly	14	3
Co. Roscommon	13	4
Co. Sligo	7	3
Co. Tipperary	23	8
Co. Waterford	12	3
Co. Westmeath	14	4
Co. Wexford	23	6
Co. Wicklow	14	5
	<b>547</b>	<b>148</b>



## Enforcement

2023 full year roadside returns – 18,962 commercial vehicles inspected for roadworthiness and 3,650 drivers for compliance with drivers' hours, tachograph, driver CPC and operator licensing obligations. These represent a 20% surplus on the targets set and are testament to the strong relationship we have with An Garda Síochána who are our partners at the roadside and who facilitated 1,740 bilateral roadside checkpoints with us in 2023. This partnership has continued into 2024 with approx. 5,100 vehicles and 1,150 drivers inspected so far.

From a project perspective the focus year to date has been on renewing both the Vehicle Inspector and Transport Officer panels to enable us hire new recruits to replace movers/leavers and launching a tender for the procurement of remote early detection equipment to ensure our Transport Officer team are equipped with this technology for preselecting SMART tachograph equipped vehicles for inspection in time for the Aug deadline specified in EU legislation. Despite our contactor's decision to exit the Irish market, work is also continuing on the introduction of an Electronic Inspection Data Capture (EIDC) solution which it is hoped will be ready for User Acceptance Testing (UAT) in Nov/Dec this year. EIDC will eliminate the paper-based recording of inspections and therefore improve efficiency in that inspection records will no longer have to be manually entered into the RSA inspection database.

From a policy perspective, work is nearing completion with DoT in finalising the legislation necessary to give effect to EU Mobility Package 1, with comms activity set to commence in June altering operators of the new requirements.