Road Safety Partnerships in 2012: Sustainability in the ‘Big Society’

A report by
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On behalf of

GEM Motoring Assist Road Safety Charity

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Executive Summary

Road Safety Partnerships have helped create better road safety outcomes by integrating Education, Engineering and Enforcement and through collaborative working. The recent economic climate was thought to potentially affect the long term viability of partnership working and a study was implemented to consider some aspects of this issue.

The aims were to explore the views of practitioners regarding how partnership working has changed since the end of the Road Safety Partnership Grant (RSPG), the barriers and facilitators of partnership working, their sustainability and how they engage with the community as a partner.

Telephone interviews were conducted among 19 road safety officers who had been in receipt of the RSPG. The sample was anonymous and confidential and interviews were taped and transcribed. Thematic content analyses was undertaken to derive the key themes. A range of verbatim comments have been used to illustrate themes.

The key themes that emerged were:

1) **The value of partnership working**: nearly all participants felt that partnership working was very important and achieved more than by working alone.

2) **Impact of loss of funding**: many felt the loss of the grant made it very difficult to keep the strategic partnerships going.

3) **Partnership working has suffered since the grant finished and economic recession begun**: a key barrier to partnership working was the loss of funds provided by the grant and because of cuts related to economic recession. The majority of participants commented that their partnership working had suffered since the end of the grant and the start of economic recession.

4) **Partners-gains and losses**: most of the road safety officers said that they were still working with key professional partners although many reported the diminishing role of the police in their partnership as they were retreating to core business, such as enforcement. This was described as one of the “biggest fall outs” from the partnerships dissolving.

5) **Forward looking partnerships**: many participants were determined to continue to work in partnership and were positive about the challenge of working together to deliver cost efficient road safety interventions.

6) **The community as a partner**: Useful information emerged regarding how they engaged with the community and what mechanisms were used. None of the participants had been given specific training about how to engage with the community. Many participants highlighted the importance of engaging with the local community especially for behaviour change.

7) **Sustainability**: uncertainty about the future was a key theme with isolated examples of where participants were identifying opportunities to ensure the sustainability of the partnership. Some participants saw the move of public health to the local authority and the “Joint Strategic Needs Assessment” process as a way of embedding casualty reduction as a future health and wellbeing outcome.

Most road safety partnerships have been influenced by economic recession and a consistent theme emerged of the cuts severely damaging partnerships. Despite this there was a clear commitment and desire to continue to work in partnership and rise to the challenge of doing the same or more with less and to be more creative in finding solutions to ensure sustainability. Future challenges seem to be how best equip practitioners in ways to meaningfully engage with the community and its diversity; how to disseminate good practice or case studies in partnership working and to understand how best to strategically embed road safety. It is recommended that a systematic reappraisal of what is still feasible is now undertaken. This will identify areas for prioritization and new, viable, partnership models. Failure to do this is likely to lead to further fragmentation of effort which may impact on local authorities’ ability to deliver further casualty reductions.
Introduction

Working in partnership is a key strand of a number of government policies. Where remits and agendas overlap and partners have a vested interest in the outcome it is clear that working together is better than working apart and potentially duplicating effort and resources. Different partners bring different roles, skills, data and insights to resolve a problem. The governments Big Society vision implies that local partnership working is more important than ever to share data and resources and as ‘a focus for local consultation and engagement’.

Working together is promoted by government as a way to improve delivery and outcomes and features as a key part of the Department for Transport’s Road Safety Strategic Framework. The National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) has also called for formal road safety partnerships to be maintained or established to manage road safety activities and should include the road safety team, fire and rescue services, the injury prevention coordinator, the NHS, police, local education authorities and local safeguarding boards. NICE recommend that partnerships should

- Have a member of staff responsible for road safety partnership work
- Develop policies with the community;
- Secure funding for local projects that makes best use of local data to understand the demographics and risk-exposure data of those involved in injuries.

Despite these clarion calls for partnership working the economic environment has seen extensive cuts in public services which are having an impact on many of the partner agencies involved in delivery of road safety.

