Northamptonshire County Council

Please ask for: [redacted]
Tel:
Our ref:
Your ref:
Date: 6 January 2015

HM Coroner for the County of Northamptonshire
110 Whitworth Road
Northampton
NN1 4HJ

FAO Mr H Shah

Dear Mr Shah,

RE: LEANNE CARMEN GOWER (DECEASED)
REGULATION 28 CORONERS REPORT

I refer to your letter dated 19th November 2014 to my officer, [redacted] and accompanying regulation 28 Report expressing concerns regarding various policies and would reply as follows:

1. Department of Transport Design Manual

National Guidance HD 28/04 is published by the Department for Transport and the Highways Agency for use on the Motorway and Trunk Road network. As such, it is without the remit of the County Council to review.

However, I would comment that in the period 2001 to 2004, Northamptonshire saw considerable changes to its principal road network as a result of the government's national programme of trunking and detrunking. This consisted of the A45 (from M1 Jn 15 to A14) becoming a trunk road and sections of the A6, A428, A43, A45 and A47 ceasing to be trunk roads and becoming part of the county A road network

This has resulted in two very different networks: Trunk Roads and Motorways which (with the exception of the A5) consist mostly of Motorways or motorway style dual carriageways with limited junctions, often grade-separated and relatively modern, designed roads (M1, M45, A14, A45 and A43).

This contrasts with the county principal road network which are local A roads the majority of which have evolved historically with limited design and consist of numerous junctions, a mixture of urban/rural environments, and varying levels of horizontal and vertical alignment.

2. Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) Skidding Resistance Policy

The County Council's policy and utilisation of SCRIM data modifies the Department of Transport guidance for use on the County Principal Road network. NCC considers that strict application of HD28/04 is too stringent for a local road network because the national

document does not provide suitable guidance for roads designed for lower speeds and lower traffic volumes.
The current NCC policy was first issued in 2009 and was last reviewed in 2013/14 to take into account all latest available national advice and guidance. This latest review has yet to be formally signed off so we will take this opportunity to look at our Skidding Resistance Strategy again to see if any further changes are required or improvements can be made.

3. Red Route Working Party and Red Route Process
This is the working party referred to in your report and the process is more of a strategy rather than a policy. The process has been in place since 2000 and the working party meets on a monthly basis with expert practitioners from Northamptonshire Highways, Northamptonshire police and Northants Fire & Rescue Service.
The Red Route process has evolved over the years and an annual review of routes, interventions, working practices and inclusion of SCRIM data ensures that the most effective strategy is in place. This means that the process is already subject to regular review.

I have attached some additional information relating to the Red Route Strategy by way of further explanation including some more specific information regarding the A508 and perspective around the use of non-injury collision data which was an issue raised during the inquest.

Yours sincerely

[redacted]

[redacted]
Strategic Manager Transport and Highways

RED ROUTE STRATEGY

Red Route Process

By virtue of a known and significant collision/casualty history around 40 routes in the county are designated as 'Red Routes' and are each subject to an investigation by a working group panel comprising expert practitioners from Northamptonshire Highways, Northamptonshire Police and Northants Fire & Rescue Service. The Panel meets on a monthly basis in order to survey and profile Red Routes using an evidence led process derived mainly from data recorded by the police when attending personal injury collisions. This analysis ensures that interventions are directed to where they are most effective by implementing appropriate engineering, educational or enforcement measures, either in isolation or in combination. Non-injury collision data held by the police is retained in a form that is of no evidential value for analysis purposes and is therefore not considered by the Panel. An explanation of the police non-injury collision recording policy is provided later in this report.

