

The changing politics of road death in Britain: from policy action to kicking the can down the road

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ABSTRACT

Britain has one of the lowest road casualty rates globally, yet tens of thousands of people are killed or seriously injured annually, and numbers have plateaued since 2012. Despite the consequential impact of road trauma, there has been limited evaluation of Britain's policy response. This paper uses Kingdon's Multiple Streams Model to understand agenda setting and analyses *how* road safety policies were made or not made over time. Critical discourse analysis evaluates patterns and themes in new data acquired via thirty-five interviews with politicians and policy participants, and data from Parliamentary debates and policy documents, spanning the period between 1987 and 2021. The data suggests two distinct time periods: 1987 to 2002, the policy problem was accepted, policy solutions advanced, when policy windows opened as political discourse was constructive, the multiple streams coupled, and policy change resulted. Policy development in road safety is therefore possible when it is viewed as an important policy agenda in need of attention. After 2003, there was a perception the problem had been resolved. Road safety lost out to a dominant mobility framing, road deaths were reframed as *accidental* and so unavoidable, solutions were contested, the politics stream flowed slowly, and from 2011, with the tight fiscal environment, discarded targets, and significant competition for attention from alternative policy areas, policy stasis resulted. The prevailing politics meant that the policy problem remained sidelined and policy solutions continued to be kicked down the road. The paper explores how this shift occurred and the consequences on the politics of road death.

1. Introduction

This paper evaluates the response of policymakers to road safety policy in Britain between 1987 and 2021. It explores why certain decisions were made or not made, and how politicians work with a series of policy actors to develop policy to address road safety over time. To do this, thirty-five interviews with politicians and policy participants, debates from the House of Commons, and policy documents were analysed. The paper uses Kingdon's (1995) Multiple Streams Model to analyse agenda setting and addresses Marsden and Reardon's (2017) finding that transport policy literature overwhelmingly contributes knowledge on *what* to do, but pays less attention to *how* policies are formulated.

Globally, 1.19 million people are killed in road traffic crashes each year (World Health Organisation, 2023), and the consequences are a "common cause of human suffering" (Redelmeier and McLellan, 2013, p.1). Britain has some of the lowest numbers of road casualties by head of population (DfT, 2023a), and a history of research, innovation and expertise in many disciplines advancing road safety interventions. Yet, there are tens of thousands of people killed or seriously injured from road crashes each year, and these numbers have plateaued after decades of decline (DfT, 2023a). There are known risk areas, for example: to

those travelling outside a vehicle and so not protected by metal or airbags (Baker, 2019); a disproportionate number of deaths from young male driver crashes (Jones, 2016); and there is an unequal impact on the poorest in society (Lucas et al., 2016; Green and Edwards, 2008). There are increasing safety concerns about the introduction of new modes of travel, such as electric scooters (Kazemzadeh et al., 2023), and developing business models, such as the gig economy (Christie and Ward, 2019), and food delivery on motorcycles (Christie and Ward, 2023). These new travel modes and areas of risk have developed in recent years, whilst there has been less focus on road safety in Britain. Despite the social and economic consequences of road trauma (DfT, 2023b; OECD, 2016), there is limited literature where public policy theory has been applied to the study of road safety globally (Wegman, 2003), and there has been limited evaluation of Britain's policy response, which is important given its position as a putative leader in road safety (Wales, 2017).

Public policy theories around agenda setting help to understand how and why policies get made in the way they do, or why policies do not get made, or put on the agenda at all. Notable is Kingdon's Multiple Streams Model (1995) which explores how policies get on the agenda and then how change is enacted (Howlett et al., 2015). In this paper, Kingdon's (1995) model (explored and reviewed in section 3) is used to analyse

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road safety policy in Britain between 1987 and 2021 using a qualitative case study based approach. 1987 was selected as this marked the year *Road safety: next steps* was published (DoT, 1987) and the start of increased discourse in the House of Commons. By studying policy change (and stasis) over a period of thirty-four years, the paper aims to tease out what conditions have been necessary for policy change in road safety.

Transport policy is one example of many areas considered by politicians which compete for attention, of which road safety forms one small part. Marsden and Reardon (2017) reviewed one hundred papers in two key transport policy facing journals and found, in the overwhelming majority of studies, there was greater engagement with *what* to do rather than *how* policy is actually developed. They recognise the value of studying articles which advance transport policy through interventions, but distinguish between this, and the need to study *how* policies get formulated, with questions of power, context, resources, and legitimacy. They suggest a substantial lack of engagement with governance issues means that research on “policy making ... is unlikely to be utilised because of the distance between it and the realities on the ground” (Marsden and Reardon, 2017, p.238). Their findings were influential in informing this paper where the same distinction applies to road safety policy, between *what* to implement (the majority of the research base) rather than *how* to influence and progress policy making (for example, this study).

The paper addresses a shortcoming of the field of policy studies which often neglects a fundamental aspect of the practice and study of policymaking: that of change over time, focusing instead on more narrow cross sectional work (see Pollitt, 2008; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011 on policy and time). This paper seeks to address two key gaps in the literature. First, it will establish what conditions have been necessary for policy change and what happens when any of these conditions are removed. Second, it establishes how road deaths and road safety more broadly has changed in public policy over time.

The length of the period of study is important to avoid the risk of drawing conclusions from short periods of policy development or from periods with unchanged governments. The analysis of public policy over extended periods of study offers advantages (Sabatier, 1986) and it is important to engage with a historical perspective of policy formulation and agenda setting (Pollitt, 2008; Pollitt and Bouckaert, 2011). Policy processes have periods of change and stability (Baumgartner and Jones, 2009) and recognising where these happen, and the significance, plays an important role in evaluation. Policy change is a dynamic concept, and so the historical aspects of how road safety was dealt with in policy terms was a key factor in understanding the influences of policy development over time (Pollitt, 2008).

The paper proceeds as follows: In Section 2 the state of road safety in Britain is assessed, together with a review of the relevant literature to explain the case study context. In Section 3 policy change using the Multiple Streams Model is explored, followed by the method applied in Section 4. Section 5 sets out the results, and Section 6 discusses the main themes. Having established the necessary conditions for policy change, the paper concludes in Section 7 by reflecting on *how* road safety policy might get back on the political agenda.

2. Road safety in context

Road crash injuries are the twelfth leading causes of death worldwide, and the leading cause of death for children and young people (aged 5 to 29), which cause devastation to those impacted by road trauma (WHO, 2023). This also impedes economic wellbeing and macroeconomic performance (Chen et al., 2019), and as most road deaths are avoidable, studies suggest that a 10% reduction in road traffic deaths would raise per capita real GDP by as much as 3.6% based on global estimates (World Bank, 2021). Road safety research sets out the consequences of road trauma, and the need for change for ethical (Hokstad and Vatn, 2008; Fahlquist, 2009); health (Moran et al., 2018;

Weijermars et al., 2018), social (Weijermars et al., 2016; Bougna et al., 2022) and economic reasons (OECD, 2016; Chen et al., 2019). The next section reviews road safety in Britain to establish the context for the case study, and assesses the literature on road safety policy adoption relevant to the study.

