

Play England's response to *A Safer Way: Consultation on Making Britain's Roads the Safest in the World*

Play England welcomes the chance to respond to *A Safer Way: Consultation on Making Britain's Roads the Safest in the World*. Play England is the leading national play organisation in England, is part of NCB and is supported by the Big Lottery Fund. We represent the views of the Play England Council. Play England is also a government delivery partner, working with the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) to implement England's first national Play Strategy.¹

Play England's comments focus primarily on ensuring that national government and local authorities, in their transport planning, fully consider the needs and views of children and young people and promote opportunities for active travel and outdoor play.

Summary

- The strategy should promote mixed use of roads with low traffic volumes, which can also help create environments that are sufficiently safe for children to play outdoors and walk and cycle more.
- The strategy needs to make reference to the important role of home zones in making Britain's residential streets safer.
- The strategy needs to make reference to DfT's *Manual for Streets*, which emphasises the 'place' function of streets, making them more people centred.
- Practical and theory driving tests should include sections on teaching road users to be especially responsible in all areas where children live, go to school and play.

Introduction

Play England is pleased to see that the road safety strategy identifies some of the main key challenges including:

- Children and young people
- Rural roads
- Areas of deprivation.

However, the vision for the strategy needs to look not just at safer, better-performing roads but also safer, 'child-friendly' local communities. It is essential that local highways authorities and transport planners take account of road safety in all environments where children are, including around schools, residential areas and play spaces. The strategy should promote mixed use of roads with low traffic

¹ DCSF (2008) *The Play Strategy*. London: Department for Children, Schools and Families.
<http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=productdetails&PageMode=publications&ProductId=DCSF-00951-2008&>

volumes, which create environments that encourage children to play outdoors and walk and cycle in their local neighborhoods.

The Play Strategy

To coincide with the publication of the first national Play Strategy for England, DCSF wrote to all directors of transport about the importance of child-friendly road safety and planning measures that support local play opportunities.²

DCSF asked transport authorities to ensure that the spatial needs and road safety of children playing and travelling to play areas are fully reflected in decision-making.

Deprivation

The Play Strategy offers funding for every top-tier local authority to improve play opportunities. A new investment package of £235m underpins the Play Strategy over the period 2008-11. Every top-tier local authority will receive at least £1m to help build and refurbish public play sites where children need them most, with safe access routes, which encourage active and healthy journeys, as part of a strategic approach to improving play offers locally. This should complement, rather than substitute for, the investment that local authorities and private developers make.

20mph zones

We are pleased to see that the strategy recommends that local authorities consider introducing 20mph limits or zones in town or city streets, such as around schools, shops, markets, playgrounds and other areas where pedestrian and cyclist movements are high. Therefore, section 5.23 needs to recognise the potential for 20mph zones to encourage children and young people's independent mobility and playing in their local areas.

However, any research on the effects of 20mph zones needs to investigate whether or not this increases the numbers of children playing and actively moving around their local neighbourhoods.

Home zones

The strategy needs to make reference to the important role of home zones in making Britain's roads safer. DfT has piloted around 60 home zones and produced good practice guidance for local authorities and developers. The pilots showed that traffic flows were significantly reduced, with the percentage of vehicles exceeding 20mph falling from 42% to 12%.³

Street planning guidance

The strategy needs to make reference to DfT's *Manual for Streets* which provides guidance for practitioners involved in the planning, design, provision and approval of new residential streets, and modifications to existing ones.

Because of their vulnerability, it is important that road design produces environments that reduces the dangers for children and young people. Currently, road design gives precedence to cars and traffic over pedestrian use and has led to reduced freedom to travel.

Anxiety about traffic means that children and young people play outside less than they want. *Fair Play: A consultation on the play strategy*⁴ sought the views of children, families and professionals

² DfT, CLG, DCSF, DH, DCMS (December 2008) *Letter to Chief Planning Officers and Directors of Transport: child-friendly public space and transport.*

<http://publications.dcsf.gov.uk/eOrderingDownload/Play%20Strategy%20-%20Letter.pdf>

³ Layfield. R, Chinn. L and Nicholls. D (2003) *Pilot Home Zone Schemes: Evaluation of The Methleys, Leeds (TRL 586)*. Wokingham: Transport Research Laboratory

⁴ *Fair Play: A consultation on the play strategy*. DCSF and DCMS. 2008.

on providing better play opportunities. Of those that responded, 74% suggested a number of general traffic calming measures would allow children to play more safely in and around their streets and on the way to play areas.

Reducing pedestrian casualties

This section of the strategy needs to be viewed in the context of use of outdoor space. A more suitable title maybe:

Reduce the risk to pedestrians whilst at the same time increasing the use of outdoor space and the local streetscapes for pedestrians, active travel and children's play.

Without this provision there is a danger that steps to reduce accidents will result in initiatives to keep people off the streets and out of the way of traffic rather than traffic out of the way of people.

The strategy should promote restricting traffic speeds to 20mph or below in residential streets through good design, as well as making crossing and junction improvements. Home zones in urban areas and 'quiet lanes' in rural areas, which encourage mixed use of roads with low traffic volumes, can also help to create an environment that encourages children to play outdoors.

Responsible and irresponsible road use

Whilst we recognise the importance of teaching children and young people road safety skills the emphasis should be on making roads safer for children and young people. For example, responsible road use should promote the need to recognise the play and independent mobility needs of children and young people. Therefore, practical and theory driving tests should include sections on teaching road users to be especially responsible in all areas where children live, go to school and play.

Measuring and ensuring success

Reductions in numbers of children and young people killed or seriously injured on the road should not take place at the expense of children's independent mobility and play. Therefore, we believe that there needs to be a separate target looking at an increase in children's walking, cycling and play needs, to be combined with targets to reduce road traffic accidents.

This should link to NI 198: Children travelling to school, mode of transport usually used. This indicator provides information to help local authorities monitor and manage road traffic associated with the school run, with a view to reducing the proportion of children travelling by car and increasing the proportion walking, cycling or using public transport.

In addition, data collected via the national travel surveys need to collect a range of information on children's play and travel. The current focus is on children's travel to and from school and this underestimates children's journeys. Better data collection on children's mobility will allow local authorities to enhance their transport planning and accommodate children's mobility needs.

Lisa Davis
Policy Officer
ldavis@ncb.org.uk
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