Near-Miss Register for Tunbridge Wells

Joint Transportation Board

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Summary and Recommendation

Following a motion at Full Council, TWBC officers have explored the possibility of setting up a Near-Miss database/register for the borough so that residents can report incidents that they are concerned about. This report sets out the work that has been undertaken to date and requests that JTB discuss the proposed initiative and makes a recommendation about next steps.

Introduction and Background

At Tunbridge Wells Borough Council Full Council on 26 February 2020 the following motion was put forward:

We request Cabinet to instruct the council's officers to investigate the cost, means and viability of establishing and maintaining a near-miss register to cover the roads in Tunbridge Wells Borough. This would consist of:

- *A database of near misses*
- *A telephone line, postal address, email address and webpage to report near misses*
- *The staff time (and associated costs) to establish and run the register*
- *Integration of other data such as killed and seriously injured records*

The debate on the motion included the following comments:

- Road safety was a major concern for residents. Although responsibility for this sat mainly with Kent County Council, action could still be taken forward by TWBC.
- The introduction of a near-miss register would be a tool that would be able to assess where there was greatest risk and predict where most accidents were likely to occur. Action could then be taken before somebody was either killed or seriously injured.

- This system was already in use by the Ministry of Defence and in aviation. It was also used extensively in Australia and New Zealand.
- The term 'near miss' was subjective and would always have to rely on the judgement of those who were involved.
- Those involved in a 'near miss' should be provided with a means to report it which in turn would provide a set of data that could be analysed and if necessary remedial measures could be considered.
- The motion asked that instruction be given to investigate the costs, means and viability of establishing and maintaining a near miss register to cover the roads in the Borough of Tunbridge Wells.

Following this debate, Full Council resolved to refer the matter to JTB for discussion.

Establishing the register

Following the Full Council request above, the Digital Team at Tunbridge Wells Borough Council has investigated and advised that creating a simple near-miss register is feasible and low cost when utilising existing e-forms or interactive mapping applications. This assumes the near miss register is a simple reporting tool where a user would find a location on the map then complete a proforma asking for information about the near-miss.

North Lincolnshire Unitary Authority offers an example of a near-miss reporting form on which we would base ours: https://www.northlincs.gov.uk/site/forms/form-near-miss-incident-report/

It is proposed that the following information be collected:

- Customer name, address and contact details
- Incident location (map and / or address)
- Incident date and time
- Description of vehicles involved
- Direction of travel
- Road surface condition
- Light conditions
- Damage to street furniture
- Description of incident

A privacy policy would need to be created for the service.

Technical officers would ensure the maintenance of the database, dealing with any errors or exceptions as they occur and developing it as new requirements arise, but these are not expected to be a significant call on their time.

An export of the data could be provided on a regular basis as necessary, e.g. quarterly.

The Full Council motion suggests that other data, such as killed or seriously injured records should be incorporated into the near-miss register. Attempting to incorporate this data changes the purpose of the near-miss register from being a relatively simple data collection form, to a data integration, display and potentially analysis tool which will require significant

additional investment in officer time and perhaps software and is not considered necessary as other systems already fulfil this purpose.

Issues for Discussion

As indicated above, North Lincolnshire, a unitary authority, has had a near-miss register in place for a little over eight years. They too, provide only a web form for reporting but people are able to call the Highways Team's general number to submit a report. Conversations with colleagues at North Lincs have indicated that the service has not been used a great deal. They have stated that some reports have been useful, some less so, and there has been some abuse. Understandably, the biggest issue to date in North Lincs has been classifying what constitutes a near miss.

The opportunity for Tunbridge Wells Borough Council to provide a similar service for residents has been discussed with a Transport Intelligence Team Leader from KCC Highways who acknowledges that a near-miss register may be useful in some circumstances to understand possible risk on the highway network. He agrees, though, that as with North Lincs, the service could be misused, and accuracy of reporting would be a further issue.

The statutory requirement for KCC Highways is to review and validate injury-only collisions but damage-only collisions recorded by Kent Police are also considered now as part of a wider understanding of incidents that occur on the network.

Reported near misses, as with all collisions, would be random events and would not necessarily improve the casualty reduction measures that are in place or currently being considered by Kent Highways Schemes team.

The KCC Transport Intelligence Team is, however, happy for TWBC to produce a quarterly report to be sent to the Crash Data email address (crashdata@kent.gov.uk) so that it can be cross-checked against other collision data. While the number of reported incidents may be low, the data should show if this would be useful over the longer term.

In addition, KCC has informed TWBC that it is currently developing its Casualty Reduction Strategy and as part of this, consideration will be given as to how to use additional data to inform where and when interventions are made. One of the data sources that will be looked at is near miss/damage only statistics.

Even if the data collected is not of assistance from a KCC Highways perspective in the short term, it could still provide opportunities for local awareness-raising initiatives or campaigns which could then be taken forward by the Tunbridge Wells Community Safety Unit. Such action would be taken forward under the Road Safety priority (one of four identified priorities) of the Tunbridge Wells Community Safety Partnership Plan, agreed in July 2020.

Recommendation

This paper asks JTB to consider this potential initiative and provide a recommendation on a way forward regarding a Near-Miss Register for Tunbridge Wells.