2.1. Road safety in Britain

Britain has some of the lowest casualty rates globally, as measured by fatalities by head of population, and there has been a significant decrease in the rates over the past fifty years (DfT, 2023a). The number of those killed (approximately 8000) or seriously injured annually (approximately 100,000) peaked in 1966 (DfT, 2023a). The decline in casualties over the ensuing decades coincided with increases in the number of vehicles per head of population (DfT, 2023c). However, in Britain, in 2022 thirty-three people were killed, on average, each week, and 28,031 people sustained serious injury (DfT, 2023a). Fig. 1 shows the absolute number of road deaths between 1987 and 2022, and identifies three policy documents (*Road safety: next steps*, DoT, 1987; *Tomorrow's roads: safer for everyone*, DETR, 2000b; and *Strategic framework for road safety*, DfT, 2011). These policy events are identified in order to set the context of agenda setting and when policy decisions were made, rather than draw conclusions from the casualty data. The 1987 and 2000 strategic policy documents were bold, influential and had significant success in addressing road safety. The 2011 statement and the two which followed: *Working together to build a safer road system*, *British road safety statement: moving Britain ahead* (DfT, 2015) and *The road safety statement 2019: a lifetime of road safety* (DfT, 2019) were less significant and less effective. An example of this view is suggested by a policy actor:

“A lot of things listed in the 2015 and 2019 road safety statements weren't massive things. I think we do them anyway and ‘they look good,’ but they're tinkering” (Policy actor).

These are discussed further in sections 5 and 6.

STATS19 is Britain's openly accessible dataset of comprehensive and detailed road casualty numbers which has been collected since 1926 (DfT, 2024). The availability of this data is significant within Britain to support research and policy development, and internationally for comparative studies. It was used in this research to support contextual analysis.

The rate of improvement in reducing the number of road deaths has slowed since 2012, the year after the Coalition government policy document for road safety (*Strategic framework for road safety*, DfT, 2011) and Britain has moved from one of the best performers in Europe with regards to the rate of improvement to the fifth worst (ETSC, 2021). This waning progress is at the same time as improved vehicle safety (TfL, 2016) and widescale improvements to pre-hospital and hospital-based trauma services with improved clinical outcomes (Moran et al., 2018) which has contributed to the reduced severity of the consequences of crashes: whether saving lives or reducing serious injury.

The highest proportion of road deaths, by absolute count using 2022 data, occurs in car drivers and their passengers (46%) and car journeys account for the majority of the traffic on Britain's roads (DfT, 2023d). Pedestrian and cyclist road deaths account for 28%, and motorcyclists account for 20%. When compared in terms of fatality rates (deaths per passenger mile travelled), motorcyclists are at greatest risk, followed by pedestrians and cyclists, and then car occupants (DfT, 2023d). Care is needed when considering casualty data and how comparisons are made (PACTS, 2020). However, vulnerable road users (pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists) remain overrepresented in the number of people killed on Britain's roads. The number of deaths of young male drivers (DfT, 2022; RAC Foundation, 2022) and deaths which occur on rural roads (Fosdick, 2012) also continue to be overrepresented in the data.

The devastation caused by road crashes on individuals and on wider social and economic costs is well documented (WHO, 2018; World Bank,

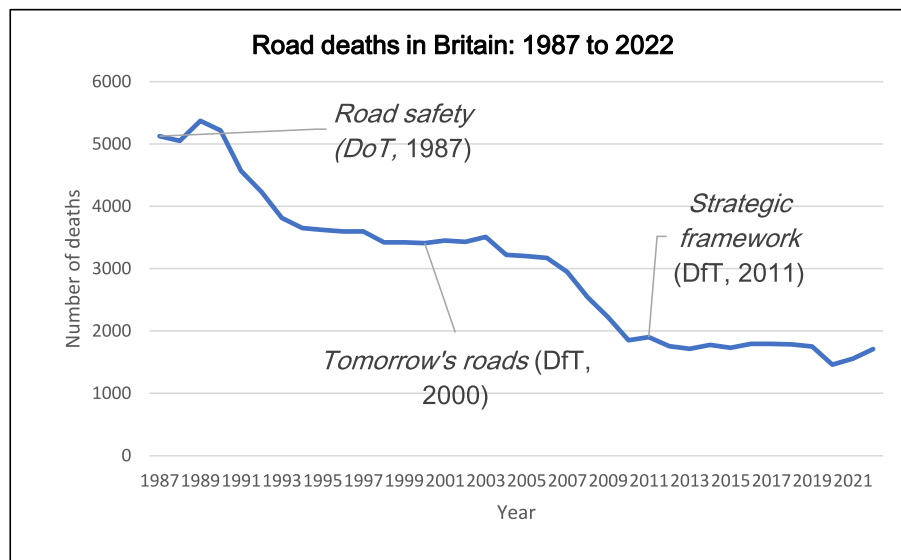


Fig. 1. Changes in the number of road deaths, 1987 to 2022.

2021). Economic evaluations use social and economic measures, and each demonstrate significant costs and impacts on the economy through lost productivity and employment, avoidable demand on healthcare, the cost to emergency services, transport inefficiency, higher insurance premiums, and wider societal impacts. There are differences in economic evaluation of road crash costs within and between countries, mainly due to methodological differences (Wijnen et al., 2019). There have been estimates on the impact of lost GDP in advanced economies of between 2.7% (Wijnen and Stipdonk, 2016) and 2.1% (Bounga et al., 2022), and some claim that economic evaluations underestimate the impact (for example, ETSC, 2007). Although there are variations in the detail within the evaluations, it is clear there are significant social and economic costs, and this is part of the context within Britain, on which this paper focuses.

2.2. Studies of road safety policy adoption

There are limited articles tackling *why* particular road safety policies are pursued or not pursued using public policy and agenda setting theories. An Australian study by Hinchliffe et al. (2011) focused on agenda setting in young driver risk with proposals on Graduated Driving Licensing (GDL) and found a strong connection between the public's demand for and acceptance of change in influencing political support. GDL is a transitional licence based policy response to high risk situations for young drivers, typically for those between the ages of 17–24 and countries such as New Zealand, Australia and Canada have implemented it (TRL, 2018). It can include restrictions to carrying peer aged passengers and night time driving. Hinchliffe et al. (2011) identified the main factors which influence the novice driver policy agenda as being: the communication of the evidence on novice driver solutions; lobbying and advocacy by policy participants; and media reporting of crashes involving deaths.

A US study analysed the relationship between legislative processes and the degree of public support in setting the agenda on road safety (Debinski et al., 2014). The hypothesis they assessed was that public opinion can be the impetus to progressing successful road safety laws. They suggest there was little evidence on the public's opinion of road safety policies; the evidence that was available pointed to the public having "generally favourable" (p.249) opinions, and the authors recommended that this framing should be used to communicate with the media and policy makers to improve road safety policy. This US study suggested a link between public opinion, the media, and politicians, and identified the need for evidence-based policymaking in road safety in

order to contribute to agenda setting.

A case study from The Netherlands by Bax (2009) evaluated the role and the degree of cooperation of policy actors in decision making after the move from a centralised to a devolved Dutch system of implementing road safety policy, where the aim was to discover which factors promoted or hindered setting the agenda for road safety. The study investigated the connections between a centralised and devolved approach, and the decisiveness of the decision-making processes, and the effectiveness and level of ambition in delivering road safety policy. The involvement and effectiveness of many policy actors in complex systems, and particularly the early engagement with opponents were found to be important to successful agenda setting and policy implementation.

Svensson et al. (2013) assessed the influence of local and national policy actors on speed management in Sweden, and the impact on the perspectives and priorities on local politicians using interviews. They found significant conflict between those wanting reduced speed limits and those opposed, and framed this tension as a lack of consensus between the "mobility perspective" (p.47) and the "traffic safety" (p.48) perspective. The research found powerful networks of pro-mobility and freedom that were more effective at influencing the policy agenda than: i) the "silenced" (p.50) - road crash victims; ii) individuals and families who submitted applications for lowering the speed limits; and iii) travellers who use the roads – described as drivers, cyclists, pedestrians, whose mobility and safety in traffic are affected by speed limits. The study found a power imbalance, and the political processes associated with decision-making on speed limits were characterised as mobility versus safety, and the role that this tension played in setting the agenda.

