

# MEDIA GUIDELINES FOR REPORTING ROAD COLLISIONS



Laura Laker  
*Journalist*  
*Report Author*

rians.  
Friday on the A1074  
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**PHONE ZOMBIES'**  
**BY CYCLISTS SOARS**

in the last five years after 1--

Bikers and cyclists to be given skills on  
to avoid killer crashes as police back  
campaign to help 'most vulnerable' on  
roads

**OK SUPER CAR SPINS OUT**  
**IN HEAVY RAIN AND IS 'WRECKED'**

They believe distracted drivers will be too  
busy monitoring their speedometers and  
'panic-braking' to properly pay attention  
to the road conditions

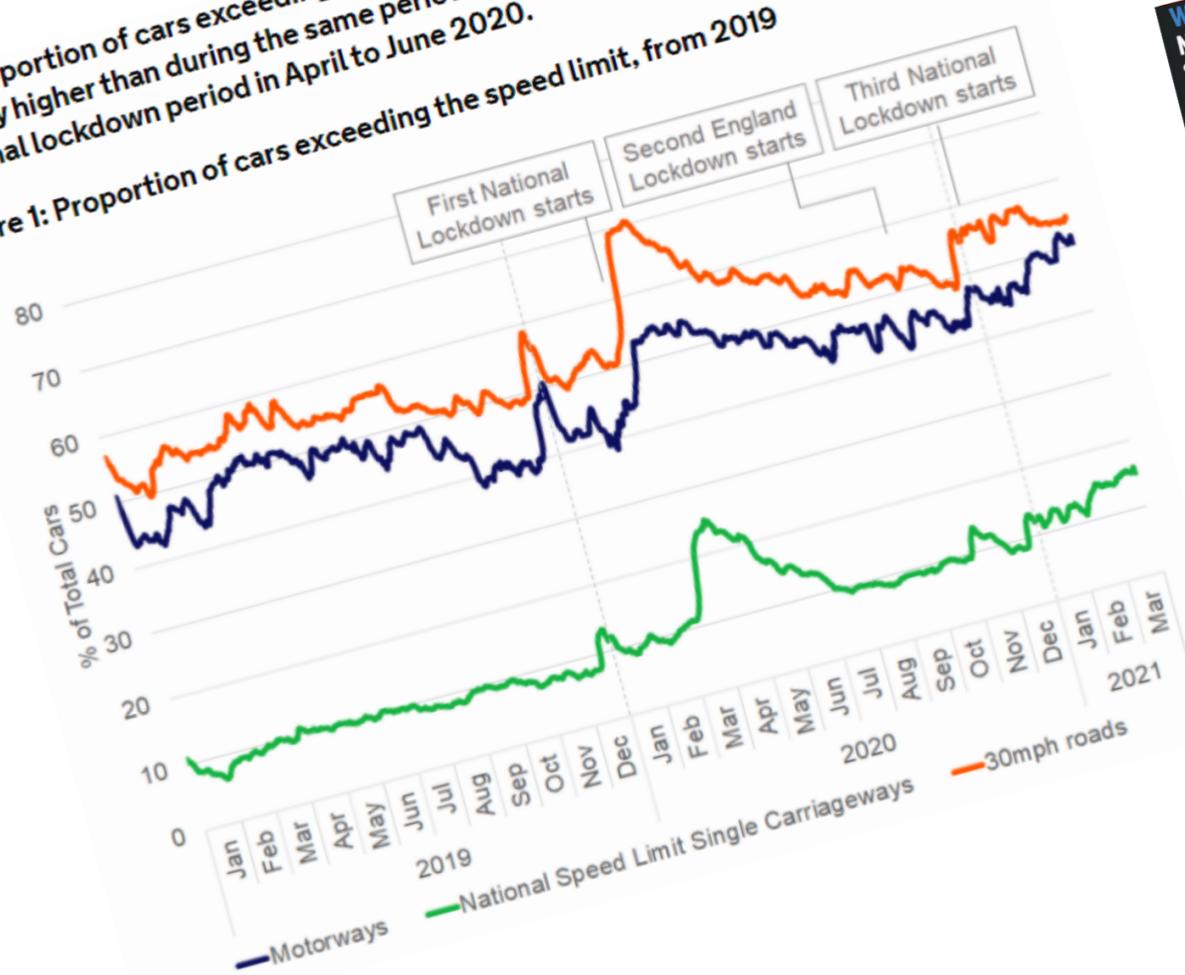


UNIVERSITY OF  
WESTMINSTER  
Report author: Laura Laker

# The trouble with 'car accidents'

The proportion of cars exceeding the speed limit during January to March 2021, was slightly higher than during the same period in 2020, but lower than during the first national lockdown period in April to June 2020.

Figure 1: Proportion of cars exceeding the speed limit, from 2019



Driver had a lucky escape after a car went out of control and crashed in a back garden

"The vehicle failed to stop at the scene and had left the immediate area prior to police arrival but we're doing all we can to trace the person responsible for this awful



A cyclist in his 40's was yesterday taken to hospital af Carron Road by a Mercedes car which failed to stop.

**Major North Staffordshire road collision between bike and car**  
Motorists are unable to pass

**A CYCLIST suffered life-changing leg injuries after being hit by a car – which then sped off when police officers arrived.**

Two people have died in a crash involving a car and pedestrians.  
The Subaru car hit two people on foot at about 17:00 GMT on Friday on the A1074 Dereham Road, close to the Norfolk Showground, near Norwich.

**Terrifying moment £50k super car spins out of control on M66 in heavy rain and is 'wrecked' in smash**

"This driver had a lucky escape" after the Ferrari spun out and hit the central reservation

Sources: Vehicle speed compliance statistics for Great Britain: January to March 2021 <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/vehicle-speed-compliance-statistics-for-great-britain-january-to-march-2021/vehicle-speed-compliance-statistics-for-great-britain-january-to-march-2021>  
Walking and cycling statistics 2019.

# Most crashes aren't 'car accidents'

- Road crashes kill or seriously injure someone in the UK every 20 minutes
- Road deaths have remained static for a decade...
- We accept road danger - but most road deaths are preventable
  - Speed
  - Distracted driving
  - Drug/drink driving
- People want to walk and cycle more but don't feel safe
- Language is part of the solution

