



## Motor vehicles: seat belts and child restraints

Standard Note: SN/BT/43  
 Last updated: 1 December 2010  
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 Section: Business and Transport

This note outlines the legislative requirements to fit and wear seat belts in cars, taxis and heavy goods vehicles (HGVs). The arrangements for buses are covered in HC Library standard note [SN/BT/542](#).

The current arrangements are summarised below:

	Front seat	Rear seat	Who is responsible?
Driver	Seat belt must be worn if fitted	n/a	Driver
Child under 3 years of age	Correct child restraint must be used	Correct child restraint must be used. If one is not available in a taxi, may travel unrestrained.	Driver
Child aged 3 to 11 and under 1.35 metres (approx. 4ft 5ins) in height	Correct child restraint must be used	Correct child restraint must be used where seat belts fitted. Must use adult belt if: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- In a taxi, the correct child restraint not available</li> <li>- On a short and occasional trip, the correct child restraint not available</li> <li>- Two occupied child restraints prevent fitment of a third</li> </ul>	Driver
Child 12 or over 1.35 metres (approx 4ft 5ins in height)	Seat belt must be worn if fitted	Adult seat belt must be worn if fitted	Driver
Adult passengers	Seat belt must be worn if fitted	Seat belt must be worn if fitted	Passenger

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## 1 Cars

### 1.1 Fitting of seat belts

The law governing the fitting of seat belts is currently set out in Regulations 46-48 of the *Road Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1986* (SI 1986/1078), as amended.

All cars first registered after 1 January 1965 must be fitted with seat belts in the front seats.<sup>1</sup> Cars manufactured after 1 October 1981 must have anchor points fitted for rear seat belts. Cars manufactured after 1 October 1986 and first registered after 1 April 1987 must be fitted with rear seat belts.<sup>2</sup> The regulations also require a seatbelt to be fitted in the centre front seat of cars and light vans where such a seat is provided.

The Regulations allow for different types of belt or restraint to be fitted in order to meet European obligations and to allow individuals to choose the most suitable type of belt for themselves or restraint for their children.

### 1.2 Wearing of seat belts: adults

The law governing the wearing of seat belts by adults travelling in the front and rear of a car is currently set out in the *Motor Vehicles (Wearing of Seat Belts) Regulations 1993* ([SI 1993/176](#)), as amended.

It has been compulsory for adults to wear seat belts in the front of cars since 31 January 1983<sup>3</sup> and in the back of cars since 1 July 1991.<sup>4</sup> In 1993 the regulations were consolidated

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<sup>1</sup> originally introduced by Regulations 46 and 47 of the *Motor Vehicles (Construction and Use) Regulations 1966* (SI 1966/1288)

<sup>2</sup> originally introduced by the *Motor Vehicles (Construction and Use) (Amendment) (No 4) Regulations 1985* (SI 1985/2039)

<sup>3</sup> originally introduced by the *Motor Vehicles (Wearing of Seat Belts) Regulations 1982* (SI 1982/1203)

<sup>4</sup> originally introduced by the *Motor Vehicles (Wearing of Seat Belts in Rear Seats by Adults) Regulations 1991* (SI 1991/1255)

and slightly amended to fit in with the relevant European legislation.<sup>5</sup> In summary, the general rules for adults are:

- when travelling in the front seat of any vehicle, an adult must wear a seat belt if one is available; and
- when travelling in the back seat of a car an adult must wear a seat belt if it is available.

Under section 14 of the [Road Traffic Act 1988](#), as amended, it is an offence for an adult not to wear a seat belt where one is provided. This is punishable by a maximum fine of £500 (Level 2), as set out in Schedule 2 to the [Road Traffic Offenders' Act 1988](#), as amended. It is the personal responsibility of each adult occupant of a vehicle to ensure that he or she complies with the law in respect of wearing seat belts.

