

Petitions briefing – P-05-774 Pass Wide and Slow Wales

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 3 Hydref 2017
Petitions Committee | 3 October 2017

Research Briefing:

Petition number: P-05-774

Petition title: Pass Wide and Slow Wales

Petition text:

We call on the National Assembly for Wales to urge the Welsh Government to implement an annual 'public education' road safety campaign to educate all road users how to pass horses and riders safely, and one that highlights the dangers/consequences of not doing so.

We are aware of, and support, a UK wide petition that is campaigning to make it law to pass horses wide and slow (<https://www.change.org/p/uk-govt-make-it-law-to-pass-by-a-horse-wide-and-slow-and-abide-by-our-hand-signals>), but would prefer to see education and prevention rather than prosecution after a serious or fatal incident had occurred.

Welsh Government has the opportunity to capitalise on the materials and information already available from existing campaigns such as; the British Horse Society's road safety campaign Dead Slow (<http://www.bhs.org.uk/safety-and-accidents/dead-slow>), whilst emphasizing particular issues facing Welsh road users. These include the close links between urban and rural communities in Wales, and the popularity of Wales as a tourist destination. In more urban communities (e.g. the commuter belt around Cardiff), there is a volume of traffic using country lanes, either as a short cut or main access route. In other parts of Wales (e.g. Carmarthen and Pembrokeshire) there is an annual influx of holidaymakers with little experience of encountering horses on the roads.

All we ask is that drivers, recognise horse riders as vulnerable road users, and be more considerate when passing horses. We feel the best approach to achieving this is by the Welsh Government taking a lead, in line with their commitment to 'Work with representatives of the horse riding community to understand their road safety concerns and facilitate engagement with other partners.' (Welsh Government Road Safety Framework (July 2013)).

Additional information:

The British Horse Society (BHS) estimates the economic value of the horse industries across the UK to be worth £7 billion, and to employ 220,000 – 270,000 people. This, alongside, the health and wellbeing benefits associated with horse riding make it an important part of Welsh life. But, increasingly, it feels that the voice of equestrians is not being heard.

Many equestrians would rather not ride on public highways, but as the availability of accessible bridleways varies across Wales, we often have little choice.

Welsh Governments Road Safety Framework (July 2013) recognises that horses and their riders (as well as carriage drivers) are vulnerable on the road network, and that a collision between a horse and a vehicle can have life threatening consequences for the horse, rider and those in a vehicle. It also states that there is evidence to suggest that the number of road traffic collisions involving horses is underreported.

As the number of new houses being built in rural/semi-rural locations increases, it brings with it an increase in the volume of traffic, on country roads that are frequently used by farm machinery, horses and riders. Many drivers, new and experienced, are often unaware of the potential dangers of driving fast on these roads, and many do not know how to pass horses safely. Just because the legal speed limit on these roads is 60, does not mean it is safe to drive at that speed.

Furthermore, evidence from the BHS (<http://www.bhs.org.uk/our-charity/press-centre/news/jan-to-jun-2016/riding-and-road-safety-campaign>) shows that there is an increase of incidents involving horses, riders and motor vehicles in June. Although the reasons for this increase remain unclear, there is a potential correlation with holidaymakers driving on unfamiliar roads in unfamiliar circumstances.

Background

Responsibility for road safety

The Welsh Government sets road safety policy in Wales and, as the relevant Highway Authority, is responsible for the safety of the Welsh motorway and trunk road network. Local authorities are responsible for the safety of other roads. There are several other bodies with a role in road safety including the South Wales Trunk Road Agent; North and Mid Wales Trunk Road Agent; and the Police.

The Welsh Road Casualty Reduction Partnership, GoSafe, works to reduce road casualties, predominantly through the deployment of safety cameras and enforcement. The Partnership is made up of 27 equal partners including the 22 local authorities in Wales, four Welsh police forces and the Welsh Government. Advice provided by the Partnership relating to [other road users](#), and as part of its [campaigns](#), makes no specific reference to equine road users.

[Road Safety Wales](#), a partnership between the 22 Welsh local authorities; the Welsh emergency services; GoSafe; the Welsh Government; and RoSPA, works to develop and sustain co-operation and interaction between key road safety partners and agencies with the responsibility for road safety promotion in Wales. Its mission is to “further casualty reduction through collaborative working”. It has produced a range of road safety [resources](#) including a [horse road safety poster](#) (PDF 311KB).

Department for Transport action

The Department for Transport (DfT) provides advice to motorists and horse riders through its [THINK! road safety campaign](#). The DfT’s advice for motorists says:

- Slow down and be ready to stop if necessary
- Look out for riders' signals to slow down or stop
- Watch out for sudden movements, horses can be easily frightened and unpredictable
- Don't sound your horn or rev your engine
- Pass wide and slow when overtaking; giving the horse plenty of room. Don't accelerate rapidly once you have passed them.
- On roundabouts, horse riders will keep to the left within the roundabout until reaching their exit, when they will signal left. They will normally signal right only when approaching exits they don't intend to use

The Highway Code

The Highway Code contains [rules for road users requiring extra care](#) such as horse riders. The Code highlights that “the most vulnerable road users are pedestrians, cyclists, motorcyclists and horse riders” (Rule 204). Rule 215 relates to horse riders and horse-drawn vehicles and says:

Be particularly careful of horse riders and horse-drawn vehicles especially when overtaking. **Always pass wide and slowly.** Horse riders are often children, so take extra care and remember riders may ride in double file when escorting a young or inexperienced horse or rider. Look out for horse riders’ and horse drivers’ signals and heed a request to slow down or stop. Take great care and treat all horses as a potential hazard; they can be unpredictable, despite the efforts of their rider/driver.