The limited research base on the policy process surrounding road safety suggests that it is important to understand multiple influences such as power, lobbying, politics, framing, and the role of information in understanding policy change.

3. Exploring policy change through the Multiple Streams Model

Whilst the Multiple Streams Model has been applied to the different stages of the policy cycle (see Cairney, 2012), it was originally developed to understand agenda setting, why some ideas develop into policy at certain times, while other do not. Kingdon's model was a major step forward in understanding policy formulation and agenda setting (John, 2012, p.160), and a major strength of the Multiple Streams Model is its basic simplicity: the definition of three independent streams, change and contingency (Knill and Tosun, 2012, p.257). The applicability of the

Multiple Streams Model to agenda setting, where the problem, policy and politics streams interact to produce policy change, was the main determining factor in its selection for this study, though it is less effective in explaining stability (Cairney and Jones, 2016).

Policymaking processes are driven by long term social and economic ideas, networks, and strategic interactions. The conscious adoption of ideas, random processes, events, competition, and selection, all exert influence on what is prioritised (John, 2003, p.495). The study of public policy helps the understanding of why certain decisions are made or not made, and how decision makers, working with a wide range of actors, produce actions which are intended to have an impact outside the political system (Dorey, 2005). Politicians make choices on widely differing policy areas, from budgets to foreign policy, to specific enforcement, and these policy areas compete for attention.

There are three important traditions in public policy research which could be relevant: Baumgartner and Jones' Punctuated Equilibrium (2009), Kingdon's Multiple Streams Model (1995) and Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith Advocacy Coalition Framework (1993). Of the various public policy theories which could be deployed to understand road safety policy, this study selected Kingdon's Multiple Streams model. Road safety is an area where there are multiple known solutions, but these solutions only sometimes get recognised, brought forward and accepted. The Multiple Streams Model provides a basis for structuring the revisiting of debates at different points in time (Howlett et al., 2015). As the literature in Section 2 showed, networks of actors and coalitions have been an important influence and so these remain in sight (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993) but the study did not begin with this as necessarily being central.

As a means to explore the development of policy, John Kingdon authored his book *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies* (Kingdon, 1995) in which he identified three streams as flowing through the policy system: the problem stream, the policy stream, and the politics stream. These independent processes are “governed by different forces, different considerations and different styles” (Kingdon, 1995, p.88). Each evolve in their own way adapting to rules, context, and the dynamics of the policy environment, making policy development unpredictable and sometimes chaotic. There are many policy issues and only a proportion of problems are given attention by decision makers (Jones and Baumgartner, 2005), where these issues compete for attention in the problem stream.

Some conditions are not even defined as a policy problem until there are available and acceptable policy solutions. Problems need a push to receive the attention of people in and around government which can be provided by a focusing event such as a crisis, for example a major train crash in 2002, swings in national mood, changes of government, or the personal experience of a policymaker. Policy ideas, it is posited, float in a *policy primeval soup* (Cohen et al., 1972) and are developed and adapted over time, where ideas are tested and challenged within the policy community, consisting of specialists in the given policy area who are scattered through and outside of government (Kingdon, 1995, p.17). The politics stream is composed of dynamics relating to the “public mood, pressure group campaigns, election results, partisan or ideological distributions ... and changes in administration” (Kingdon, 1995, p.145).

The three streams develop independently, it is suggested, and when a problem is recognised, a solution is available, and the political climate is positive for change, a policy window opens, the streams can be coupled, and this can facilitate policy change. Policy windows open when there is a recognised and compelling policy problem identified as requiring attention. Equally, the lack of development of the policy stream can constrain an issue from being raised up the policy agenda. The issue may not be recognised as a problem, there may be a lack of an available policy solution or there is little political will or recognition to make change. To illustrate, the ubiquitous use of Killed and Serious Injury (KSI) data and global and regional benchmarking is one route to problem identification, and mandatory Intelligent Speed Assistance (ISA) or

GDL are policy solutions, which have been available to policymakers in Britain, in the case of GDL for decades, which have not been consistently or fully implemented.

The role of the *policy entrepreneur* can be important in the process of coupling the streams. They are individuals who can introduce, promote and advocate for their ideas in a range of policy communities and invest resources to increase the chances for their policy area to be placed on the agenda (Kingdon, 1995, p.179). Policy entrepreneurs are active both in the problem stream and the policy stream. Their success or failure can be linked to the qualities of the policy entrepreneur such as persistence, access to policymakers, and in framing policy problems in a language acceptable and understood by policy makers and politicians. While decision makers frequently shift their attention from one problem to another, policy entrepreneurs maintain an interest in their stated policy area, but can also be unsuccessful at coupling the multiple streams. Their role is also contested, placing as it does huge amounts of agency on entrepreneurs as individuals and the limited attention on the role of coupling within and across government systems (Zahariadis, 2014).

Kingdon builds the Multiple Streams Model on the *garbage can model* of decision-making (Cohen et al., 1972) where policy development happens under the condition of ambiguity. Cohen et al. (1972) used a University setting to develop the *garbage can model*, and Kingdon (1995) extended the themes into public policy to explain the sometimes chaotic or unplanned manner in which organisations deal with policy decisions. In the process of continual change and the inconsistent involvement of many policy actors, Kingdon suggests that policy making is as much accidental as it is rational. A main aspect of the model involves policymakers kicking policy ideas down the road, with the result of the delay of policy action, within a context of unpredictability, and a system where the acceptance of new policy ideas within government is not straightforward.

Policy areas compete for attention in the ambiguous and complex policy context described above, and in agenda setting, how a policy image is portrayed or framed is important. The level of public, media, and government attention to any policy issue, what causes attention to rise or fall over time, and whether policymaking develops or not, are influenced by how a policy issue is framed (Schon and Rein, 1994; Baumgartner and Jones, 2009, p.26). Policy areas can be framed and categorised, for example to make them appear technical, complicated or linked to wider social values to encourage greater participation (Cairney, 2012, p.185). Policy entrepreneurs can deliberately portray issues in certain ways to win support and allegiance to a particular perspective, and to persuade or justify a specific view and reframe an issue to one which the general public can relate to (Baumgartner et al., 2014, p.66). In a US study reframing how road safety legislation was viewed increased the support for the road safety laws (Clegg Smith et al., 2014), and framing road safety differently played a significant role in adopting *Vision Zero*, a new and radical approach to road safety in Sweden (Belin et al., 2012).

In road safety there is limited analysis of how policy is developed and how politicians make choices to establish the road safety agenda, and this study therefore addresses important questions with a robust data set.

4. Method

Britain was selected to study the development of road safety policy over time as it offered a context where there had been limited data on the perspectives of policy participants, or evaluation. Government data sources were readily available and researching within the British governance structures may be of value to different jurisdictions. The study used three separate sources of qualitative data: interviews, debates, and policy documents which were analysed using Critical Discourse Analysis (Grant, 2019, p.66). This is a form of critical research which supports the study of social and political fields, understood through the analysis of language, meaning and power (Fairclough, 2003,

p.202). The analysis considered not just how many times things were said from any data group, but who said them, how it triangulated with what others said and within the wider discourse. An overarching strategic level case study using the approach taken by Baumgartner et al. (2014, p.67) was used in the evaluation of stability and change in road safety policy over a thirty-four year period. The focus was on strategic level issues and in addition, the paper explored detailed policy responses around rural road safety and young driver safety, and this is treated as one combined dataset for a strategic level evaluation in this paper.

