

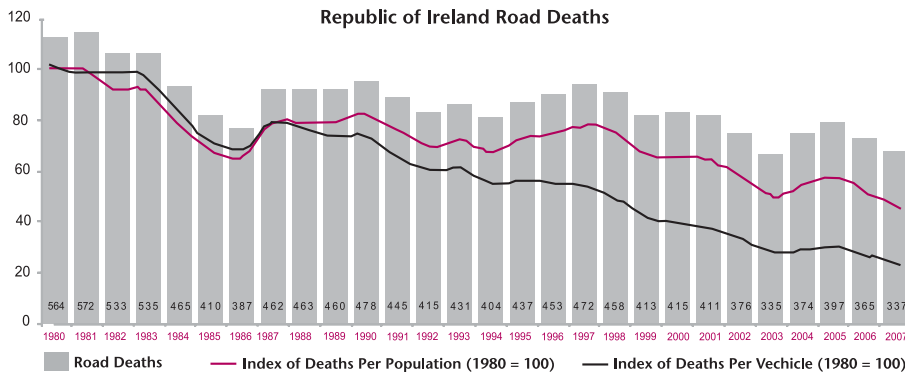
Irish Road Deaths, an update

In the October 2006 Newsletter, we examined the historic trends in Ireland's road death statistics and looked at the comparative experience versus our European neighbours. In this update, we examine how the experience has developed since that time.

One of the major road safety initiatives since the last analysis was the introduction of random breath testing in August 2006. We will examine what effect this has had on road fatalities. Finally we will look briefly at how motor insurance premiums have moved in the last ten years.

Recent Trends in Road Deaths

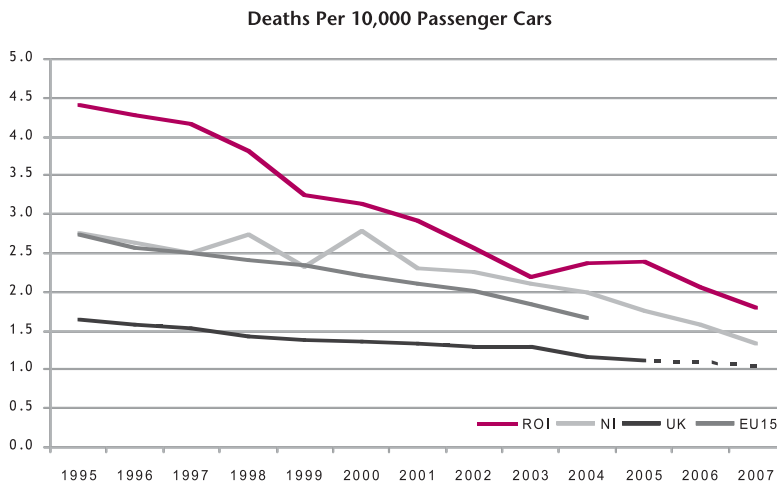
Road deaths fell to their lowest point in over 40 years in 2003, following the introduction of penalty points in late 2002. However, at the time of writing the 2006 article, we had seen road deaths on the rise for two successive years.



The upward trend in 2004/2005 persisted even when we allowed for the very strong growth in both population and car ownership. The years 2006 and 2007 have seen a return to an improving trend in fatalities. In fact, the rate of deaths per car in 2007 was almost 77% lower than in 1980 – there were 337 deaths in 2007 compared with the 1,460 deaths that would have occurred if the 1980 rate had persisted - and almost 18% below the previous record-low level of 2003. In the period 2003 - 2007, 370 lives were saved on Irish roads, based on a comparison with the 2002 pre-penalty points death rate.