Chart 1: Road deaths, GB, rolling years ending June, 2005-2020

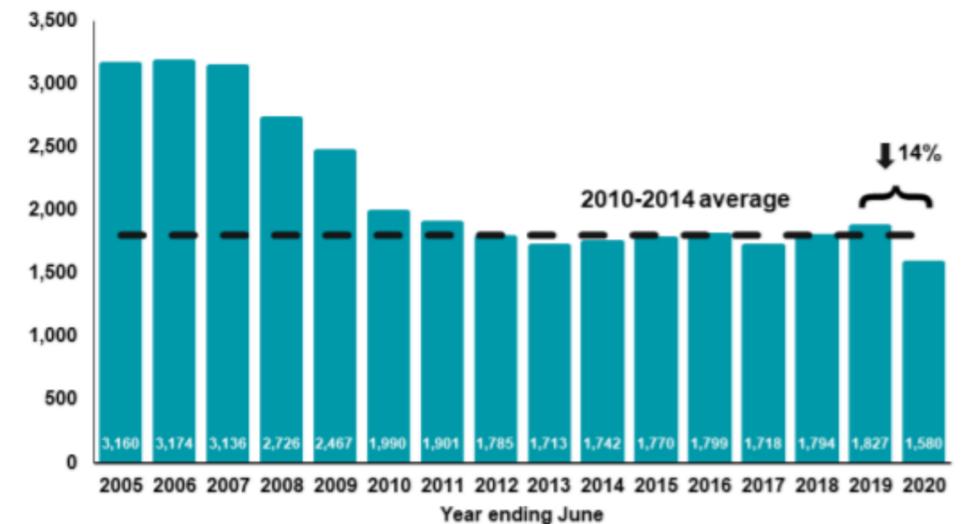
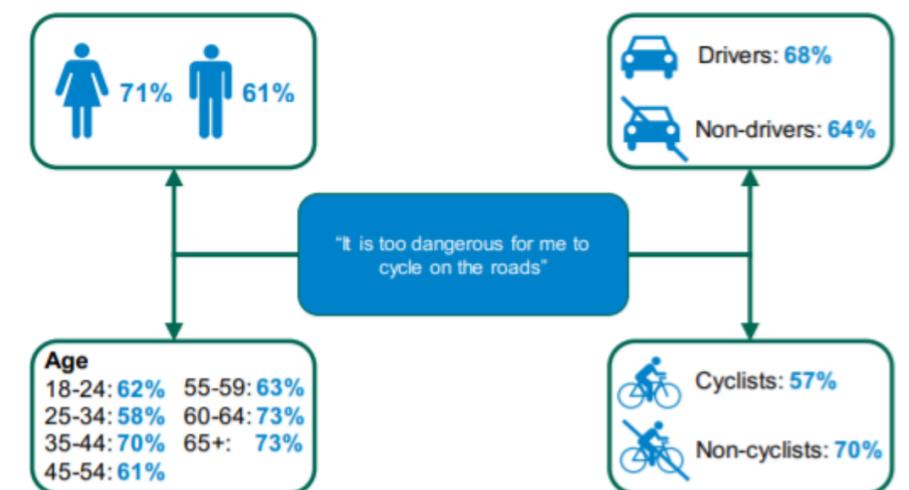


Chart 5: Proportion of adults aged 18+ who agree with the statement "It is too dangerous for me to cycle on the roads", by gender, age band, cycling and driving status, England, 2020 [CW0409]



Sources: Reported road casualties in Great Britain: provisional estimates to year ending June 2020

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/vehicle-speed-compliance-statistics-for-great-britain-january-to-march-2021/vehicle-speed-compliance-statistics-for-great-britain-january-to-march-2021>

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/906698/walking-and-cycling-statistics-england-2019.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/906698/walking-and-cycling-statistics-england-2019.pdf)

# What the research tells us

- Subtle language changes have big impacts
- Crash vs accident
- Driver vs car
- Context is crucial
- Avoid implications of blame
- Avoid coverage that normalises speeding or phones at the wheel

About



Transportation Research Interdisciplinary  
Perspectives

Available online 15 November 2019, 100073

In Press, Corrected Proof



Does news coverage of traffic crashes affect perceived blame and preferred solutions? Evidence from an experiment

Tara Goddard <sup>a</sup> , Kelcie Ralph <sup>b</sup> , Calvin G. Thigpen <sup>b</sup> , Evan Iacobucci <sup>b</sup>

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**“I really encourage everybody to stop using the phrase ‘road accident’ which doesn’t always reflect the nature and recklessness of the driving involved and can be very offensive to bereaved families or people left seriously injured.”**

Detective Superintendent Andy Cox, Head of Crime at Lincolnshire Police, and the National Lead for Fatal Collision Investigation.

# Consultation

- We produced draft guidelines and held a **public consultation** in Autumn 2020 for six weeks on [www.rc-rg.com](http://www.rc-rg.com)
- 198 responses from our online form and email
- 72% (139) agreed with the principles of the Guidelines
- 21% (38) indirectly expressed their support for the aims
- 2.5% (5) did not agree
- Professional rationale for support *and* moving anecdotes around feelings of vulnerability on the roads

## Road Collision Reporting Guidelines

# Contact

### Consultation form

This consultation is to gather views on the proposed Guidelines, to help inform how they may affect interested people, bodies and industries, and to receive suggestions for improvements.

