



Department  
for Transport

# Response to statistical consultation on the Department for Transport's drink drive statistics

December 2014

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# 1. Introduction

## Purpose of this document

- 1.1** The public consultation on the Department for Transport's drink drive statistics ran from 24 July 2014 to 4 September 2014. This document summarises the responses received to that consultation and sets out the response and next steps from the Department for Transport.

## Consultation overview

- 1.2** The Department has published annual estimates of drink drive casualties for many years. They are an important tool for year-on-year monitoring of progress on drink driving and assessing the efficacy of drink drive education, legislation and enforcement.
- 1.3** Around six months after the end of each year, we publish a set of provisional estimates. These are finalised a year later when more data are available. The provisional estimates are intended as a timely snapshot of drink drive deaths.
- 1.4** We have identified some problems with recent provisional estimates - related to a diminishing sample size and systematic bias. This has prompted us to review the methodology and timing for the provisional statistics.
- 1.5** The consultation presented three options for changing the methodology and timing for provisional statistics, as well as discussing the implications of retaining them as they are or stopping them entirely.
- 1.6** The consultation document is available at:  
[www.gov.uk/government/consultations/drink-driving-monitoring-data](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/drink-driving-monitoring-data)

## 2. Summary of responses to the consultation

### Responses to the consultation

- 2.1** The Department is very grateful to those that took the time to respond to this consultation. The considered manner of the responses will ensure that DfT continues to maintain the statistical quality of its official statistics.
- 2.2** A total of 19 responses to this consultation were received. A list of respondents can be found in annex A.
- 2.3** The summary of responses is structured according to the eight consultation questions.

### **Question C.1: What use do you make of the provisional and final drink driving estimates at present?**

- 2.4** There were a range of different types of respondents including police forces, road safety charities, alcohol health campaigners, medical bodies, a county council, a motoring organisation and a provider of consumer breathalysers.
- 2.5** A large number of respondents said they use the data to raise awareness of the dangers of drinking and driving to the public. In addition, some respondents use the figures in publication materials such as reports, policy papers, briefings, factsheets, press statements and newsletters.
- 2.6** Road safety charities use the data to inform their policies and prioritise, the measures on which they campaign or lobby.

**Question C.2: Which, if any, of the proposed options below do you think is the best future form for the provisional estimates and why?**

**2.7** Option 1 was the preferred option amongst respondents where a clear preference was given with option 4 receiving the second highest support. The main reason for supporting option 1 was that publishing final figures only would avoid any confusion arising from the provisional estimates being revised.

**Table 2.1: Responses by option**

<b>Option 0:</b> Retain provisional statistics with their current form and timing	2
<b>Option 1:</b> Stop publishing provisional statistics entirely	6
<b>Option 2:</b> Delay provisional statistics to later in the year to allow a larger, more representative sample to be gathered	2
<b>Option 3:</b> Adjust the estimates to account for the bias	0
<b>Option 4:</b> Produce the estimate as a range, rather than a single "best" estimate	4
"hybrid" option 3 and 4	3
No preferred option indicated	2
<b>Total responses</b>	<b>19</b>

**2.8** Option 4 would lead to production of provisional estimates as a range rather than a single "best" estimate. One respondent favouring this option suggested that a range should be published alongside a single "best" estimate. They highlighted that publishing just a range would be difficult for the public or media to use and there may be a temptation for the media to use the upper limit in the range.

**2.9** Option 2 would lead to a delay in publishing the provisional statistics to later in the year to allow a larger, more representative sample of data to be gathered. Respondents supporting this option highlighted the importance of having timely provisional statistics to give an indication of trends which would be sacrificed if option 1 is followed.

**2.10** Only two respondents supported option 0 - retaining the provisional statistics with their current form and timing. Respondents supporting this option felt that in their current form the provisional statistics are timely and fit for purpose. They felt that the trend in both provisional and final figures have matched reasonably well over the last few years, with the exception of 2011. However, the consultation started before final 2012 figures were published in August: [www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reported-road-casualties-in-great-britain-final-estimates-involving-illegal-alcohol-levels-2012](http://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reported-road-casualties-in-great-britain-final-estimates-involving-illegal-alcohol-levels-2012). The 2012 figure for drink drive deaths was 230, revised down from a provisional estimate of 290.