### 1.3 Wearing of restraints: children

The law governing the wearing of seat belts by children travelling in the front of a car is currently set out in the *Motor Vehicles (Wearing of Seat Belts by Children in Front Seats) Regulations 1993* (SI 1993/31), as amended, while the wearing of restraints by children travelling in the rear of a car is currently set out in the *Motor Vehicles (Wearing of Seat Belts) Regulations 1993* (SI 1993/176), as amended.

It has been compulsory for children to wear seat belts in the front of cars since 31 January 1983<sup>6</sup> and in the back of cars since 1 September 1989.<sup>7</sup> In 1993 the regulations were consolidated and slightly amended to fit in with the relevant European legislation.<sup>8</sup> In summary, the general rules for children are:

- no child may be carried unrestrained in the front seat of any vehicle;
- children under 12 and of a certain height must be seated in the rear of the vehicle in an appropriate restraint, if no restraint is available the child cannot travel in the car;
- children between the ages of 12 and 14 must wear an appropriate restraint in the rear of a vehicle if one is provided and must move to the front if there is no seatbelt in the rear but there is one available in the front.

Under section 15 of the [Road Traffic Act 1988](#), as amended, it is an offence for a child not to comply with the requirements listed above. This is punishable by a maximum fine of £500 (Level 2), as set out in Schedule 2 to the [Road Traffic Offenders' Act 1988](#), as amended. Drivers are responsible for ensuring that children under 14 wear the appropriate restraint.

The changes for children in the rear of vehicles came about in September 2006, following the adoption of European Directive 2003/20/EC.<sup>9</sup> The Directive meant that all children would have to use a restraint appropriate for their size and would no longer be able to use an adult

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<sup>5</sup> the compulsory wearing by adults and children of fitted safety belts in cars, goods vehicles and passenger-carrying vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes is required by [Directive 91/671/EEC](#), 16 December 1991

<sup>6</sup> originally introduced by the *Motor Vehicles (Wearing of Seat Belts by Children) Regulations 1982* (SI 1982/1342)

<sup>7</sup> originally introduced by the *Motor Vehicles (Wearing of Seat Belts by Children in Rear Seats) Regulations 1989* (SI 1989/1219)

<sup>8</sup> the compulsory wearing by adults and children of fitted safety belts in cars, goods vehicles and passenger-carrying vehicles up to 3.5 tonnes is required by [Directive 91/671/EEC](#), 16 December 1991

<sup>9</sup> [Directive 2003/20/EC](#), 8 April 2003, amending the 1991 Directive

seat belt alone in the front or rear seats. In summary, the Directive required the following changes to be made to domestic legislation:

- all children under 3 years old must use an appropriate child restraint when travelling in a car;
- children aged 3 or more years old and up to 150 cms (approximately 4 feet 11 inches) in height must use a child restraint appropriate to their size when travelling in cars (some exceptions are permitted);
- rear-facing baby seats must not be used in a seat protected by an active frontal air-bag;
- all child restraints in use must conform to [UN-ECE Regulation 44/03](#) or [Directive 77/541/EEC](#), or any subsequently agreed standards; and
- all occupants of cars must use seat belts, where provided, while seated and the vehicle is in motion, and the number of people carried in such vehicles may not exceed the number of seats available fitted with seat belts or child restraints.

The Labour Government consulted on the changes in 2005-06.<sup>10</sup> Along with the outcome of the consultation in February 2006 it published the final Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA). This set out how the new arrangements would be taken forward:

In the light of the comments received, the Department has decided that the options on exemptions and timing will be exercised as originally proposed as follows:

- children aged three years **up to 135 cms**, instead of 150 cms, **in height** will be required to use child restraints when carried in vehicles equipped with seat belts;
- children will be able to travel in the **rear seats of taxis** if restraints are not available. Under 3s can be unrestrained (because the alternative, the adult belt is not suitable for such small children) and those 3 years and over will need to use an adult belt;
- children 3 years or over will be able to use an adult belt in the rear of a vehicle **if two child restraints in use prevent the fitting of a third**;
- children 3 years or over will be able to use an adult belt in the rear of a vehicle if no child restraints are available for them on **short and occasional journeys**;
- children will be allowed to be unrestrained in a vehicle being used for the purposes of police, security, Serious Organised Crime Agency or emergency services (because an appropriate restraint may not be available in an emergency);
- the prohibition on **older design child restraints** will come into force in May 2008 (and not earlier); and
- that, from May 2009 (and not earlier), in vehicles where seat belts are provided, the number of passengers carried may not exceed the number of seat belts or child restraints provided.

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<sup>10</sup> DfT, [Compulsory seat belt/child restraint wearing in cars and goods vehicles](#), 15 June 2005

The prohibition of older design child restraints will require separate Regulations, to be made in due course, amending the Motor Vehicle (Construction and Use) Regulations. This amendment is not required immediately, and is not appropriate to seat belt wearing regulations.<sup>11</sup>

The *Motor Vehicles (Wearing of Seat Belts) (Amendment) Regulations 2006* (SI 2006/1892) came into force on 18 September 2006.

## **2 Taxis and private hire vehicles (PHVs)**

### **2.1 Drivers**

The requirements to wear a seat belt do not apply to the driver of a licensed taxi (hackney carriage) while it is being used for seeking hire, or answering a call for hire, or carrying a passenger for hire; or a private hire vehicle (PHV) while it is being used to carry a passenger for hire.

Taxi drivers do not therefore have to wear a seatbelt when plying for hire, when answering a call or when carrying passengers, but they are supposed to wear them when travelling to or from work or when using the vehicle for private purposes. Drivers of PHVs or minicabs are exempt only when they are carrying a passenger: they are not exempt when they are answering a call.

The reason for the inclusion of taxi and PHV drivers in the exempt category was that they risked being attacked by their passengers and needed to be able to make a quick and unrestricted getaway. Taxi drivers have the additional exemption covering answering a call and plying for hire because they claimed they often needed to get in and out of their vehicles to help passengers. They were not included in the original legislation, nor in the consultation paper circulated by the Secretary of State in 1981 but the taxi drivers seem to have argued their case convincingly enough to be included in the final regulations, introduced in January 1983.<sup>12</sup>

In his initial statement accompanying his proposals, the then Secretary of State for Transport, David Howell, said that he appreciated that exemptions from seat belt wearing would be controversial but that he was intending to introduce very few exemptions. He would consider arguments in support of other claims put forward, but to be successful these claims would have to be based on the most compelling reasons. The proposals considered in some detail the various other categories of driver for whom it had been suggested that there should be specific exemptions e.g. on grounds of age, height, length of journey (taxi drivers were mentioned in passing in this section), and for those who had conscientious objections. The Secretary of State rejected all these grounds. He also said he had in mind the practice of other countries and listed exemptions in the annex to the document. A lot of these do include taxi drivers.<sup>13</sup>

The draft regulations were considered in the House of Commons in July 1982. The then Minister for Transport, Lynda Chalker, explained the inclusion of taxi drivers as an exempted category as follows:

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<sup>11</sup> DfT, *Amendment to the Seat Belt Wearing Regulations: Regulatory Impact Assessment*, 27 February 2006, paras 14 and 15

<sup>12</sup> the *Motor Vehicles (Wearing of Seat Belts) Regulations 1982* (SI 1982/1203)

<sup>13</sup> DoT, *Compulsory seat belt wearing for adults and children in cars: proposals by the Secretary of State for Transport*, 8 December 1981