Thirty five semi-structured and anonymised interviews were completed in 2021 to elicit the views and opinions of policy participants guided by seventeen interview questions (see appendix A). Incrementally, a total of 70 potential interviewees were invited from a small pool from local and national organisations. For example, academics were selected from within a very small pool for their experience of the development of road safety policy, rather than this being their area of research. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed by a single researcher. A major factor in securing the number of interviews was the commitment to ensure anonymity and whilst interviewees were categorised (see Table 1), the identity, the area of work, and the political party were not identifiable. Sample sizes and the category split in qualitative research are guided by data adequacy, so an effective sample size is less about numbers (n's) and more about the ability of data to provide a rich and nuanced account of the phenomenon studied (Hennink and Kaiser, 2022). The numbers recruited within each category was largely directed by practical issues: reluctance to engage with over committed (politicians) or limited participant pool (academics) (see limitations at 5.3). Whilst participants were categorised within levels of governance at a local or national level, a very similar set of narratives across scales were found and these are explored in section 6 which deals with multi-level governance related questions (and the lack of impact of this).

Debates from the House of Commons, inquiries from the Transport Committee and strategic policy documents from between 1987 and 2021 were included in the analysis. Policy documents, for example, those relating to geographically focused or specific modes of transport, such as motorcycle safety or cycling, were excluded. There were 52 debates and 25 policy documents analysed (Transport Committee reports n = 17 and government policy documents n = 8).

The study design resulted in a large volume of data: for example, there is almost 50 h of interview transcriptions. Analysis was dependent on coding using a coding framework embedded in specialist software where quotes and text were categorised and analysed. Coding involved attaching keywords to a text segment or a systematic categorisation of a quote or statement, both of which enabled the identification of text for analysis (Kvale and Brinkman, 2009, p.201). Codes developed from the analysis of documents and debates were used and built upon as the analysis developed, and were fixed prior to the analysis of the interview data. Largely, the Multiple Streams Model did not direct the coding framework, rather emerged from the analysis and the factors which

emerged from the evaluation. The coding framework has twenty-two nodes which were used for all data sources, of which, twenty have sub nodes. The main approach to coding was inductive, moving from the specific texts to patterns or broad generalisations (Coding framework at appendix B).

A validation process was applied to the coding framework and the consistency of coding using academics not connected with the study within two categories: those within the field of road safety and those from wider transport policy. Each interview was identifiable by the categories set out in Table 1, and documents and debates were identifiable by data type. By combining multiple empirical methods, including new data from interviews, the richness and volume of data reduced the risk of bias, insufficient or weak data, especially when compared to research based on single data sources.

The next section presents the results from the Critical Discourse Analysis of all three data sources based on the themes, patterns, consistencies and contradictions, and is presented in two defined periods of time.

5. Results

Within the discourse there was political disagreement and some contradictions between the views of politicians and policy participants about how to improve road safety. However, there were two clearly identifiable periods where the impact on how to progress road safety was understood to be different. The data is interpreted in more detail separately for the two periods and is based on understanding the discourse, its meaning and nature, the language used, and whether the data disclosed any patterns or themes. There was also a discernible difference in the spread of full debates on road safety, as categorised within Hansard: 80% were in period 1, and 20% in period 2. There were clearly identifiable differences between the two periods which are explored in more detail in the thesis (Greenwood, 2023).

During the periods there were a range of governing parties, and these are set out in Table 2 for reference.

5.1. Period 1: 1987 to 2002

From 1987 to 2002, after a period of policy inaction, road safety was framed as a policy problem and was accepted as needing attention, solutions were advanced, the policy window opened as political discourse was mainly constructive and the policy streams coupled. In 1987 *Road safety: next steps* (DoT, 1987) was a major policy document which established the beginning of a period of strong commitment to road safety and was described as a “landmark policy” (Interviewee: academic). The number of people killed or seriously injured, and the social and economic consequences were recognised as a policy problem in need of attention, and the nature of the political discourse enabled the policy window to open with a series of acceptable policy solutions.

Table 1
Categories of interview participants.

Academic (n = 5)	Researchers currently in the field of road safety with different academic backgrounds and interests. Sub-disciplines include transport, psychology, public health, and policy ^a
NGO (n = 9) E.g. charity, think tank	Non-government organisation: for example charity, think tank, motoring organisation (divided by national and local) ^a
Policy actor (n = 13) E.g. police, civil servant	Involved with road safety as employee: for example – senior civil servant, senior police, office of a police and crime commissioner, qango, devolved organisation (divided by national and local) ^a
Politician (n = 8)	Elected politicians from different legislatures (divided by national and local). Members of Parliament equally split between Conservative and Labour ^a

^a Clustering was used to maintain the anonymity of the interviewees.

Table 2
British governments between 1979 and 2021.

Years	Government and Prime Minister
May 1979 to November 1990	Conservative Government led by Margaret Thatcher
November 1990 to May 1997	Conservative Government led by John Major
May 1997 to June 2007	Labour Government led by Tony Blair
June 2007 to May 2010	Labour Government led by Gordon Brown
May 2010 to May 2015	Coalition (Conservative and Liberal Democrat) Government led by David Cameron
May 2015 to July 2016	Conservative Government led by David Cameron
July 2016 to July 2019	Conservative Government led by Theresa May
July 2019 to September 2022	Conservative Government led by Boris Johnson

Participants described strong alignment between different political parties about improving infrastructure, vehicle standards, and education. Strategic policy from across government resulted, including the prioritising of road safety, visible national leadership and the first casualty reduction targets. Robert Atkins MP suggested:

“Road safety is one of the most important matters ... facing us ... The constant number of deaths and injuries ... is unacceptable ... Britain’s record on road safety is better than many other countries, but as long as one person dies on our roads, our record is not good enough ... We shall continue to press strongly to reduce those dreadful statistics and to cut out the dreadful carnage on our roads” (Hansard HC Deb., 3 November 1987, c. 648).

Sir Peter Bottomley, the Minister stated: “... there are still far too many deaths” (Hansard HC Deb., January 16, 1989, c.14), and what followed was a reduction in the number of those killed by 39% and those seriously injured by 45% (DETR, 2000b) thus surpassing the 1987 target which was to reduce KSIs by a third (DoT, 1987).

Evidence of the continued importance of road safety framing was *Tomorrow’s roads: safer for everyone* (DETR, 2000b) which was delivered after a change in the governing party (Table 2). This maintained the commitment to targets and policy change, and was launched together with *New directions in speed management* (DETR, 2000a) which included important research on speed and the consequences of speeding. These followed from commitments in a broader national strategy in *A new deal for transport: better for everyone* (DETR, 1998) and were an important catalyst in the identification of these areas of transport as a policy problem in need of policy attention. Whilst elements of road safety policy proved to be effective in reducing the numbers of people killed or seriously injured in the following years, the aim to focus on speed policy within *Tomorrow’s roads* (DETR, 2000b) ultimately did not propel speed to become a central pillar of road safety policy.

One area of focus on speed policy was the rural roads speed hierarchy and was a major element of government policy from *Tomorrows roads* (DETR, 2000b) which was identified, discussed, and plans were developed, but it was subsequently dropped. A Conservative backbencher, Dr Andrew Murrison MP, suggested that: “the Government’s failure to incorporate their hierarchy of roads into the Bill, where it would fit very well, is a missed public health opportunity” (Hansard HC Deb., January 28, 2003, c.808). After this period of road safety being seen as a policy problem and the resulting policy development, the change in policy direction illustrated by the rural roads hierarchy was, perhaps, the first stage of failure of the clear alignment around problems and policies from the Thatcher, Major and early Blair Governments (see Table 2). In period 1 there was evidence in the data that the policy problem was acknowledged and the need for policy action was accepted, policy solutions were available and accessible, and the political environment was conducive to agreement. Within this context, policy windows opened which enabled the development of the two significant policy interventions (DoT, 1987; DETR, 2000b) which were followed by policy implementation, and the subsequent reduction of the number of people killed or seriously injured.

