



Pedestrians, Cyclists and Horse Riders to Benefit from Changes to the Highway Code

By Madison Heel, Watkins & Gunn

Madison Heel reports on proposed changes to the Highway Code designed to improve safety and support the 'Green Agenda'.

The Government have pledged to invest £338 million into the safety of roads in order to improve the conditions for active travel (such as walking and cycling). This may come as no surprise following the surge of people becoming more active during lockdown. They propose to do this by investing a portion of the investment into the Highway Code.

The changes to the Code will put cyclists and pedestrians at the top of the hierarchy, giving them top priority at zebra crossings and junctions. This should help to reduce the number of reported road accidents and deaths each year. In fact, statistics show that in 2019, a total of 16,884 cyclists were involved in accidents on the roads (4,333 of these being seriously injured, and 100 being killed) and pedestrians accounted for 27% of traffic accidents and an estimated 1,472 road deaths were reported. The changes to the Code are an effort to lower this statistic even further.

The 3 main proposed changes to the Code which are expected to be approved by Parliament in the autumn are listed below.

A hierarchy of road users – which places pedestrians at the top and the heaviest and potentially most dangerous users at the bottom (such as heavy goods vehicles, large passenger vehicles). This hierarchy will impose a greater responsibility on those road users who can do the greatest harm in order to reduce danger they may pose to others -

- Pedestrian priority – this is intended to clarify existing rules that are little-understood. Drivers and riders should give way to pedestrians crossing or waiting to cross the road.
- Guidance when overtaking cyclists and horse riders – establishing guidance on safe passing distances and speeds when overtaking. Cyclists and horse riders will have priority at junctions when travelling straight ahead. The 'Dutch reach' method for opening vehicle doors will also be included, to prevent cyclists being hit by opened vehicle doors.

There are also a number of changes to other areas of the Highway Code.

- Speeding – removal of the rule that 30 mph zones generally have street lighting.
- Tailgating – Amended section on tailgating will emphasise that tailgating is an offence that will be enforced by the police.

The proposed changes have not yet come into effect. The Government has confirmed that the amended