**2.11** Respondents were able to combine aspects of options 2, 3 or 4. Please see **question C.6** for a summary of respondent views on "hybrid" options.

**Question C.3: If option 2 is your preferred option, when in the year do you think the provisional estimates should be published?**

**2.12** There were two respondents who supported option 2, one of which gave details of when they think the provisional estimates should be published.

**2.13** This respondent suggested publishing provisional statistics in the late autumn/early winter e.g. publishing 2013 provisional estimates in late autumn/early winter of 2014. They felt that given one of the peak times of year for drink driving incidents is Christmas/New Year, an autumn publication of new statistics would give the DfT and anti-drink-drive campaigners time to assess any developing trends.

**2.14** Two respondents did not support option 2, but provided some comments on the publication timetable for the provisional statistics. Both these respondents support publishing drink drive casualty estimates at 6, 12 and 18 months intervals after the end of each year e.g. publishing 2013 provisional figures in August 2014 and December 2014 with final 2013 figures published in August 2015. This would allow the data to be easily and regularly tracked and reduce the risk of large differences between the initial provisional estimates (at 6 months) and the final estimate (at 18 months).

**Question C.4: If option 3 is your preferred option, do you have any suggestions for an improved adjustment methodology?**

**2.15** No respondent expressed a preference for option 3 alone, but respondents supported combining this option as a "hybrid" with option 4 (see table 2.1 and **question C.6**).

**2.16** One respondent noted that adjusting for the bias in the provisional estimates resulted in figures closer to the final figures than the original estimate in only two of the years over 2006 to 2011 ([see table 2, page 22 of consultation document](#)). They suggested that a 5 year moving average of revisions seen in previous years could be applied to adjust the current year estimate instead of a 3 year moving average.

**Question C.5: If option 4 is your preferred option, do you have any other suggestions on how to construct a sensible range?**

**2.17** No other suggestions on how to construct a sensible range were provided.

**Question C.6: Do you have any views on hybrid options, combining aspects of options 2, 3 or 4**

**2.18** Respondents were able to combine aspects of options 2, 3 or 4. Two respondents supported combining options 3 and 4 with no other combinations proposed. They felt that publishing a range instead of a "best" estimate would address the problem of the provisional figures tending to over-estimate drink drive casualty figures without sacrificing the timeliness of the provisional estimates.

**Question C.7: Do you have any other suggestions on improved methodologies for the provisional estimates?**

**2.19** One respondent suggested studying the causes of systematic bias as the single most important factor in improving the quality of drink drive data. They felt a clearer understanding of the nature of the problem will enable DfT to find robust

solutions that will improve the methodology for the provisional estimates.

- 2.20** One respondent felt that the reasons for the delays in obtaining the remaining data were not explained in detail in the consultation document. They think efforts should be made to obtain the results sooner – more cooperation by coroners, faster processing of the toxicology results, STATS19 data matching and analysis.

**Question C.8: Do you have any other comments or feedback?**

- 2.21** One respondents made reference to the issue of morning after incidents of drink-driving. They felt it would be useful for statisticians, policy planners and campaigners if the statistics could draw out the number of incidents at different times of the day.

- 2.22** One respondent would like more context and explanation of the drink drive figures, in the statistical release or at least summarised and referenced elsewhere. For example, interventions undertaken (numbers of drivers breathalysed, failure rates, drink drive campaigns) and other factors likely to have a bearing on the statistics (traffic levels, demographics, alcohol prices and consumption).