5.2. Period 2: 2003 to 2021

The period after 2003 is more complex, and had more inconsistencies, where road safety policy struggled to be formulated, any progress was incremental or there was policy inaction. Road safety was not seen as a big enough issue to be recognised as a policy problem in need of attention, and any evidence of discourse on the concerns about road death or serious injury were insufficient to open a policy window for long enough to generate policy change.

There were periods where there were gaps in policy activity, periods of infrequent debate and short periods with connected speeches, and when debate happened, there was a disconnect between the policy problem, and the evidence base and acceptable policy solutions. To illustrate, the debate on the Railway and Transport Safety Bill (Hansard

HC Deb., January 28, 2003, c.808) where the purpose was transport safety, but rail safety significantly dominated after a public outcry following the train crash in 2002 where 7 people were killed. Rail safety significantly overshadowed road safety, and whilst the Bill led to the creation of the Rail Accident Investigation Branch in 2003, calls to mirror a national organisation to investigate road crashes were discarded. It was almost two decades later, in 2021, when the Department for Transport finally supported the establishment of the Road Safety Investigation Branch, subject to primary legislation. Road safety was crowded out by rail safety and whilst establishing formal mechanisms for rail crash investigations, the similarly proposed policy solutions for road crash investigations were seen as unacceptable.

From 2011, the tight fiscal environment coupled with the localism policy direction meant that the national government was stepping back from funding programmes of action. These political choices, together with the removal of national targets, left local political actors with little leverage to drive forward road safety improvements compared to other policy areas which were equally under pressure. An interviewee suggested that the choice not to continue casualty reduction targets was illustrative of the policy shift: “... in 2010 they decided they weren’t going to have any more ... targets. It was a pivotal move in the wrong direction. If I compare and contrast 1987 to 2010 ... that was absolutely devastating alongside a recession that meant that a lot of the road safety teams were decimated” (Interviewee: academic).

In considering the three streams, road safety struggled to compete with other policy areas as being seen as a problem in need of policy attention, largely due to “being seen as resolved” (Interviewee: policy actor). The available policy solutions, such as an investigation branch or speed management were not acceptable, and the politics stream flowed slowly or stopped with an absence of any obvious public mood for change to create political pressure, and little consensus, resulting in policy stasis. An interviewee suggested that the incremental nature of progress in reducing deaths and serious injuries over the 2010’s could be explained by the ineffectiveness of policy solutions put forward by the government: “What’s interesting about those (government policy documents - DfT, 2011; DfT, 2015; DfT, 2019), whether it’s a la carte or not, there’s a lot of filler. I’d rather have a six or seven song album of absolute killer tracks than a 10-20 song album with lots of absolute nonsense. It’s the same thing here, so I think there was something like 80 or 90 actions in the most recent statement” (Interviewee: academic). The interplay between the three streams of problem, policy and politics resulted in limited progress. In an interview, a national politician suggested:

“I am not entirely sure that my own party has been brilliant at looking at the issue of road safety, I don’t think it’s got a very high priority, full stop, at the moment” (Interviewee: national politician).

Road safety did not get on the agenda sufficiently as policy entrepreneurs failed to establish it as a policy problem in need of attention, the media were largely indifferent, solutions swirled in the *policy soup*, and because of limited political discourse and commitment, decision makers chose to kick road safety down the policy road.

Following the analysis three themes were evident in the second period:

“Road safety was not seen as a problem requiring attention” (Interviewee: national policy participant), and the lack of visible public support and “indifference from the media” (Interviewee: local policy actor), resulted in limited success of the policy entrepreneurs to gain traction and action from politicians - “it just doesn’t hit my post bag” (Interviewee: national politician). Whilst policy solutions were available to politicians, because road safety was not seen as a problem in need of attention, solutions were not adopted.

The influence of framing in the recognition of policy problems: Policy areas compete for attention with many alternative policy ideas and how a policy image is framed is important. The degree of public, media, and political attention to policy issues, what causes attention to change over time, and whether policymaking develops or not, are

influenced by how a policy issue is framed (Schon and Rein, 1994; Baumgartner and Jones, 2009, p.26). Policy entrepreneurs can be influential in portraying their policy idea in such a way as to win support or reframe an issue to one which the general public can relate to (Baumgartner et al., 2014, p.66). There were two opposing frames which influenced the approach to agenda setting in road safety. Some frame Britain's approach as "*Britain's roads are among the safest in the world*" – for example, Robert Goodwill MP (Hansard HC Deb., February 26, 2014, c.383), rejecting there was a policy problem requiring attention, whilst others used language such as "*scandal*" or "*complacency*" (Transport Committee, 2008), suggesting policies were deficient or delayed, and advocated for rapid improvements. The powerful framing of a solved policy issue, as indicated by a national politician: there is "*a general complacency that's reflected in society out there that we've done it, we've solved all the major problems*" (Interviewee: national politician) was an influencing factor in road safety not being seen as a policy problem in need of attention.

In addition, participants suggested that the framing of road safety as too complex and road deaths as inevitable, and the trade-offs between mobility and safety (as described by Svensson et al., 2013) were sufficient to deter politicians from recognising the problem as being worth resolving, or the solutions as worth owning. The consequence of road safety not being identified as a policy problem exposed a paradoxical relationship between the public, the media, and policymakers, where improvements in road safety were seen as highly desirable (DfT, 2010; DfT, 2020 [National Travel Surveys]; RAC Foundation, 2014), and, at the same time, proposed interventions, such as the rural roads speed hierarchy or GDL were not adopted as they were seen as controversial. A failure of the road safety policy community to reframe the agenda so that politicians saw a policy problem in need of their attention was the outcome in the second period. Delay, obfuscation, and inaction in policy development, with periods of incremental change where road safety was crowded out by alternative policy areas resulting in complacency.

Mobility vs safety: the complex relationship between mobility and safety, and the competing desire for freedom and mobility for economic gain (Mohan, 2003), with the reliance on the car in society (Walker et al., 2023) as the primary influencer within the discourse on road safety, contributed to the crowding out the demand for policy change in road safety. The result was an optimism bias towards non-interventionist or technological solutions as it was not worth the political capital for politicians to make policy changes which were seen as unpopular or controversial. The power imbalance between the mobility and safety groups resulted in the dominance of mobility and the resulting productivity (see Svensson et al., 2014). During the 2010's there was increasing evidence over time of more libertarian politics with an instinct to not interfere. For example, in 2011, in setting out the new Government's policy direction in the *Strategic framework for road safety* (DfT, 2011), the Secretary of State for Transport, Philip Hammond, MP, cites "*localism*", "*increased freedom*" for Local Authorities, and "*making it easier for road users to do the right thing instead of resorting to more bureaucracy, targets and regulation*" (DfT, 2011, p.5).

Whilst the second period was more complicated, further resolving the number of people killed or seriously injured on Britain's roads was not seen as a policy problem in need of national attention, policy solutions were seen as expensive or controversial, and the political environment, in part based on a disconnect between the public and national politicians, did not enable politicians to choose to address road safety.