Significant investment in partnership working was seen in the creation Safer Roads Partnerships. In 2007 the Department for Transport (DfT) established the Road Safety Partnership Grant (RSPG). The grant had been set up to “promote:

- partnership working among local authorities and others (including the education sector and youth service as well as other public service organizations such as the health sector, the fire and rescue service, the police and the voluntary sector);
- the take-up and sharing of good practice in the road safety arena;
- innovative approaches and ways of working to address road safety issues; and
- Main-streaming the most effective lessons learned from other road safety pilot projects. “

It was hoped that these would provide a framework for partner agencies to work together to reduce road casualties by:

- Engaging with local communities on road safety issues that concern them
- Sharing data to decide the most appropriate way of tackling identified problems
- Sharing resources, skills and ideas
- Monitoring and evaluating intervention approaches to ensure that they are effective

In March 2011 the RSPG came to an end. It had funded 19 projects at a total cost approaching £2.2million. However, recent research commissioned by the DfT suggests that the current economic climate is having a significant impact on partnership:

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3 http://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/index.jsp?action=byID&o=13272
4 Besley, E (2010). Tackling the deficit: at what cost to road safety? RAC.
5 http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/roadsafety/rspg/impactofround2projectsreport/
..”the present economic recession and public-sector spending cuts have already constrained partnership working, with member organisations having to focus on their statutory obligations. This is a worrying trend, especially given the potential loss of ‘intellectual memory’ from within partnerships, which risks undermining previous investment.”

The report concluded that Road Safety Partnerships have played a critical role in creating better road safety outcomes by integrating Education, Engineering and Enforcement and drawing on the strengths of each partner through collaborative working. However, the report also stated that the current economic situation jeopardises the sustainability of partnership working.

Aims

The aims of this project were to explore the views of practitioners regarding how partnership working has changed since the end of the RSPG, the current barriers and facilitators of partnership working, their sustainability and how they engage with the community as a partner.

Method

Telephone interviews were conducted among 19 road safety officers who had been in receipt of the road safety partnership grant. The sample is anonymous and confidential. All interviews were taped and transcribed. Thematic content analyses was undertaken to derive the key themes showing the commonality and diversity of views. Verbatim comments are used in the report to illustrate themes but are not attributed to individuals.

Key themes

The value of partnership working

Nearly all participants felt that partnership working was very important and achieved more than by working alone:

“I think you can also start to look at some of the economies of scale that we achieve through collectively paying for resources, particularly things like media,...we can do things a lot cheaper as a partnership as we can as individual partners. And I think its fair to say that really the sum of the whole is much greater than the individual components together..”. Participant 16

“I think that partnership is absolutely essential. The days when you were a sort of modular road safety team or a Fire Brigade working on something or a Police force working on something, I think those days are long gone and rightly so. I think everybody needs to be working collectively because none of us have got enough resource to do what we need to do.” Participant 18

Many participants felt that it was more important than ever to work together:
“I think it’s probably a time when we need to work more in partnership to deliver more, or at least the same, with less. But there’s, you know, it’s almost like - because there’s less resources particularly in staff, then people that you did work with in partnership before, either departments have gone or budgets have gone. A lot of those partnerships are no longer there to work with, so it’s looking for new partners. As well, a lot of what we do is duplicated by the other agencies so it’s actually trying to find out who does what and make sure that we are working together.” Participant 1

Only one participant had a more negative view of this:

“I mean, each of the four local authorities did their own thing to quite a large extent: they are under different sorts of political constraints and different managements and so on, and the degree to which we really, genuinely, coordinated what we did with some of the other agencies was not all that successful.” Participant 15

Impact of loss of funding

For participants the grant mechanism had provided a political commitment to partnership, a welcome scrutiny and involvement from the DfT, had enabled local authorities to plan activities and provided a platform to engage partners. When the RSPG finished partners had to face loss of funding at a time when economic recession meant that many services were being cut which many found difficult:

“The Road Safety Partnership, when it was more of a commitment politically for all the people that were engaged with it, because that’s been lost, it’s obviously made it difficult... as the organisations like the police and the fire service are more remote than they were” Participant 13

“The logic, the motivation to get together and coordinate our spending and so on has gone from that point of view.” Participant 15

For many the loss of the grant made them feel it was very difficult to keep the strategic partnerships going:

“It’s definitely going through a rocky patch at the principal strategic level. It’s very, very difficult to get senior people in organisations around the table to talk about the things that need to be done when actually nobody is saying, ‘and this is the pot of money that we’re going to use to operationalise our decisions.” Participant 3

“It’s started its decline, which will only continue in the coming months and years. And, for somebody who’s – I mean I’ve been around road safety partnerships since 2003 now, so I was there [name of region] when the hypothecation scheme was around, so when the Department for Transport were running the safety cameras and the work of the Safer Roads Partnerships was governed by the Department for Transport. We then moved into the road safety partnership grant, the four-year scheme that ran from 07 to this year, so yes I saw both of those funding regimes working and, when we moved from the cameras into the road safety grant that was great because that gave us the freedom with four-years of funding (well, almost guaranteed until they cut it in year four) to enable us to plan not just the safety camera stuff but all of the other road safety work that we really wanted to get on and do across the three counties.” Participant 4
“The money disappears; the partnership disappeared. The police now do their own enforcement on their own, and just do enforcement, and it’s up to the Highway Authorities to cope on their own doing their other things. And it has been as, well, I say catastrophic, but you know, it’s been that much of a marked change in our area and speaking to colleagues around the country, it’s heading that way.”
Participant 8

Many felt that less would be delivered locally as a result of the loss of the grant:

“I mean I can’t say there’s been no impact through the loss of the grant because there has and it’s mainly affecting the delivery, the initiatives in the community in the local areas.” Participant 19

**Partnership working has suffered since the grant finished and economic recession begun**

A key barrier to partnership working was the loss of funds provided by the grant and because of cuts related to economic recession. The majority of participants commented that their partnership working had suffered since the end of the grant and the start of economic recession. There was a feeling that the funding had got people round the table but now participants felt that there was less money, less commitment from partners, less partners, less sharing of information, less communication and this had a knock on effect on the numbers of initiatives delivered. It was felt by participants that restructuring of public services meant that there was a lack of continuity and redundancies had created a low morale. Some local authorities had seen their teams reduce and their communications groups cut. On the positive side sharing of data seemed to be the one aspect of partnership working that continued.

“Since the funding disappeared then we meet less frequently and fewer of the partners turn up. So, because that personal contact is not so great, then obviously the exchange of information tends to go the same way….the Road Safety Partnership, when it was more of a commitment politically for all the people that were engaged with it, because that’s been lost, it’s obviously made it difficult... as the organisations like the police and the fire service are more remote than they were”. Participant 15

“There is actually less communication, yes. We see less of people because we’re not doing – when we worked together on projects... when we had a lot of money, and say for example the Fire Service and the Police had more staff, we would work more closely because we were actually doing a campaign or a project. ... Now, because we’re not doing any events and we’re not doing any campaigns, we don’t see the people as much.” Participant 14

“It’s not really changed in terms of who’s involved, what’s changed is how often, I think, people are involved and the level of commitment because we’ve got less happening ultimately. We’ve reduced the number of priority groups and priority areas that we looked at in terms of risk groups, if you like, as part of that. And also we stopped a number of meetings that were happening.” Participant 9

“I think it is hard work because of all the other issues around it and getting high-level buy in and, in the current situation where everyone is focused on cuts, I think that’s the challenge. And I think that’s likely to be the thing that breaks it, if anything breaks it. “Participant 6
There was a general feeling among participants that partnerships were fragile because many partners were closing in on core business or threatened with staff cuts:

“...if the Fire Brigade, for example, decided that they didn’t have the funding to run the Community Speed Fire and Safety Team the way it is structured and instead to go back to core activity which is putting out fires or cutting people out of cars, rather than engaging with us to try and prevent the crash, just being reactive. Then, if they dropped off, that would have a huge impact on us. We would have a really valuable partner taken away. The Police restructured the Casualty Reduction Team quite recently; it’s still there but it’s not the same as it was, so that had an impact on how we operate. And my team are under threat.” Participant 18

“I think it’s fair to say that our partners currently are the police; to a lesser extent, the Highways Agency. And that at the moment is pretty much where we stop in terms of our local county council partnership. Fire and Rescue have pretty much withdrawn from road safety as an activity and are less engaged”. Participant 8

