

Speech by RS Minister Jim Fitzpatrick for WDR 2007 London service

It has been 14 years since RoadPeace introduced a Day of Remembrance for Road Crash Victims and 50,000 families in the UK have been bereaved since then. We are here today to remember the loss of their loved ones as well as those who died before them and in other countries on the world's roads. Road crashes currently kill over 1.3 million people each year and too many of these are young and healthy –fathers with young as well as elderly dependents. Crashes are also the leading cause of death to on-duty police officers as well as the armed forces. WHO estimates as many die on the roads in one day as are killed in a week of warfare.

While Home Office Ministers have spoken at previous services, I believe I am the first DfT Road Safety Minister to speak and I am proud to be here today. I know from my previous work with the fire service of the frequency and devastation caused by road crashes. Fireofficers attend 10 times as many crashes as they do fires in buildings. It is too regular and too deadly an occurrence.

The UK is known to have a comparatively good record at reducing road death and injury but let no one think this means this is good enough. There is more than can be done and more that will be done. Have recently announced the upcoming consultation over graduated speeding penalties which proposes greater penalties for extreme speeding. Speeding remains a tolerated vice among too many of our drivers. Forty years ago, we started imposing a one year driving ban for first time drink drivers yet our proposals were reported by much of the media as shocking that we would ban drivers after only two instances of extreme speeding. The kind of speeding that guarantees death to any pedestrian or cyclist in a collision. This just shows how far we still have to go.

I will be Road Safety Minister next year when the new charge of causing death by careless driving comes into force. I know this has been a key issue for RoadPeace and that there are families here today whose loved ones were killed in crashes where the driver was only charged with careless driving without any mention of the loss of life involved. I cannot imagine how much more this must have added to their suffering.

We are currently working on our road safety strategy for the next decade. There have been calls from RoadPeace and PACTS for a new approach to be adopted—one that aims to reduce the level of risk on our roads to that with air and road travel. They believe there should not be a higher level of risk associated and socially accepted with road use. This is an honourable aim and we are investigating the practicalities of adopting such an approach.

Road safety has recently become an official responsibility for the fire service and I want to thank RoadPeace and victim families for their participation on the many fire service Safe Drive Stay Alive programmes. RoadPeace regularly reminds us that victims need to know lessons are being learned and that their loved ones did not die in vain and speaking on behalf of the government and the public who have yet to suffer, thank you for your efforts to reduce the risk to others. You have done your loved ones proud .