5.3. Limitations

Although the research design was effective, the research questions were answered, and there was a breadth of data to analyse, there were some limitations. First, the limited availability of road safety policy literature was an issue, restricting wider references, and, there was no published comparative data on the views of politicians or policy participants. Second, the choice to select debates from the House of

Commons and policy documents, and the restricted historical knowledge of the interviewees, resulted in less visibility of the influence of policy actors, or policy entrepreneurs, despite the targeting of interviewees who had direct experience of the research period starting in 1987. Third, the mix of interviewees, the balance between interview groups, the mix within each interview group and the political balance between the political parties were largely effective. However, there were differences between the number in each category and despite applying the same degree of tenacity to the recruitment of politicians, notably local politicians, this is a limitation and the reasons for this should be understood (e.g. failure to engage, capacity, knowledge, or availability) to improve any future research.

6. Discussion

This section discusses the factors which influenced road safety being viewed as a policy problem in the first period, not being seen as a policy problem in the second period, and the resulting levels of policy development. It also discusses what conditions have been necessary for policy change and what happens when any of these conditions are removed, and how road deaths and road safety more broadly has changed in public policy over time. The discussion is structured around those factors where there was a noticeable change between the two periods, and so, these are likely to have been more impactful on the development of road safety policy; and, those factors which were present throughout the study period, which, whilst still relevant, may have been less impactful at influencing road safety agenda setting. It is feasible to posit that in the first period, more acceptable and straightforward policy interventions were used, and in the second period policy solutions were more complicated and less popular, thus impacting on the fate of road safety policy.

6.1. Factors where a difference was observed between the two periods

The following themes or impactful factors were identified as changing between the two periods, and so may explain which factors were important to whether road safety was seen as a policy problem in need of policy attention.

6.1.1. Government coordination in policy development

The effectiveness of coordination across government departments to generate policy was notable in the development of policy between 1987 and 2002, and, for example, in the production of wider policies to address the determinants of health in *Health of the Nation* (DoH, 1992), which included children involved in traffic crashes. Explicit within *Road safety: next steps* (DoT, 1987) and *Tomorrow's roads* (DfT, 2000) was cross government involvement in the development of policies. Government structures remained complex throughout, but the degree of communication and constructive cross departmental working positively influenced the prioritisation of road safety in the first period. This changed during the second period, with little evidence of joint cross government policy development, and this contributed to a disconnect at the intersection between transport safety, health and public health which impacted on road safety policy. This lack of joined up government (Jones and Lucas, 2000), and the absence of a whole Government approach (Koehlmoos, 2013) were reported to be important influencing factors.

Policy ideas or solutions can swirl around in the *policy primeval soup* (Kingdon, 1995) as they are considered, reconsidered and modified or indeed, ignored, by large numbers of policy participants. In the first period policy solutions were better understood, seen as acceptable and formed part of major policy developments, and to continue the use of Kingdon's model, solutions were extracted from the *policy soup* and used for substantive policy change. Policy development was more effective, in part, due to the cross government acceptance of solutions. By contrast, in the second period, the increased number of policy solutions and the lack

of focus on road safety resulted in potential solutions not being adopted. Examples include reductions in blood alcohol levels (except in Scotland which reduced levels in 2014); technological solutions through the General Safety Regulations (including Intelligent Speed Assistance); and the extension of casualty reduction targets beyond 2011. In the examples cited the availability of evidence for these potential solutions were strong (see Cairney, 2016 on evidence-based policymaking), but these solutions were seen as politically unacceptable or controversial, and so were not supported. The divergence in policy solutions between England and Scotland in relation to drink driving suggests that problem recognition and the politics, rather than lack of policy solutions, was at play.

6.1.2. Visible and prioritised policy

In the first period, there was a clear articulation from central government of the importance of road safety with visible leadership, which strongly influenced local government supported by clear accountability frameworks. For example, it is notable that Sir Peter Bottomley and Larry Whitty (now Lord Whitty) were both Ministers with responsibility for road safety during the early period and both stayed in post for more than three years, leading the development of policy and implementation. During the mid-2000's the approach changed with more centralised policy making and delivery (Richards and Smith, 2007) in the Blair and Brown governments (see Table 2), and the localism agenda from 2011 onwards which “left local government feeling abandoned” (Interview: local policy actor). Whilst *Tomorrow's roads* (DfT, 2000) had an immediate and major impact, the prominence waned and, over time, road safety became less visible and there was a shift from deliberate strategy led by government to an approach, accelerated with the localism policy from 2011, to an emergent route to policy. The commitment to “look to fresh, alternative approaches to road safety” (DfT, 2015) did not materialise. The response from local government, combined with reduced funding, was to prioritise competing policy areas. This change was also seen in relation to wider transport policy over the second period (Docherty et al., 2018).

There was a clear difference between the two periods, and evidence that the level of road safety policy development progressively worsened over time, particularly after 2009. There was, latterly in the Labour government, an attempt in: *A safer way: consultation on making Britain's roads the safest in the world* (DfT, 2009) to set a new agenda for road safety which ultimately failed due to the Labour party losing the general election. The churn in the political environment, and the frequent change in administrations since 2007 resulted in regular changes to the incumbent Roads Minister, which had a negative impact on the ability to take action, and where policy activity occurred it was incremental in nature. The revisiting of road safety, by three different Secretaries of State and three different Roads Ministers in the three policy documents during the 2010's (DfT, 2011; DfT, 2015; DfT, 2019) illustrates what the *garbage can model* suggests. Different incremental choices were made at different stages with frequent examples of changes in focus and of delay.

6.1.3. Resources and casualty reduction targets

The availability of capital and revenue funding, and the resulting capacity and expertise within road safety teams, and in the levels of commissioned research, influenced the profile of road safety. Kingdon (1995) suggests that the availability or lack of funding is a strong factor indicating the degree of political will and interest. The introduction of targets in 1987 and 2000, and the associated accountability frameworks influenced the priority given to road safety. But the influence of targets was more nuanced, as the presence of targets was closely aligned with the commitment from government, clear policy, and the availability of funding, and so it was difficult to identify the impact of targets independent of these other factors. However, the removal of targets was seen as detrimental to the progression of effective road safety policy (Interviewee: academic). The consequence of these three factors combined, a clear strategy, resources, and targets created a context where road safety developed in the first period, and the diminution or absence

of these factors in the second period contributed to policy inaction and delay. It was suggested that the ending of casualty reduction targets in 2011 was a result of a government-wide reaction against the Labour party's propensity for targets across government in that period, rather than one specifically targeted at road safety (Interview: national policymaker).

6.1.4. Framing

The main difference in how road safety was framed between the two periods was heavily influenced by the wider policy context in which the impact of traffic crashes was viewed, and the language used to describe policy problems. In the first period the number of road deaths and seriously injuries were higher than the second period (see Fig. 1) and this influenced the framing of the problem as urgent, after a period of neglect. This enabled the establishment of largely uncontested policy solutions, resulting in a clarity of the problem which raised the profile of road safety up the political agenda. This was the case in 1987 and 2000. The use of accidents to describe road crashes was common parlance and did not hold the negative connotations developed during the 2010's. There was a simplicity to the policy issue resulting in a clear policy image in need of attention. At the start of the second period, following the implementation of the impactful *Tomorrow's roads* policy (DETR, 2000b), road safety was seen as having been fixed and despite strong criticism from Transport Committees and Parliament (for example, TC, 2008), the number of those killed or seriously injured reduced, and the lack of policy development prevailed because of the ‘resolved’ framing. From 2009 this framing supported a perception there was no problem to fix and this, combined with increasing competition for attention from other policy areas, negated policy action. This continued into the 2010's where the framing of *the safest roads in the world*, which was not new, developed greater influence and prominence, thus persuading politicians that road death was not a policy problem in need of urgent attention.