“I know the view is that in hard times, if we all pull together we’ll achieve our outcomes but, bottom line is, when the chips are down sometimes the fences come up for people to preserve what they have, and that sometimes inhibits partnership working”. Participant 11

“I think it’s just a natural reaction within the individual – the specific stress is that the budget cuts both on the individual component parts of the partnership organisations so everybody’s heads went down to their own bottom line and, yeah, the practicalities of running one’s own core business versus the partnership engagement.” Participant 12

**Partners: gains and losses**

Most of the road safety officers said that they were still working with key professional partners such as police, fire and rescue, the Highways Agency and ambulance trusts. A few participants were working with a Primary Care Trust but generally the partnership with health was highly variable, though some were looking forward to the move of public health to the local authority:

“Historically we’ve found it difficult to work with our Public Health. I think we’re getting over that issue and that’s helped by the fact that, as a body, they’re being moved into the county council, so that’s helpful.” 8

Some local authorities were working with new partners such as Local Child Safeguarding Boards and children’s centres and one participant was linking up with the drug and alcohol teams.

A major concern of many participants was what they felt was the diminishing role of the police in their partnership because they were retreating to core business such as enforcement, this was described as one of the “biggest fall outs” from the partnerships dissolving:

“Now the great historical partnership between local authorities and other casualty professionals tends to be with the Police; they are really, really strong relationships. Now frankly it’s always been the case that you never ask a copper for money. Never, never go to the Police and ask for cash. They
however have brought other operational resources to the table, mainly personnel and the ability to deploy personnel for enforcement in order to support, say, educational programmes. That’s changed now. This has got nothing to do with the loss of the road safety grant; this has got everything to do with the restructuring of the Police forces and general cuts across the board which means that there is less resource now for enforcement. That has an effect on the partnerships because it means that one of the three tiers of road safety working, enforcement (the other two being education and engineering) is now severely disadvantaged. A very, very, very big problem. And what you find is that people like me work to the safety triangle: engineering, education, enforcement. And, if you cannot provide a sufficient level of resource on one of those three, then you bolster up the other two. It is now not the case even though we’ve been hit on education which is what the road safety grant was being used for, normally I would probably have looked at my enforcement colleagues to try and shore up the triangle if you like by providing additional enforcement. That’s no longer there, so two sides of the triangle are now severely disadvantaged.” Participant 14

“the degree to which we work with them has massively reduced compared with where we have been over the last 11 years”…….. “The money disappears; the partnership disappeared”. Participant 8

Forward looking partnerships

Many participants were determined to continue to work in partnership and were positive about the challenge of working together to deliver cost efficient road safety interventions. Several participants had achieved this by working at a regional level:

“We’ve done one thing together where everybody from the whole region agreed to put money in. That’s the first time that’s happened, to my knowledge, in the last four years and that was after the grant funding had gone. And we’re going to try for some more for this year... because we don’t have the money to do whatever ourselves.”. Participant 13

“there’s probably 50 different motorcycle road safety schemes around the country with 50 different websites with 50 different brands and 50 different logos; we need more regional working on things and that’s starting to happen.” Participant 8

Participants suggested partnership working was facilitated and embedded by clear governance:

“Once we’d had our first meetings and we determined that our objectives are the same and the criteria that each group needed to meet and how they needed to report, there wasn’t - everybody was really good because we already had it set up” Participant 7

One local authority had created a ‘partnership guru’ to take a proactive role in developing partnership work:

“What we’ve done in my team is we’ve taken one of the RSOs and actually given them a portfolio responsibility for partnership working. So her day job now if you like isn’t so much traditional road safety activity, it’s finding partners, encouraging partners, and finding ways to work with those partners. And then we use the rest of the team to capitalise on what she’s done.” Participant 18
The community as a partner

The community is identified as a key partner in the Road Safety Strategic Framework and participants were asked about how they engaged with the community, what mechanisms they used and how their training had prepared them for this. Many participants felt it was extremely important to engage with the local community especially with regard to behaviour change:

“...if you’re going to change behaviour, obviously you’ve got to work with the community and find out how you’re going to change behaviour, and then offer a number of either specific training or educational publicity methods to do that. So we do try and find out what people want and what will affect behaviour that way so it’s very valuable to get it from the horses mouth, if you like.” Participant 9

