

Draft Response of The British Horse Society

A Safer Way: Consultation on making Britain's Roads the Safest in the World.

The British Horse Society (BHS) represents the interests of the 4.3 million people in the UK who ride or who drive horse-drawn vehicles. With the membership of its Affiliated Riding Clubs, the BHS is the largest and most influential equestrian charity in the UK.

The BHS has a riding and road safety training, education and examination programme. Every year some 4,500 riders take the Society's riding and road safety test. Last year this programme received the prestigious Prince Michael International Road Safety Award. The Prince Michael International Safety Awards recognise the most outstanding examples of international road safety initiatives.

The BHS also works for safer on and off-road riding and driving through an improved public rights of way network. The BHS works in partnership with other user groups, local and central government to make rights of way useful and open to all.

The BHS has more than 800 access and safety volunteers across the country working to achieve greater safety not only for horse riders and carriage drivers but other road users as well, in both rural and urban areas.

The Strategy for the Horse Industry in England and Wales, published in December 2005, was prepared by the British Horse Industry Confederation in partnership with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Welsh Assembly Government.

Aim 5 of the Strategy is to 'Increase access to off-road riding and carriage driving', two of the objectives of which are:-

- Continuing safety education for motorists, riders and carriage drivers; and
- Ensuring urban and suburban riding and carriage driving are promoted and improved as well as rural riding and carriage driving.

It is incomprehensible how a consultation document into making Britain's roads the safest in the World can fail to make any reference at all to horse riders and carriage drivers, especially as 4.2 million people now ride at least once a year and 2.4 million people are regular riders.

Especially when statistics show that there were 124 recorded road accidents in 2006, consisting of 3 fatal, 26 serious injuries, 95 slight injuries, in which a person was injured and a horse was involved: (Department for Transport 2009)

Equestrian road accidents voluntarily reported to the British Horse Society (BHS) in 2006 were 5 riders killed & 22 injured, 19 horses killed & 32 injured

(<http://www.BHS.org>). The BHS considers that the true picture is likely to be much higher and that these figures are suppressed figures as many riders are too fearful to ride on our roads because of the speed and volume of traffic.

Key Challenges.

The BHS in principle welcomes the key challenges as set out. Whilst it is an unfortunate statistic that 20% of road fatalities are motorcyclists, the key challenge should be the protection of all vulnerable road users; or if specific mention of motorcyclists is required, the wording should be amended to read as follows 'protecting all vulnerable road users, especially motorcyclists...'

The BHS supports the focus that will be given to improving safety on rural roads, as it is these roads that are predominantly used by horse riders and carriage drivers when accessing the 22% of public rights of way network that is accessible to horse riders and the 5% that is accessible to carriage drivers.

80% of the road accidents involving horses which were reported to the BHS were on minor roads.

The BHS advocates lower speed limits on all roads as recommended by the DfT in its Circular 1/06. The BHS does not though agree that priority should be given to assessing A and B roads to the detriment of assessments being carried out on C and unclassified roads which are predominantly used by the recreational vulnerable road user.

Chapter 2: Background and context.

The BHS deplores the fact that currently the Stats 19/National Reporting Injury Road Accident Data Collection System does not currently require the recording of accidents when injuries are caused to a ridden/driven horse even if the rider/carriage driver suffers no injury. Accidents often occur when the rider/carriage drivers suffer no injury due to be thrown clear of the horse, and being higher than the impact of the vehicle, but the horse does suffer an injury. These accidents are road traffic accidents and should be recorded.

The current non recording of these accidents gives a false view of the safety of the road network for equestrians, and the behaviour of other road users towards equestrians.

It is imperative that such data is collected and recorded so that improvements can be made to the safety of the equestrian user of the road network.

Chapter 3: A vision for the future

The aim to have the safest roads in the world is welcomed by the BHS, however this aim will not be achieved if the Department for Transport continues to ignore the needs of equestrians in developing and implementing policies to improve safety on our roads.

Over the last 10 years there has been an increase of 2 million in the number of people who now ride at least once a year to ignore this fact and to fail to

consider the needs of equestrians on our roads over the next 20 years is something that needs to be corrected immediately.

The BHS agrees that successful road safety delivery requires the involvement of lots of different people and organisations working in a range of different areas, and the BHS is eager to assist the Department for Transport in the delivery of this to improve the safety of equestrians on our roads.

The BHS will be happy to sign up to a common vision that recognises the need to improve safety for all vulnerable road users.

Chapter 4: Delivering our goal – the overall approach

The Department for Transport's offer in the strategy to strengthen the weak links in the road network needs to be accompanied by a programme of works that improves the links to the country's disjointed public rights of way network.