Comparisons versus European Experience

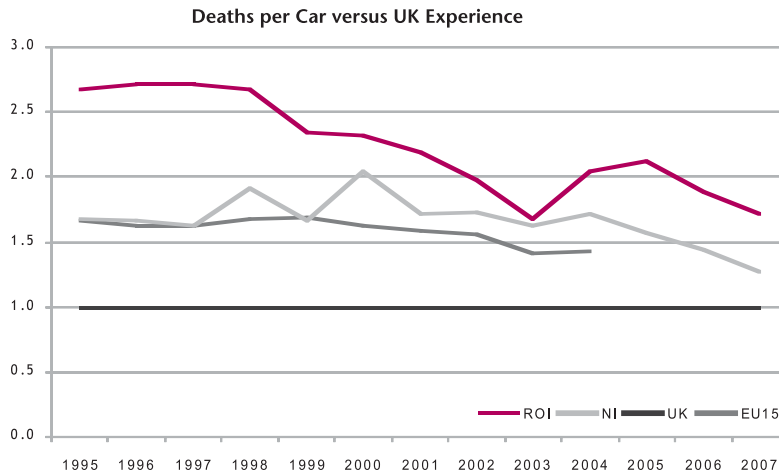
By 2003, road deaths rates in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) had almost converged on Northern Ireland (NI) rates, and were rapidly approaching the average levels for the old "EU 15". The UK was on several measures the best performer in the EU, and was significantly ahead of Ireland in road safety.



In the following two years, the NI fatality rate continued to improve every year and by 2007 almost matched the total UK rate. On the other hand, the ROI death rate rose for two years, wiping out recent gains relative to NI. Since 2005, both ROI and NI death rates have moved in parallel.

Irish Road Deaths, an update...contd

By 2007 the ROI death rate was still about 70% above the UK rate, almost exactly where it had been four years earlier, indicating no overall progress versus EU best practice. The number of lives that would have been saved in 2007, had the ROI matched UK experience, would be 140, almost 12 per month, or 1 every 2½ days.



There are two risk factors for road deaths which are not allowed for in the above discussion. The first is the fact that Irish drivers typically drive more per year than their UK counterparts. This can be factored in by looking at fatality rates per vehicle-km. Secondly the make-up of the Irish road network is very different, having a much lower proportion of motorways and dual carriageways, and a much higher proportion of single carriageway roads.

Detailed data on these factors is not readily publicly available. However, EuroRAP (the European Roads Assessment Programme), an international not-for-profit organisation, has produced a risk map of Irish roads, north and south, which allows for these factors. The report is available on the Road Safety Authority's website.¹ Three of its findings are:

- UK fatal collision rates (per billion vehicle-km) are 1.9 on motorways, 5.0 on dual carriageways, and 12.4 on single carriageway roads.
- The average fatal collision rates per vehicle-km on Ireland's motorways show that they are about as safe as those in Britain.
- On single and dual carriageways, fatal collision rates per vehicle-km in Ireland and Britain are similar.

Based on this, it is possible to infer that a significant cause of the higher death rates in Ireland is the quality of the road network. Such results underpin the importance of ongoing improvements in the Irish road infrastructure.

What Effect has the Introduction of Random Breath Testing Had?

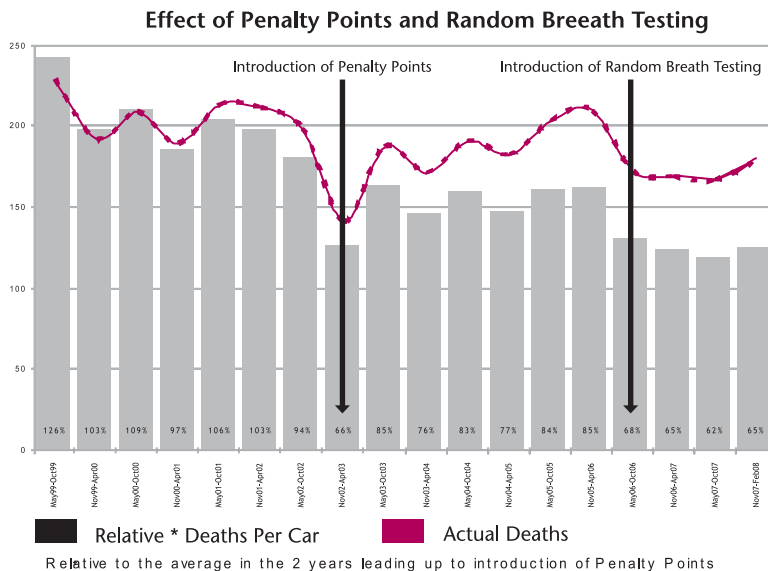
While advances in the road network may be necessary to maintain an ongoing trend of improvements, step-changes in road deaths can also be made by other means.