“I personally value a resource where I can listen to what people actually want on the ground rather than being part of, which I am, part of a council which might occasionally dictate what it thinks is best for the community.” Participant 11

“It’s important you do the right things so, for me, liaising, working with the community or working with focus groups or just being at events and talking to the local community. But obviously it’s the motorcycle community that we work with most now but not exclusively of course because we talked to non-bikers wherever we went, but it’s important to get their views that they think we’re doing the right things. And they work with us.” Participant 7

“It’s what people want, rather than assuming that we know what they want. It’s having ideas but then taking that idea to them and seeing if it works, if it’s what they want.” Participant 3

There were only a few examples of how participants had involved the community in delivery of interventions. One of these was community speed watch:

“It is members of the community making their own statement against certain types of behaviour. It carries a bit more weight I suppose in the community in terms of social acceptance than if it’s just an Authority possibly. It’s sort of saying – it’s them taking responsibility because as long as I’ve been in road safety the message we’re trying to get across to the community is, ‘road safety’s a bigger job than any Authority can do, it’s everybody’s responsibility’.” Participant 17

One participant had involved the community in a social marketing approach with young drivers:

“..in terms of actually delivering something which is effective, you have to understand how they think about what they are doing and what motivates them to do what they do, and how that works for them either individually or as part of a group. So, in order to formulate an effective intervention, engaging with them is absolutely essential really.” Participant 6

One participant identified that the localism agenda could mean that community would demand more from local authorities at a time when they have less resources and this could be problematic:

“I think it is absolutely a challenge at the moment for communities to understand what’s really going within the public sector, that the money is disappearing at a vast rate. And there is almost a
contradiction between government policy with localism and with the Big Society which is almost saying, ‘get on the backs of your local authority, push for them to do more for you’, but at the same time funding is being squeezed.” Participant 8

Participants were asked what mechanisms they used to engage with communities. A range of mechanisms were identified including the use of focus groups, citizens panels, and attending road safety and neighbourhood forums.

“There’s one or two of the local authorities that have road safety forums and we have a seat on those forums and we also go out to give presentations at member based meetings to explain what we’re doing. And we’re trying to engage with the public more through our website. But it is an area where we’re looking to develop more.” Participant 19

“We engage by discussion through forums, with liaise with our area committees who have neighbourhood forums. We engage very directly at parents’ meetings and even more directly recently with door knocking in areas where we’ve got a lot of child casualties, for instance, we’ve been door knocking, engaging the local community in why we’re working in the area and what they can do to help themselves.” Participant 15

One participant was planning to create road safety champions as dissemination agents and some participants saw existing interventions such as pedestrian training as an opportunity to engage with parents:

“we’ve just done our Road Safety Plan and we did focus groups and citizens panel questionnaires to get the view of our people…. We do have a programme that we’re working on which I’m hoping to start to use, which we are going to call Road Safety Champions and, if that works, then obviously what we’re looking at is for them to be really championing road safety and we give them the information and they talk about it.” Participant 2

“if there’s a child in the family, the message is going to get across to the adults via letters that we’ll send, we take children out, we do a lot of pedestrian training, so parents will know what we’re doing, we tell them why we’re doing it - because of the accidents.” Participant 5

None of the participants had been specifically trained in how to engage with the community:

There is no training programme for this profession that equips you to deal with the community, to conduct social research for example, to do exactly what it is that you’re doing right now. However, we’re wise to this and have been for a very long time so all of our people go through pretty intense training programmes on communications issues and research. And we have a number of seasoned academics in the team, we have people with formal research backgrounds. And, as of November of last year, we have an evidence based researcher whose job it is to make sure that not only do we engage with the communities but we do it at a level that would meet a pretty rigorous academic standard.” Participant 3

Many felt that embracing the diversity of the community was challenging, especially in understanding how to access hard to reach groups. A few had liaised with communications departments to integrate information on accident data, and area based deprivation to make sure campaign material was targeted. One participant was in the process of writing engagement strategies on how to tackle hard to reach groups. One participant felt that the road safety profession was only just beginning to understand how to engage with the community:
“I think there’s a lot of people who think they’re working with the community because they hand out a leaflet. That’s not engaging with the community, that’s creating litter.” Participant 8