## 3. Department for Transport's response

- 3.1** The Department does not believe that continuing the status quo is acceptable given the known bias and small sample size associated with the current provisional drink drive statistics. Based upon users responses and balancing the need to give an early indication of trends against publishing robust statistics we plan to publish a range (option 4: the second most popular option among respondents) in August each year (using data collected six months after year end), an additional provisional statistics publication showing a range and central estimate in February (using data collected twelve months after year end) and final estimates showing a range and central estimate in August the following year.
- 3.2** Although three releases per year was not provided as an option, two respondents did suggest this approach (as outlined in para 2.14) and we feel that this offers a sensible way forward, allowing us to emphasise the uncertainty in the early figures, whilst continuing to provide an early indication of the drink drive casualties.
- 3.3** As an example, first provisional estimates of drink drive casualties in 2014 would be published in August 2015, using data collected over the first six months following the end of 2014. We propose that these estimates would consist of a range but no central estimate. This is because this estimate will be based on a small number of returns from coroners and procurators fiscal so will be subject to a high level of uncertainty. A second provisional estimate would be published in February 2016, using data collected over the first 12 months following the end of 2014. The final estimates would be published in August 2016. Both of these two releases would consist of a central / best estimate figure, plus a confidence interval range. Table 3.1 outlines these proposals.

**Table 3.1: Publication timetable for drink drive casualty estimates**

Release date	Provisional/final	Central / best estimate produced?	Range produced?
Roughly six months after year end	provisional	No	Yes
Roughly twelve months after year end	provisional	Yes	Yes
Roughly eighteen months after year end	final	Yes	Yes

- 3.4** We recognise the concern of some respondents that a range without a central estimate could lead to misuse of the statistics. However, we have concerns that including a central estimate in the first provisional release would give the impression that the estimates are more certain than they are. This could then lead to misleading statistics and similar changes in the central estimate that prompted the consultation in the first place. Our position at the moment is that the risk of a misleading central estimate is greater than the risk of misuse of a range. However, we will pay careful attention to how the statistics are used when first released in August 2015 and will reconsider the inclusion of a central estimate if necessary.
- 3.5** Option 1 (stop publishing provisional statistics entirely) was the preferred option among respondents, however we plan to continue to produce provisional estimates of drink drive casualties. Not publishing any provisional estimates would result in a significant delay in getting any estimates of the number of casualties in drink drive accidents. In practice, this would mean that the first figures released are the final estimates which are only available 18 months after the year end. This would seriously curtail their value for quickly identifying and responding to sudden changes in drink driving. For example, if a new drink driving policy were introduced at the start of a year, it would be over two years before the published official statistics could detect its impact.

## 4. Next steps

- 4.1** The Department will continue to publish provisional estimates of drink drive casualties.
- 4.2** Provisional estimates for drink drive casualties in 2013 will be published in February 2015 with final estimates published in August 2015. Both will be published as a range, but will also include a central estimate. The release in February 2015 will be the equivalent of the second provisional estimate as described in paragraph 3.33. Provisional estimates for 2014 will also be published in August 2015 as a range. The publication timetable for drink drive statistics in 2015 and 2016 is shown in table 4.1.

**Table 4.1: Publication timetable**

Release date	Figures	Central / best estimate produced?	Range produced?
Feb 2015	2013 2nd provisional	Yes	Yes
Aug 2015	2013 final	Yes	Yes
Aug 2015	2014 1st provisional	No	Yes
Feb 2016	2014 2nd provisional	Yes	Yes
Aug 2016	2014 final	Yes	Yes
Aug 2016	2015 1st provisional	No	Yes

# Annex A: List of respondents

Responses to this consultation were received from the following organisations:

Alcohol Health Alliance

Alcosense

An individual in their personal capacity

Avon & Somerset Police Force

Cleveland Police Force

Cumbria County Council

Kent Police Force

Northumbria Police Force

Nottinghamshire Police Force

Parliamentary Advisory Council for Transport Safety (PACTS)

Police Scotland

Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA)

South Wales Police Force

South Yorkshire Police Force

Staffordshire Police Force

The AA

THINK! Campaign

Warwickshire Police Force

West Mercia Police Force