

## **Opening Statement to the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Transport (Road Safety)**

*On behalf of Headway Ireland*

Chair and members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

My name is Richard Stables, and I am the Information and Support Manager with Headway Ireland, a national organisation providing community-based rehabilitation services to people living with acquired brain injury.

I would like to begin by acknowledging that road traffic accidents are a source of profound grief and trauma. Much of our national conversation quite rightly focuses on fatalities. However, I am here today to ask the Committee to broaden that focus to include those who survive, but whose lives are permanently and devastatingly changed. While fatalities are immediate and visible, serious injuries—particularly brain injuries—unfold over years, often out of public view.

At Headway Ireland, approximately one fifth of our caseload arises directly from road traffic accidents.

Behind that figure are people living with traumatic brain injury. These are individuals who may never return to work, who may lose their independence, their relationships, and in many cases, key aspects of their personality. Families often describe the experience not simply as survival, but as a different kind of loss. As one family member told us, *“I sometimes think it would have been better if he hadn’t survived.”* Another said, *“There are worse things than death.”*

These are difficult truths, but they are necessary ones if we are to fully understand the consequences of road traffic collisions.

We would make a number of observations.

First, there is a strong case for expanding restorative justice approaches in road traffic offences, including the wider use of mandatory driver awareness programmes. Where appropriate, these can play an important role in changing behaviour and helping drivers understand the lifelong consequences of their actions.

Second, emerging risks require urgent attention. We are seeing increasing concern around e-scooter-related injuries, supported by research published in the Irish Medical Journal. Similarly, issues relating to scramblers and other e-vehicles, particularly around helmet use and regulation, need to be addressed as a matter of priority.

Third, enforcement remains critical. Investment in dedicated roads policing units is essential, particularly in urban environments where we are seeing more complex interactions between vehicles, cyclists, and pedestrians, including injuries occurring on pavements. Risk factors such as alcohol, drugs, and mobile phone use continue to be strongly associated with traumatic brain injury.

We also note the positive impact of reduced speed limits, including 30 km/h zones, in lowering the severity of injuries when collisions occur. This is an important public health measure and should be supported.

Finally, and critically, road safety must include transport accessibility.

Keeping people safe on the roads is not only about restricting dangerous behaviour. It is also about ensuring people have safe, viable alternatives.

For individuals who can no longer drive due to disability or brain injury, the absence of accessible transport can lead to isolation or, in some cases, unsafe transport choices.

We therefore welcome measures such as the extension of the Free Travel Pass to those who lose the ability to drive.

However, significant gaps remain. The long-standing absence of the Mobility Allowance, and the lack of a fully implemented replacement, continues to impact people with disabilities. Similarly, supports such as the Motorised Transport Grant have not been adequately reinstated.

Accessible taxi provision is another area of concern. While Ireland has strong regulations governing vehicle safety and design, there are no requirements in relation to minimum coverage, response times, or geographic equity. This is particularly problematic in rural areas, where options are already limited.

In short, accessibility is not separate from road safety. It is part of it.

Chair, members of the Committee,

Ireland does collect data on serious injuries, and that is important. But in our experience, the long-term reality of those injuries, particularly brain injury, is not yet fully reflected in how we understand or communicate road safety.

A serious injury is not a moment in time. It is often the beginning of a lifelong condition.

If we are to build a truly safe road system, we must move beyond counting incidents to understanding consequences. That means recognising not only the number of people who survive collisions, but how they live afterwards.

I would urge the Committee to ensure that life-changing injuries, including brain injury, are brought from the margins of the conversation to its centre.

**Thank you**

## Summary of Policy Recommendations

### 1. **Strengthen awareness and policy focus on life-changing injuries**

While data on serious injuries is collected, greater emphasis is needed on the **long-term consequences** of those injuries, particularly traumatic brain injury.

This could include:

- Enhancing public awareness campaigns to reflect the lifelong impact of non-fatal collisions
- Incorporating long-term outcomes into road safety messaging and policy evaluation
- Ensuring that the lived experience of survivors and families informs strategy development

### 2. **Strengthen driver behaviour interventions**

Introduce and expand mandatory **driver awareness and restorative justice programmes** for relevant road traffic offences, with a focus on the real-life impact of injury.

### 3. **Address emerging and under-regulated risks**

- Accelerate regulation of e-scooters and e-vehicles, including **mandatory helmet use**
- Respond to injury trends identified in research from the Irish Medical Journal
- Tackle the ongoing risks associated with scramblers and similar vehicles

### 4. **Invest in enforcement capacity**

Increase resourcing of roads policing units, particularly in urban areas, to address:

- Dangerous driving
- Mobile phone use
- Drug and alcohol impairment

### 5. **Support evidence-based speed reduction measures**

Continue expansion and enforcement of **30 km/h zones**, recognising their role in reducing the severity of injuries.

### 6. **Improve accessible transport as a road safety measure**

Recognise accessible transport as part of road safety policy by:

- Ensuring **affordable and available options in rural areas**
- Addressing gaps in wheelchair-accessible taxi provision, including **coverage, response times, and geographic equity**
- Supporting safe alternatives for those who cannot drive

### 7. **Restore and replace mobility supports**

- Introduce a replacement for the Mobility Allowance without further delay
- Review and reinstate supports such as the Motorised Transport Grant
- Continue to expand eligibility for the Free Travel Pass for those who lose the ability to drive