As stated above the BHS disagrees that STATS 19 provides a complete source of identifying road casualties. The current non recording of accidents where horses are injured but the rider escapes unscathed, gives a false view of the safety of the road network for equestrians, and the behaviour of other road users towards equestrians.

Action needs to be taken to ensure that satellite navigation systems do not direct traffic away from our major roads onto our minor roads to the detriment of the recreational vulnerable road user.

Paragraph 4.24 implies that the main focus is improving safety for drivers of vehicles, whilst this is important it must not be to the detriment of improving safety for vulnerable road users, the two issues should run in tandem and complement each other.

In supporting the effectiveness of the road safety profession it is important that they are provided with relevant information regarding the different groups of vulnerable road users, especially equestrians.

The BHS welcomes the proposal to produce an independent annual report on road safety performance provided that such a report addresses performance in improving safety for all vulnerable road users.

Chapter 5: Strengthening the weak links in our road network.

Whilst recognising the vulnerability of motorcyclists this chapter fails to recognise the vulnerability of equestrians, who like motorcyclists, are not given any protection by their mode of transport.

Reducing speed limits on our rural roads will assist in improving the safety for equestrians providing the reduction in speed limits is sufficient.

The desire should not just be reducing the casualty problem on single carriageways, the aim needs to be wider than this and should include the aim to ensure that our rural roads are made safer so that vulnerable road users can continue to use them, and in many instances start using them again.

The removal of inappropriately positioned highway furniture on roadside verges and margins, and proper maintenance of the verges and margins will ensure that they can be used by the vulnerable road user as an alternative to using the actual carriageway.

Chapter 6: Supporting the choice of the safer vehicle

Delivering safer vehicles is a laudable aim. A negative effect of this could be that as a consequence of feeling safer within their vehicles drivers may feel that it is safer to drive at higher speeds which will be to the detriment of vulnerable road users.

The development of global positioning tracking systems that could notify motorists of the presence of equestrians on the road would have the potential to greatly reduce equestrian casualties.

Chapter 7: Responsible and irresponsible road use

It is important that the Department for Transport's highly successful THINK! Campaign continues and continues to educate drivers to pass equestrians slowly.

Graphically showing drivers the results of colliding with a horse, and/or making drivers think that there could be a child on a pony round the corner would encourage safer and more responsible driving.

The delivery of road safety education and promotional material must include information about all vulnerable road users.

As well as providing practical skills for cyclists the Department for Transport should do likewise for equestrians and deliver a Rideability scheme providing levels of riding proficiency training both for children and adults.

The BHS currently provides a riding and road safety test for horse riders that 4000-5000 riders take every year and the BHS would be happy to develop this programme further with the Department for Transport.

It is imperative that the Department for Transport as well as making funding available to give an extra 500,000 children the opportunity to undertake national standard training by 2012, do likewise to enable more children to take their riding and road safety test.

Chapter 8: Measuring and ensuring success

The new target in respect of the rate of KSI per distance travelled by pedestrians and cyclists should include equestrians as well. What are the merits of excluding equestrians from this target?

The proposed key indicators should include one relating to the number of collisions involving killed or seriously injured casualties to either or both horse and rider from collisions with vehicles.

The BHS recommends that the Department for Transport:

- Adopt a common vision that recognises the need to improve safety for **all** vulnerable road users.
- Improve the Stats 19/National Reporting Injury Road Accident Data Collection System so that it records accidents when injuries are caused to a ridden/driven horse even if the rider/carriage driver suffers no injury. The current non recording of these accidents gives a false view of the safety of the road network for equestrians, and the behaviour of other road users towards equestrians.
- Take steps to ensure that satellite navigation systems do not direct traffic away from our major roads onto our minor roads to the detriment of the recreational vulnerable road user.
- Commission an independent annual report on road safety performance provided that addresses performance in improving safety for **all** vulnerable road users.
- Recognise the vulnerability of equestrians, who like motorcyclists, are not given any protection by their mode of transport.
- Reduce speed limits on our rural roads.
- Should not simply just reduce the casualty problem on single carriageways, but widen this to ensure that our rural roads are made safer so that vulnerable road users can continue to use them, and in many instances start using them again.
- Advocate proper maintenance of the verges and margins.
- Develop global positioning tracking systems that notify motorists of the presence of equestrians on the road.
- Deliver, in partnership with the BHS, a 'Rideability' scheme providing levels of riding proficiency training both for children and adults.
- Make funding available to enable more children to undertake national standard riding and road safety training by 2012.

- Include equestrians in the new target of the rate of KSI per distance travelled by pedestrians and cyclists.
- Include a key indicator of the number of collisions involving killed or seriously injured casualties to either/or both horse and rider from collisions with vehicles.

7th July 2009