Following the consultation period, it became clear that there were other cases where exemptions were justifiable. The representatives of the taxi drivers and private hire car drivers made the case that their members were particularly vulnerable to attack when going about their work and that they could be made more vulnerable by having to wear a seat belt. I accept that, sadly, that is a valid argument. I have therefore allowed an exemption for taxi drivers when plying for hire or carrying a passenger, and for private hire car drivers when carrying a passenger. That is set out in regulation 5(h). Bearing in mind the need for enforceable legislation, only vehicles displaying the relevant licence plates will fall within the scope of that exemption.<sup>14</sup>

## 2.2 Passengers

Taxis have an exemption from two of the new provisions regarding children in the rear of vehicles that were introduced in September 2006. These are:

- requiring children between 3 and 11 years of age but less than 135 cms in height to be secured with a child restraint appropriate for their height and weight in the rear of motor vehicles provided there is an adult belt in place to secure the child restraint; and
- prohibiting children under 3 being carried in the rear of a motor vehicle altogether unless they are in an appropriate child restraint.

In general, taxis and PHVs without a partition are basically treated in the same way as ordinary cars. The driver of the vehicle is responsible for ensuring that children under 14 are wearing seat belts: it is an offence for someone to drive a car with a child under 14 in the front of a car and not wearing a seatbelt and with a child under 14 in the rear who is not wearing a seatbelt if it is fitted. A child sitting in the rear where there are no seat belts fitted when there is an unoccupied seat in the front with a seatbelt must move to the front. For children aged 14 and over, responsibility for compliance rests with the passenger not the driver.

Where taxis or PHVs have a partition (e.g. London's hackney carriages), they are exempt from the requirement to ensure that children under 14 in the rear of such a taxi are wearing a seat belt. Children over 14 would appear to be covered by the legislation and should wear a seatbelt but it is their responsibility, not the driver's.

## 3 Heavy goods vehicles (HGVs)

Seat belts have had to be fitted in the front of vehicles first used from April 1980 up to and including 3,500kg design gross weight (DGW); from May 2006 this has been law for all HGVs, including those weighing more than 3,500kg. Where seat belts are fitted, they must be worn. The rules are set out in detail in the *Road vehicles (construction and use) Regulations 1986* (SI 1986/1078), as amended, particularly Regulation 47. The majority of the construction and use regulations are guided by European rules.<sup>15</sup>

A *Transport News Network* report from 2006 gives further information:

HGV drivers across the European Union will have to buckle up, when a new European Directive on the compulsory use of seat belts is incorporated into national law by individual Member States.

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<sup>14</sup> [HC Deb 22 July 1982, c629](#)

<sup>15</sup> in this case [Directive 2003/20/EC](#), 8 April 2003, amending [Directive 91/671/EEC](#), 16 December 1991

The new directive (Directive 2003/20/EC), which should have been written into national law by May 9th across the EU 25, makes it compulsory for the drivers of vehicles with a gross vehicle weight greater than 3.5 tonnes to wear a seat belt.

Under the existing European legislation it was compulsory to use seat belts in vehicles below 3.5 tonnes fitted with restraints. This obligation has now been extended to all categories of vehicles and also requires the use of restraint systems specially adapted for children.

"I am convinced that this measure will save thousands of lives. In so doing it will help to meet the target of halving the number of deaths on the roads by 2010 compared with the figure of 50 000 in 2001" said Jacques Barrot, the European Commission Vice-President with special responsibility for transport.

The European Commission recently reviewed the efforts made since 2001 to improve road safety. While considerable progress has been made, particularly in some Member States - in 2005 there were 41 000 road fatalities in Europe compared with 50 000 in 2001 - greater efforts will have to be made at all levels if the target of halving the number of deaths on the roads by 2010 is to be met. The new European Directive is a step in the right direction. Failure to use seat belts is the second biggest cause of road deaths, after speeding and ahead of drink-driving. A study carried out for the European Commission has come to the conclusion that, in the best-case scenario, actions targeting the use of seat belts would save 5,500 lives a year in the EU.<sup>16</sup>