Regarding the wording of the Code, [the DfT says](#) that although failure to comply with these rules “will not, in itself, cause a person to be prosecuted”, the Highway Code “may be used in evidence in any court proceedings [...] to establish liability”.

A UK wide petition calling for the introduction of a law [on passing horses and abiding by horse riders hand signals](#) was supported by over 111,000 individuals. The safety of riders and horses on rural roads was subsequently [debated in the House of Commons](#) on 4 July 2017. Responding to the debate, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport, Jesse Norman, stated:

the Department [for Transport], through the “THINK! road safety” campaign, worked directly with the British Horse Society to support its own “Dead Slow” campaign, to encourage car drivers to pass horses safely. The Department was able to reinforce the BHS campaign by developing a short film that is being promoted as a public information film on UK TV stations. [...]

The Department has also invested in promoting the film on YouTube and other social media, such as Twitter and Facebook. Leaflets and posters to support the campaign further reminded motorists of the need to be patient when they encounter horses on the road and supplemented the advice already given in The Highway Code.

[...] Road safety officers around the country have also been encouraged to feature the campaign locally. To some extent, therefore, there is already a national campaign, in embryo at least.

The video co-produced by the DfT and the British Horse Society showing how to pass horses safely can be viewed [here](#).

Action by the British Horse Society and the AA

The [British Horse Society](#) is a charity which works to “promote and advance the education, training and safety of the public in all matters relating to the horse”. The Society promotes horse and rider safety through the publications such as [Road Sense for Riders](#) (PDF 644Kb) and [Horse Sense for Motorists](#) (PDF 4.14MB), and its [Dead Slow](#) campaign.

As part of the launch of its Dead Slow campaign in 2016, the BHS disclosed [statistics on incidents involving horses on the roads](#). Based on incident reported via its [horse accidents website](#) between November 2010 and March 2016, the Society highlighted:

over **2,000** reports [2,070 incidents reported in five years] of road incidents involving horses have been reported to the charity. Of these, **36** caused rider deaths, and **181** resulted in a horse dying from their injuries or being put to sleep.

75% of accidents happened because the vehicle passed the horse without allowing enough space, while **over a quarter** of respondents said that they also had to deal with driver road rage during the incident.

Of the 2,070 incidents reported, 146 were in Wales. The AA has also published guidance on [safely sharing the road with horses](#).

Welsh Government action

The Road Safety Framework for Wales

The Welsh Government’s road safety webpage states that it is “working with police, fire and rescue services, local authorities and the third sector to improve road safety in Wales”. The Welsh Government published its [Road Safety Framework for Wales](#) (PDF 1.13MB) in 2013. The Framework sets out the Welsh Government’s approach to road safety until 2020, including its road safety targets and the actions that it is taking to achieve them.

For all Welsh roads by 2020, the Welsh Government wants to see the following compared to the average for 2004–2008:

- 40% fewer people killed and seriously injured on Welsh roads;
- 25% fewer motorcyclists killed and seriously injured on Welsh roads; and
- 40% fewer young people (aged 16–24) killed and seriously injured on Welsh roads.

The Framework includes a commitment to support various campaigns related to drink and drug driving, careless driving, mobile phone use and seat belts. In respect of horse riders, the Framework recognises the vulnerability of equestrian road users and contains a commitment to work with representatives of the horse riding community to better understand concerns and facilitate engagement:

71. Horses and their riders (as well as carriage drivers) are vulnerable on the road network. A collision between a horse and a vehicle can have life threatening consequences for the horse, rider and those in a vehicle.
72. There is evidence to suggest that the number of road traffic collisions involving horses is underreported in casualty data.
73. Horse riding is more prevalent (particularly on roads) in certain parts of the country. Rural areas have larger numbers of horse riders, who make a significant contribution to the rural economy.

We will:

- i. Work with representatives of the horse riding community to understand their road safety concerns and facilitate engagement with other partners.

We expect partners to:

- ii. Actively engage with the horse riding community and consider whether any road safety interventions should be introduced, where there are significant numbers of horse riders and/or road traffic collision involving horses.

The Cabinet Secretary for Economy and Infrastructure’s response to this petitions says:

We have a close working relationship with the British Horse Society. My officials speak to the British Horse Society’s Welsh representative regularly and are assisting them with making contacts and engaging with other partners in Wales.

We appreciate the British Horse Society’s expertise in this area. This is why we choose to support their campaigns rather than run our own campaigns.

The Welsh Government produces an annual release on [road accidents in Wales](#) based on [police recorded road casualty data](#) for Welsh roads. The [2016 release](#) (PDF 2.27MB) includes information on the severity of injury (classified as either killed, seriously injured or slightly injured) and casualties by road user type (horse rider casualties are included in figures for ‘other road users’). Underpinning data for the number of [casualties by road user type across all Welsh roads](#) indicates that, of the 6,853 casualties recorded in 2016, 1 horse rider was slightly injured. In 2015, Welsh police records indicate that 5 horse riders were slightly injured and 2 seriously injured.

Road safety funding

Funding for road safety is provided to local authorities through the Welsh Government's [Road Safety Grant](#). Local authorities can bid for grant funding on an annual basis to deliver projects that seek to reduce the number of casualties on Welsh roads. Through its allocation of funding, the Welsh Government prioritises “schemes that reduce the numbers of motorcyclists, young people and vulnerable road users being killed or seriously injured”.

The Welsh Government has also previously funded projects to seeking to [improve the safety of equestrian road use](#) through its Rural Development Fund.

National Assembly for Wales action

The Research Service has not identified any prior consideration of this issue in the Assembly.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or otherwise amended to reflect subsequent changes.