We are keen to hear from as many people and organisations as possible. Please fill in the below form with your responses, or email your response to [consultation@rc-rg.com](mailto:consultation@rc-rg.com)

The deadline for submissions is midnight on 8 November 2020. Our working group will review all responses and launch the first Road Collision Reporting Guidelines at the [Active Travel Media Awards](#) on 26 November 2020. We hope this will become the industry standard for reporting on road safety.

First Name

Last Name

Email

Company or organisation (if any)

Do you agree with the principles of the Road Collision Reporting Guidelines (Y/N)?

How do you predict the Reporting Guidelines will affect you or your industry?

What, if any, changes would you like to see to the Reporting Guidelines?

# The Guidelines

- 1. Be accurate:** Be clear about what you know and don't know. When you learn more later, update your story to reflect that.
- 2. Avoid calling it an accident:** unless it actually is one. Most collisions are preventable.
- 3. Talk about the driver, not their car:** Use phrases like "the driver hit a pedestrian" over "the car hit a pedestrian".
- 4. Consider the family of the victim:** when publishing details of collisions.
- 5. Be careful with photos and images:** Beware of publishing number plates, or footage or images taken behind the wheel, that might condone phone use while driving.
- 6. Injury is more important than delays:** Loss of life or injury shouldn't be overshadowed by traffic delays.

# The Guidelines

**7. Be wary of generalizing groups:** Does your writing negatively generalise a group of people like cyclists or disabled people? This can lead to them being treated badly on the roads.

**8. Give context:** Large vehicles like SUVs cause more damage than small ones. Pedestrians and cyclists are at greater risk in a collision. Some junctions are notorious -- if collisions aren't isolated, don't let people believe they are.

**9. Don't glorify lawbreaking:** Speed cameras don't "target" drivers. They save lives. Research shows reporting that reflects that makes people more likely to support enforcement of these laws.

**10. Talk to the professionals:** Journalists aren't expected to be experts in road collisions, so the guidelines document provides relevant contacts.

# What happens next?

- ‘Standards by consensus’
- Support from major organisations
- Team effort
  - Publishers
  - Emergency services
  - Government
  - Professionals
- Culture change
  - Point people to our Guidelines
  - Tell us how to improve them!
    - [contact@rc-rg.com](mailto:contact@rc-rg.com)
    - [www.rc-rg.com/guidelines](http://www.rc-rg.com/guidelines)

## SUPPORTERS

These organisations support the aims of the Road Collision Reporting Guidelines.



The Automobile Association



Cycling UK



Road Danger Reduction Forum



RoadPeace



PACTS



Living Streets



Wheels for Wellbeing



The Transport Research Laboratory



British Cycling



The FIA Foundation

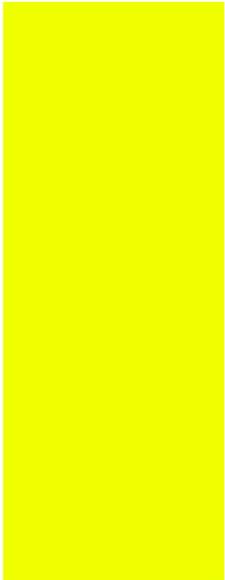


Transport for London

# About the Active Travel Academy

- Launched September 2019 by Professor Rachel Aldred
- Expertise from within the University of Westminster, and outside
- Focus on walking and cycling, micromobilities – reductions in car use
- Issues: air pollution and climate change, inactivity, road danger, unequal access to transport, the loss of independent mobility in young and old
- PhD studentships, international summer schools and visiting international fellowships
- Open, online access journal for the field
- Media awards
- Media reporting guidelines
- [blog.westminster.ac.uk/ata/](http://blog.westminster.ac.uk/ata/)





# Thank you!

[contact@rc-rg.com](mailto:contact@rc-rg.com)

[www.rc-rg.com/guidelines](http://www.rc-rg.com/guidelines)