In the UK, there is some indication from a 1997 report that around 130 deaths and serious injuries could be prevented each year if all truck drivers wore a seat belt. At the time of the report it was estimated that only around one in ten HGV drivers wore seatbelts.<sup>17</sup>

## 4 Exemptions

Section 14 of the [Road Traffic Act 1988](#), as amended, allows certain exceptions from the requirement to wear seat belts, these are outlined in detail in Regulation 6 of the *Motor Vehicles (Wearing of Seat Belts) Regulations 1993 (SI 1993/176)*, as amended:

### 6 Exemptions

- (1) The requirements of regulation 5 do not apply to—
  - (a) a person holding a medical certificate;
  - [(b) the driver of or a passenger in a motor vehicle constructed or adapted for carrying goods, while on a journey which does not exceed 50 metres and which is undertaken for the purpose of delivering or collecting any thing;]
  - (c) a person driving a vehicle while performing a manoeuvre which includes reversing;
  - (d) a qualified driver (within the meaning given by [regulation 17 of the Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) Regulations 1999]) who is supervising the holder of a provisional licence (within the meaning of Part III of the Act) while that holder is performing a manoeuvre which includes reversing;

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<sup>16</sup> TNN, "[HGV drivers must buckle up under new EU Directive](#)", 16 May 2006

<sup>17</sup> ICE for the DfT, [HGV seat belts: ergonomics of current designs](#), 1997

(e) a person by whom, as provided in [the Motor Vehicles (Driving Licences) Regulations 1999], a test of competence to drive is being conducted and his wearing a seat belt would endanger himself or any other person;

(f) a person driving or riding in a vehicle while it is being used for [relevant authority (as defined in section 6 of the Fire (Scotland) Act 2005 (asp 5))] [or, in England, fire and rescue authority] or police purposes or for carrying a person in lawful custody (a person who is being so carried being included in this exemption);

[(fa) as regards England and Wales, and so far as relating to the functions of the Serious Organised Crime Agency which are exercisable in or as regards Scotland and which relate to reserved matters (within the meaning of the Scotland Act 1998), a person driving or riding in a vehicle while it is being used for Serious Organised Crime Agency purposes;]

[(fb) so far as relating to the functions of the Serious Organised Crime Agency which are exercisable in or as regards Scotland and which do not (within the meaning of the Scotland Act 1998) relate to reserved matters, a person driving or riding in a vehicle while it is being used for Serious Organised Crime Agency purposes;]

(g) the driver of—

(i) a licensed taxi while it is being used for seeking hire, or answering a call for hire, or carrying a passenger for hire, or

(ii) a private hire vehicle while it is being used to carry a passenger for hire;

(h) a person riding in a vehicle, being used under a trade licence, for the purpose of investigating or remedying a mechanical fault in the vehicle;

(j) a disabled person who is wearing a disabled person's belt; or

(k) a person riding in a vehicle while it is taking part in a procession organised by or on behalf of the Crown.

(2) Without prejudice to paragraph (1)(k), the requirements of regulation 5 do not apply to a person riding in a vehicle which is taking part in a procession held to mark or commemorate an event if either—

(a) the procession is one commonly or customarily held in the police area or areas in which it is being held, or

(b) notice in respect of the procession was given in accordance with section 11 of the Public Order Act 1986.

(3) The requirements of regulation 5 do not apply to—

(a) a person driving a vehicle if the driver's seat is not provided with an adult belt;

(b) a person riding in the front of a vehicle if no adult belt is available for him in the front of the vehicle;

(c) a person riding in the rear of a vehicle if no adult belt is available for him in the rear of the vehicle.

[(4) The requirements of regulation 5(1)(b) do not apply to a person riding in a small or large bus—



- (a) which is being used to provide a local service (within the meaning of the Transport Act 1985) in a built-up area, or
- (b) which is constructed or adapted for the carriage of standing passengers and on which the operator permits standing.]