Sustainability

Uncertainty about the future was a key theme for many participants:

“I think everybody, is just feeling their way through what’s happening at the moment. I think we’re in the relatively fortunate position at the moment that we feel fairly stable for the next couple of years but I think we certainly all foresee some further quite dramatic changes coming in towards the end of that. But I mean sustainability of working with partners; it is almost week-by-week because there are so many changes, so many different reviews taking place all the time. Every agency at the moment is engaged in finding ways to reduce their costs and you just never know at what point that’s going to bite and have a further impact on what we’re doing and the people that we’re working with.” Participant 8

“If councils become downsized, or departments like this become downsized or the police working on road safety initiatives or working on road safety enforcement get downsized, then it’s obviously going to have an impact but so long as everybody’s there I’m sure that this will be a priority.” Participant 7

However, there were a number of isolated examples of where participants were identifying opportunities to ensure the sustainability of the partnership. Some participants saw the move of public health to the local authority and the “Joint Strategic Needs Assessment” process as a way of embedding casualty reduction as a future health and wellbeing outcome.

“Increasingly now I see that linkage is being made through the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA); that, for me, would be an aspiration that the JSNA process with the health lead, starts to impact if you like and overlap with the work of the casualty reduction partnership.” Participant 12

One participant identified community assemblies as a way forward. Community assemblies are designed to let local people have more of a say in influencing the decisions about services in their area, each has a budget and will ask communities how this should be spent on local projects.

“So, for example, last year when I was trying to set up some new projects, I attended quite a lot of [community assembly] meetings in specific areas specifically with people involved with certain groups involved with young adults. And I explained what we were trying to do and why, and that formed links which have led to us actually delivering in those areas through training organisations for example.” Participant 11

Several participants felt that revenue from driver diversion schemes (i.e. speed awareness courses) would help sustain their partnerships activities:

“In [city] anyway it’s very sustainable. It’s set up through governance and we’re on a firm footing because of the Driver Intervention Scheme.” Participant 19
“Well, we’ve just spent 18-months trying to ensure that the [named] partnership carries on and continues. We’ve worked really hard on developing a business model and funding package that will sustain it until 2015 and our aim is that by 2015 there will be no requirement for local authority contributions to maintain that partnership. It will actually be self-funding.” Participant 16

A couple of participants identified the creation of not-for-profit companies as way of sustaining delivery:

“look, if you’re looking to save money, the way to do it is more collaborative working; let’s share costs, let’s set up not-for-profit companies, community interest companies in road safety where we can work, where we can do what’s best about the public sector, what’s best about the third sector, what’s best about the private sector as well, if we work together under these... mutuals’. Participant 4

“So we have got a particularly strong partnership now in the local authorities. We are able to manage the majority of their road safety provision on their behalf now through our not-for-profit company that has been created to do the work this year [for the six authorities].” Participant 8

One participant felt that the sustainability of road safety was influenced by not knowing who will eventually ‘own’ road safety:

“the new Health and Wellbeing Boards that are being set up, then you sit within the Public Health arena and therefore hopefully get the backing of the NHS and Public Health staff. Or does it stay within Community Safety, in which case it kind of sits under the crime agenda if you like” Participant 9

Conclusions

In 2012 most road safety partnerships have been influenced by economic recession. Road safety teams are, like many public services, living with uncertainty. Partners have been lost or their roles diminished. Whilst we have found there was evidence of stoicism in adversity, a consistent theme emerged of the cuts severely damaging partnerships. Despite this there was a clear commitment and desire to continue to work in partnership and rise to the challenge of doing the same or more with less and to be more creative in finding solutions to ensure sustainability. Future challenges seem to be how best equip practitioners in ways to meaningfully engage with the community and its diversity; how to disseminate good practice or case studies in partnership working and to understand how best to strategically embed road safety. It is recommended that a systematic reappraisal of what is still feasible is now undertaken. This will identify areas for prioritization and new, viable, partnership models. Failure to do this is likely to lead to further fragmentation of effort which may impact on local authorities’ ability to deliver further casualty reductions.

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