The Red Route process has been in place since 2000 and has contributed to the good progress we have made in reducing road casualties as well as ensuring that we can address emerging trends, patterns and areas of concern. Significant casualty reductions were achieved during the early years of this strategy with vehicle technology and legislation providing considerable influence together with our own effective interventions directed towards collision cluster sites, speeding motorists, and anti-social driving habits. Elements of these still prevail but it was always anticipated that a plateauing effect in casualty numbers would occur as they reached unprecedented low levels and we experience ever diminishing returns on road safety investment. In order to identify our most collision affected routes we use a 'risk mapping' process as advocated by the Road Safety Foundation. Collision cluster sites in the county have greatly diminished and this process ensures that we focus our activity on route and area-based interventions. The Red Route process has therefore evolved over the years to meet these challenges and an annual review of routes, interventions, working practices and inclusion of SCRIM data ensures that the most effective strategy is in place

Casualty Progress

There have been significant improvements in road safety in Northamptonshire over the past 20 years.

In 2013 there were 330 KSI casualties compared to 348 in 2012, a decrease of 5%. Overall, 2013 represents the record low for all types of casualty (1,585). In addition, the number of young driver KSI casualties, at 28, is the second lowest since records were introduced in 1960.

The greatest progress in casualty reduction has been achieved over the longer term by comparing 2013 with the government baseline years of 1994-98. The average number of people killed or seriously injured during this period in Northamptonshire was 773 per year compared to 330 in 2013, a reduction of 57%.

During the same period all categories of vulnerable road user groups have fallen significantly and, in particular, young driver KSI casualties by 68%, child KSI casualties by 75%, car passengers by 77% and pedestrian KSI casualties by 54%.

This has been achieved against a backdrop of increased vehicle usage, and ownership of registered vehicles rising nationally by almost 10 million.

Non-Injury Collision Data

The police no longer routinely attend or record non-injury collisions and the Department for Transport do not require this information from local authorities. It is therefore a fact that the vast majority of damage only collisions are not recorded by the police and anecdotal information is notoriously unreliable. Reports of non-injury collisions to the police are noted on a messaging log and tend to provide the briefest of detail. The absence of precise, validated and corroborated locations for incidents therefore renders any attempt to accurately identify collision sites with any degree of confidence. It should also be born in mind that, for the purposes of the Road Traffic Act, the most insignificant damage to a vehicle or property would constitute a non-injury collision. Provided that all the conditions of the Act are met then there is no obligation for a motorist to report a non-injury collision to the police.

Where non-injury collisions are recorded by the police, details are again very brief and held in their administrative system for reference purposes. Reports are not forwarded to Northamptonshire Highways and we do not have the resource capacity to input the detail on our database. To put this in context we currently input around 1200 personal injury collisions per year on our database and the police file around 2,500 non-injury collisions in their system. This is in hard copy form and presents no opportunity to interrogate, validate or analyse the information. We spend a great deal of time validating the data contained within personal injury collision forms in order to ensure that the information available on the database has a high degree of accuracy.

Non-injury data is therefore extremely limited, unreliable and lacks scientific rigour to determine meaningful interventions. As an evidence led process our analysts are also mindful that erroneous data could potentially create danger on the road network rather than reduce it as well as divert funding away from more serious concerns on the network.

A508

The collision history along the whole route (M1 to Stony Stratford) is such that it is constantly monitored and has benefited over the years from a range of measures which have included static safety cameras, reduced speed limits and major junction re-engineering. We are also aware that local and national analysis clearly indicates that the vast majority of collisions are not due to any action (or failure) by the highways authorities but by human behavioural factors which we continually strive to fully understand and find ways to

address. When the Red Route process was first introduced in 2000 there had been 73 personal injury collisions including 5 road deaths in the previous 3 years, compared to 31 personal injury collisions (2 road deaths) in the most recent 3 years to date. There has therefore been a significant improvement in the safety record of this route, and against a backdrop of increased traffic flow.

Conclusion

The Red Route process undergoes regular assessment and appraisal by the members of the Panel in order to maintain best practice and value for money. In addition, an annual review of all the routes is undertaken to ensure that resources are directed to where they the most needed. We will continue to ensure that effective procedures are under constant consideration.