The guidance to medical practitioners on issuing an exemption certificate states that there are no conditions which should be automatically exempted (e.g. pregnancy). The guidance states that:

In deciding whether to grant exemption, a medical practitioner needs to judge each case on its merits. There are no conditions (eg pregnancy) which justify automatic exemption. Thorough assessment is important. Wherever possible ask patients to demonstrate their problem, in the vehicle if appropriate.<sup>18</sup>

The guidance states that problems that disabled people may encounter with seat belts can usually be resolved with a modification, rather than permitting an exemption:

Many people with disabilities can and do wear seat belts without undue discomfort or inconvenience. A comparatively small number experience difficulties, many of which can be resolved by simple measures such as the following.

A survey by the Royal Association for Disability and Rehabilitation (RADAR), on behalf of the then Department of Transport, showed that three quarters of the difficulties with seat belts encountered by those with disabilities could be resolved by these solutions.

'Drop links' designed to lower the position of the belt and alter the lie of the diagonal. This is particularly useful for people of restricted growth where the conventional diagonal would otherwise cross the neck.

'Pulla belts', a simple sleeve addition to the belt for people who cannot reach the top anchorage point to pull the conventional belt across them.

'The clever clip' or 'Klunk Klip' designed to ease belt tension across the chest and reduce any restriction of breathing. It can also reduce pressure on the abdomen, for instance for patients with a colostomy.<sup>19</sup>

## 5 Legislative background

Sections 27 and 28 of the *Transport Act 1981* enabled the Secretary of State to make regulations requiring, subject to certain prescribed exemptions, drivers or passengers of motor vehicles to wear seat belts. The legislation was consolidated in sections 14 and 15 of the *Road Traffic Act 1988*.

The debate on whether the wearing of seat belts should be made compulsory had continued for many years prior to 1981. On the one hand it was argued that compulsion was an unjustified invasion of freedom; that seat belts, so far from preserving life, in some cases imperilled it; that some people (or people in some special circumstances) would have great difficulty in complying with such a law; and that it would be largely unenforceable and therefore a bad law. On the other hand, experience had shown that in the vast majority of cases in which a car was involved in an accident the risk of injury or death to its occupants was minimised if they were wearing seat belts. A large body of opinion held very strongly that

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<sup>18</sup> DfT, *Medical Exemption from Compulsory Seat Belt Wearing: Guidance for Medical Practitioners*, November 2006

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*

such an invasion of personal liberty would be justified by the reduction in death and injury it could bring about. Opinion was even more united that children should not be allowed to travel unrestrained in the front seats of cars.

Parliament considered these questions – not for the first time – during the 1980-81 session and decided on a free vote that compulsion should be introduced. The Bill that became the 1981 Act contained no provisions for making the wearing of seat belts compulsory when it was first published, although it did contain a section on road safety. During the Committee stage, a new clause was tabled by the Labour backbencher Barry Sheerman that would have required children travelling in the front seat of cars to wear seat belts. He withdrew his amendment, but a similar one was later tabled by the Conservative Government and agreed.<sup>20</sup> The Bill was guillotined late in its Committee stage and only one day was allocated for the Report stage. So although a backbench MP tabled a new clause (with many signatures) to introduce the compulsory wearing of seat belts generally, there was insufficient time for it to be discussed or voted on.<sup>21</sup>

The Bill therefore went to the Lords containing only the provision that seat belts should be compulsory for children in the front seats of cars. During Committee the Conservative peer Lord Nugent of Guildford tabled a new clause applying the law to all individuals travelling in the front of cars and this was agreed on a division on 11 June 1981.<sup>22</sup> There were some later amendments during the Report stage and on Third Reading (and at least one attempt to remove it altogether), but the Bill returned to the Commons with the new clause still intact. As this was a Lords amendment, the guillotine could not preclude allowing at least a vote on the amendment, even if there was not enough time for any discussion. In the event, there was a fairly long discussion on 28 July 1981 and the new clause was finally approved by the Commons on a free vote by 221 votes to 144.<sup>23</sup>