6.1.5. Mobility vs safety (political ideology)

In the first period, there was robust debate and discussion about the acceptability of policy solutions, but this resulted in broad agreement that road safety was a policy problem needing political attention. In the second period, it became more complicated, and in both Labour and Conservative governments, a more libertarian, freedom based approach dominated, influenced by the power of motor vehicles (Walker et al., 2023). The resistance to change national speed limits, introduce GDL systems and policies to reduce traffic levels were examples. Towards the end of the period, the impact of the libertarian, freedom based political ideology, and the dominance of mobility over safety became more obvious. This was illustrated by the decision not to publish the 2021 road safety strategy, and the government's priority in the *Plan for drivers* (DfT, 2023e) further suggests a less subtle shift towards a more liberal approach to policy development. This changed the context within the political stream to prioritise mobility more strongly to the detriment of safety.

6.1.6. Policy entrepreneurs

The road safety community had some success in maintaining the visibility of road safety over time, an important factor in agenda setting, particularly in the first period, but less success in influencing the progress of road safety through the problem, policy, and politics streams. One of the weaknesses apparent from the first period was the reliance on documentary data as the majority of interviewees had little knowledge from this period. As such, there was less data on the role of policy entrepreneurs outside the House of Commons. In the second period the high number of different policy solutions, and entrepreneurs supporting individual ideas detracted from a consistent policy image, which resulted in the difficulty in influencing the politics stream. Immature road safety networks (PACTS, 2010) and less visible policy entrepreneurs were in stark contrast with the effective car lobby groups who had been

more successful in maintaining relationships and influencing governments of all parties. There were some examples which contradict this finding: for example, the early success of PACTS in influencing government on seat belts, or the coalition which formed to advance the revisions to The Highway Code. But, whilst the effectiveness of policy entrepreneurs was debated, it was clear that the lack of success in seeing road safety as a policy problem in the second period, and having unclear or contested policy solutions weakened the power of the policy image, and so reduced the ability of policy entrepreneurs to raise their policy ideas in the political discourse.

6.2. Factors consistent throughout the period

Two factors appeared in the data as potentially significant issues impacting on agenda setting and how road safety policy was responded to. However, these factors were consistent throughout the research period and so were less impactful as ingredients to developing policy.

6.2.1. Governance factors between agencies and multilevel governance

The degree of influence of multilevel governance was explored, including collecting data from local and national policy participants. A similar set of narratives were found within both groups and so there was a lack of differentiation between local or national participants. Complex organisational structures, high numbers of policy venues, and, complicated multilevel governance, were present throughout the study period, and so were less likely to have accounted for the change between the two periods. The problematic influence of governance, and particularly the relationship between central and local government was cited, but the presence of these issues throughout both periods suggest it was less important to policy change or stability. Problems with governance were shown to be a part of the political environment throughout, but given the consistent presence over the study period, were less important.

6.2.2. Relationship between politicians, the media, and the public

It was suggested that politicians made policy decisions, in part, based on their own assessment of selective information, for example, news reports, which might not be representative of public opinion (Interview: national politician). An example was resisting policies which target specific age groups (whether young or old) because they were seen as unpopular, controversial, or in this illustration, inequitable. There was a complex relationship between politicians, the media, and the public, and in 1987 road safety was described as not “*regarded within ‘opinion forming’ circles ... as a particularly interesting or important one [and influenced by] the absence of any obvious manifestation of serious public concern*” (DoT, 1987). The lack of visible public or media support for change was present throughout the study period, and contributed to how or whether politicians dealt with policies on road death, or not. There was evidence of this throughout the period, and so, this was not considered to be a significant contributing factor in agenda setting.

This section set out the factors which influenced road safety being viewed as a policy problem in the first period, not being seen as a policy problem in the second period, and the resulting levels of policy development. It is important to distinguish between these factors where an observable change happened between the two periods (section 6.1), and the two factors which were present throughout the whole research period (section 6.2). It is hoped that the discussion of the impact of these factors will contribute to understanding how agenda setting could be influenced within road safety policy in future.

7. Conclusion

The paper has addressed the two areas of interest: to establish what

conditions have been necessary for policy change and what happens when any of these conditions are removed; and how road deaths and road safety more broadly has changed in public policy over time. This paper attempted to understand the changing nature of road safety policy in Britain through Kingdon’s Multiple Streams Model. Comparative analysis over three decades has found strong evidence of periods of action and inaction. A variety of factors shifted between the two periods. Notably, the sense that the job had largely been done or was less problematic than other issues, and the rise of libertarian ideals around mobility and freedom dominated.

This lack of progress has been frustrating to the road safety community and those directly impacted by road trauma. To them, the problem remains critical, and it is out of step with the wider positioning of it within the political sphere. Therefore, whilst everyone may recognise the solutions, there is a vastly different perspective on whether they are necessary or acceptable. From there, the commissioning of studies and reviews is used by national government to kick the issues (*or policy can*) down the road. Local government are told to act but at the same time are receiving signals that other policy areas matter more through the diminution of the expected level of priority, the removal of casualty reduction targets, and reduced national funding. Pockets of progress exist, as do places which move backwards. Overall the position is policy stasis.

The results of the analysis suggested that it was critical to look at public policy agendas over longer periods. Had the study focussed only on the past decade, the two periods of policy development and change, contrasted with policy stability would not have been seen. Therefore, the results support our assertion that greater historical comparison is important to interpreting public policy responses. The case study is specific to Britain, but it is hoped the analysis can contribute to the debate on *how* road safety policy is addressed internationally and whether it is perceived as a policy problem in need of attention from policymakers.

Until road safety is reframed and dealt with as a policy problem requiring attention, road safety policies will continue to be kicked down the policy road. Looking ahead, it is interesting to reflect on the role of policy solutions such as the automation of vehicles which are touted as critical to improving road safety. These have significant industry and government backing, with strong links to wider economic growth opportunity agendas. It appears possible that road safety might get recognised again, but largely as a means to support a wider shift in how mobility is provided. The terms on which safety becomes recognised are strongly conditioned by where the solutions are coming from and what the political opportunity connected with them appears to be. Kingdon’s model continues to have relevance to the development of public policy. Our work suggests more attention should be paid to how the networks advocating for or against policy solutions influence agenda setting, and how multiple agendas are drawn together to agitate for change, in particular at the intersection between transport and health.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Ian Greenwood: Writing – original draft, Resources, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Samantha Jamson:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision. **Greg Marsden:** Writing – review & editing, Supervision.

Data availability

Interview data that has been used is confidential. Data from debates and policy documents are published.

Appendix A. summarised interview questions

1. Role in organisation, and involvement or interest in road safety?
2. Views on road safety and the number of road deaths in Britain?
3. Road safety is described in different ways. Illustrated by: Britain has “some of the safest roads in the world” (i) or we need to “end the scandal of complacency” of not addressing road safety (ii). What is your view?
4. How important is language and does different language make a difference?
5. Views on the debate between freedom and safety as a way to framing?
6. Since the 1980s, do you think the focus on road safety policy has changed?
7. In 1987 and 2000, Governments set road casualty reduction targets. Since 2011 there have been no national targets. Is the presence or absence of a target important?
8. Views on the responsibilities and relationship between national and local government.
9. In the past decade, there were three road safety statements. How effective has this policy activity been?
10. Since 1987, there have been 3 TC reports, and six dedicated House of Commons debates on young drivers. Views on the priority and policy development of young driver safety policy?
11. There is a disproportionate risk of driving on rural roads which accounts for 60% of fatal crashes. Views on how rural road safety is dealt with by policymakers?
12. Over time, there has been variation in road safety progress. What factors do you think explains this?
13. Is there a need for national action on rural speed limits?
14. The role politics or party politics play in road safety. What is the consequence?
15. What action would need to be taken to develop future road safety policy?
16. Why does a fatality in a rail crash create more policy action than a road crash?
17. Do victim groups support the advancement of road safety policy or detract from it?
18. Which three policy interventions would you prioritise to further improve road safety?
19. Is there anything you would like to add or reinforce?