We saw in the 2006 article that penalty points contributed to a sharp reduction in road deaths in late 2002 and early 2003, roughly half of which was sustained thereafter. Random breath testing was introduced in August 2006 and has also contributed to a significant reduction in road deaths. In this case, the improvement appears to have been sustained for almost two full years.

¹ <http://www.nra.ie/Publications/DownloadableDocumentation/RoadSafety/file,3630,en.PDF>

Irish Road Deaths, an update...contd

The graph below shows the rate of deaths per car relative to the experience in the two years immediately prior to the introduction of penalty points in late 2002. Road deaths during the last two years have returned to, and been maintained at, the low level first seen in the immediate aftermath of the introduction of penalty points. There is some early indication of a reversal of this trend in early 2008, but it is too soon to know if this is just a statistical fluctuation.

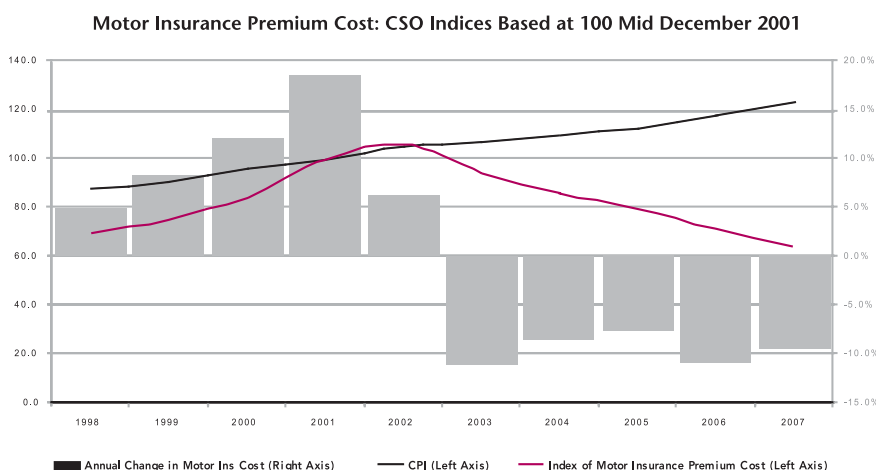


Motor Insurance Premiums

There have been many positive changes in the motor insurance environment in recent years. The launch of the Personal Injuries Assessment Board and the crackdown on insurance fraud were two major factors behind the sea-change in insurance claims costs.

While by no means the main factor driving down insurance costs, advances in road safety have undoubtedly contributed to some degree. In this context, it is worth looking briefly at just how much progress has been made.

The Central Statistics Office publishes information on the sub-indices of the consumer price index (CPI) each month. One of the components of the "Miscellaneous Goods and Services" sub-index is motor car insurance.



In the years leading up to December 2002, motor insurance inflation continually outstripped consumer price inflation. There has been a dramatic reversal of this trend since 2002. By December 2007 motor insurance premiums had reduced by almost 40% since December 2002, while the CPI had increased by almost 18%. This implies a real reduction of almost 50% in motor insurance premiums over the five year period!

Declan Lavelle

Data Sources:

ROI Statistics www.garda.ie, www.envirom.ie, www.cso.ie
 NI Statistics www.psnr.police.uk, www.nisra.gov.uk, www.drdni.gov.uk
 EU Statistics <http://w3.unece.org/>