The Conservative Government was neutral on the issue but undertook to implement Parliament's decision. The implementing regulations came into force in 1983, but included a 'sunset' clause that meant that they would expire after three years unless Parliament made further provision. To help Parliament consider the future of the regulation, the Department of Transport monitored the effects of seatbelt wearing and commissioned independent scrutiny by expert assessors, Professor James Durbin and Andrew Harvey, of the LSE. In 1985, it was reported that both the surveys found that there had been net reductions of over 200 deaths and around 7,000 serious injuries per year since 1982. Both studies also concluded that there was no significant rise in the number of pedestrians, pedal cycles and rear seat car passengers seriously injured. The assessors did conclude, however, that there was an increase in these categories being killed. It was not felt this could be attributed to a change in driver behaviour since there was little change in the number of injuries but suggested the rise might be due to changes in the distribution of car passengers in front and rear seats and in possible long term trends in passenger casualty rates.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> SC (E) Deb 19 and 31 March 1981

<sup>21</sup> [HC Deb 14 April 1981, cc157-294](#)

<sup>22</sup> [HL 11 June 1981, cc321-358](#)

<sup>23</sup> [HC Deb 28 July 1981, cc1031-69](#)

<sup>24</sup> DoT press notice, "Lynda Chalker announces results of seat belt studies", 15 October 1985

On 13 January 1986 the then Transport Minister, David Mitchell, announced the government's intention to keep the regulations in force. The motion was carried in the House by 217 votes to 25. Mr Mitchell explained the decision as follows:

What does the evidence tell us? First, it tells us that there has been instant and wholehearted acceptance of the seatbelt law on the part of motorists. Up to the end of 1982 the proportion of drivers and front-seat passengers wearing belts never exceeded 40 per cent. Immediately the law came in, the wearing rate rose to around 95 per cent and has remained consistently at that level, with no sign whatever of any fall off. This is a remarkable achievement, especially when we consider that in no other country with a seatbelt law has the overall wearing rate even begun to approach the sort of level that we have here. Our own observations have been confirmed by the police, who report that the law has been almost entirely self-enforcing.

Why should the public adapt so readily to the seatbelt law, when their previous attitude was no more than half-hearted? The most likely answer must surely be that the seatbelt law came just at the right time to catch the tide of public opinion. The majority of people had, I believe, all but decided for themselves that wearing a seatbelt was a sensible thing to do to reduce the risk of death or injury in the event of an accident. All the legislation did was clinch that decision for them. The law was accepted because it equated with what people judged to be in their own interests.

The next question must be whether people's faith in seatbelt wearing has been justified in the light of experience. I will say straight out that in our view, the answer has to be an unequivocal yes. This is the opinion, not just of the Department of Transport, but of all those who have been directly involved in research on seatbelt wearing. It is a view shared by virtually the entire medical profession, the police and all those working in road safety.

The evidence to support this conclusion is set out for all to see in the department's report, backed up by the independent assessment of Professors Durbin and Harvey. The most striking facts are surely these: since the seatbelt law took effect, there has been a substantial net reduction in road casualties at the very minimum, an annual saving of 200 deaths and a further saving of 7,000 serious injuries. On a large sample of some 14 hospitals which are generally recognised as representative by the medical profession, there has been a reduction of no less than 25 per cent, in the admission of car accident victims to wards, with a comparable fall in bed occupancy.<sup>25</sup>

Proposals to extend the law on seatbelt wearing to adults in rear seats of cars and taxis from 1 July 1991 were announced on 16 November 1990. At the time the Department of Transport estimated that at least 100 lives and 1,000 serious injuries could be saved as a result.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> [HC Deb 13 January 1986, cc875-97](#)

<sup>26</sup> DoT press notice, "Compulsory seat belt wearing proposed for adults", 16 November 1990