Appendix B. coding framework with nodes and definitions

Node and sub node	Description (or further sub codes)
Car manufacturers and traffic	
Advertising, gaming, films	References to where advertising, marketing, media occur.
Attitude of MPs	• Support of motoring • Critical of the impact of motoring
Car dependence, dominance	• Dominance of motoring and car-centric views • Specific references from car lobby, car manufacturers or political supporters • ‘War on the motorist’ reference or implied and enjoying motoring
Traffic demand	Where traffic demand is related to the safety of travel
Coalitions, policy entrepreneurs (Q17)	
Influence - distracting or negative contribution	Views of influence from all policy participants
Influence - positive contribution	Views of influence from all policy participants
Connection to active travel and climate change	
Active travel	
Climate change	
Congestion, air quality, health impacts	
Economics of impact of crashes	Specific references to economic cost of crashes - macro level
Enforcement and roads policing	General issues relating to enforcement,
Policy	Specific references to the Home Office, Roads Policing Review, or policy related issues
Evidence, science, or research	
To advance an argument	
To detract from an argument	
Factors (Q12)	
Data or information	Data, STATS19, accuracy, availability, weakness
Finance or resources	All financial or resource references
Recession	Impact of recession or economic trends
Governance	• Within Government • Between venues
Leadership	Specific references to where leadership is included in a debate or report • Strong - evidence of positive leadership • Weak or absent - calls for leadership
Legislation	Any references to where legislation or the law impacts on policy.
Public opinion	All aspects including positive and negative views, including community engagement
Random - right people, right time	References to the randomness or unpredictability of change
Skills, capacity, people	General references to skills, capability, expertise, knowledge, experience, turnover etc.
Strategy	• Positive, present, impact • Negative, missing, weak
Focus (Q6)	Since the 1980s, do you think the focus on road safety policy has changed over time?
Crowded policy field	Reference to other policy areas taking demanding the time from politicians: e.g., Covid, Brexit
Personal experience of road crash	Individual, family, or close friends
Policy windows	All references to agenda setting, policy formulation and open windows
Post 2010 flatlined KSIs Q9	Specific references to the KSI numbers in the 2010's
Priority	The degree of progress or not • Avoidance or forgotten • Connection between policy and activity • Delay or distraction • Not a priority or calls to do more.

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Talk About Road Death	• Prioritised
Variation	Evidence of where road death is not discussed, lack of visibility
Framing (Q3)	Any examples of where variation exists between venues – e.g., LA's, police
Accepted by society	References to where road death appears acceptable
Accident	The use of the description to imply inaction or unavoidability or inevitable
Best in the world	Reference to the quote and comments on the implication
Cinderella or lacking in profile	Visibility, reputation of road safety
Complacency	Reference to the quote and comments on the implications
Complexity, and unclear messaging	References informing the framing as complex
Consequence of framing	Does it make a difference?
	• No
	• Yes
Language unclear or too complex	References to where this is seen as a detriment to how policy is addressed
Language used to change the narrative	• Inevitable
Not seen as a real crime	• Preventable
Preventable or inevitable	References to where this is seen as a detriment to how policy is addressed
	Alternative views, does it matter, conference.
Right or privilege debate	Reflected, commenting on the need for a balance in the relationship between safety and freedom
What to call road safety?	• Freedom
Freedom vs safety (Q5)	• Safety
Balance or neutral	Reflecting views where freedom takes priority over safety
Consequences	Reflecting views where safety takes priority over freedom
Towards freedom view, libertarian	Need for a much more radical and less incremental reaction to the policy problem
Towards safety view	
Future (Q15)	All general references to the policy area called Vision Zero or Safe Systems
Leadership	
Resources – finance or personnel	
Radical change needed	
Strategy	
Vision Zero - unrealistic	
Disagreement	
Support	
Governance (Q8)	
Accountability	References to the impact in any part of the system
Local national relationship Q8	General views and implications
Contradictory messages from Government	References a contradictory stance from central Government – further evidence?
Health and public health	
Consequence and cost of KSI	• Individual
	• Health and care system
Health of the nation	Specific reference to HoN
Public health	General references to role, involvement, or lack of involvement
Media	
Influence	Reference to where the media has had direct or indirect influence
Lack of engagement or interest	References about the opportunity for the media to engage, but a failure to do so.
TV, film & gaming influencing attitude to driving	Impact on film or TV on road safety
Politics and party politics (Q14)	
A factor in influencing policy	• No
	• Yes
	• Contradictory
	References that make direct
	• Neutral
	• Not a vote winner
	• Timing and election cycle
	• Turnover of ministers
	E.g., PCCs, Mayor, and others
Connection between public, media, and politicians	
Political	
Wider political impact	
Risk	
Comparisons to air crash, maritime	
Comparisons to rail crashes Q16	
Crash investigation	
Micro mobility & gig economy	
Perception of risk	All references, except those specifically named as a top three solution to the policy problem.
	• Risky
	• Not risky
	References to whether responsibility is attributed
	Specifically identified as an issue
	Evidence of where the attitude between modes differs
Risk and responsibility	
Risk identified in crashes	
Safety culture	
Rural roads (Q11)	
Complexity or do not know what to do	Lack of clarity or specificity of what constitutes a rural road
Definition - unclear	References to the proposed rural roads speed hierarchy
Hierarchy	Evidence
Policy delay	Evidence
Policy problem – not seen	Evidence
Policy solution - speed management	Evidence
Policy solutions - infrastructure, or engineering	Evidence
Policy solutions - other	Evidence
Public demand for change,	• No

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Risk, impact, and scale	• Yes
Speeding and speed limits	References to whether these factors are present
Rural speed limits Q13	Specific references to rural roads
Speed reduction objections	• Objection
	• Support
Speeding impact	General comments
Targets (Q7)	
Balanced commentary	Seeing the pros and cons of targets
Consequence of targets or no targets	• No targets
	• Targets
Views	• Opposition
	• Support
Technology, innovation, automation	
Top three policy interventions (Q18)	References to any type of behavioural change
Behaviour changes	Evidence funding would have influence
Data improvement and accessibility	Local, national, multilevel, any ideas
Financial	• Crash investigation
Governance improvements	• GDL Speed management
Interventions	• Technology
	• Vehicle standards
	• Other
Leadership	
Legal	Suggestions for clearer and bolder national policy, including Vision Zero and Safe Systems.
Policy image reframing	• Community engagement
Strategy	• Education and training in schools
Other suggestions	• Older people focus
	• Research
	• Testing – stricter
	• Victim services funding or support
Young drivers (Q10)	
Alcohol	References to whether this was a factor
Driving test and learning	• Learning or training
	• Probationary period
	• Testing
Education, employment, or social restrictions	Mix of economic, educational, or social rationale for not supporting the GDL policy
Experience and confidence	Of the young or novice driver
GDL attitude	• Balanced
	• Dissent to GDL
	• Fear of being unpopular
	• Support for GDL
Insurance and technology	References to where suggested as an alternative solution – e.g., premiums, black box
Policy delay	Whether this and where this was perceived as an issue
Restrictions - consequences	• Night
	• Passenger
	• Vehicle type, engine size
Risk and causation, including KSI	All areas of risk, death, serious injury and where there is causation included
Schools, education, curriculum	Value, effectiveness

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