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# PRESS RELEASE

## **Respecting rural roads in Scotland can reduce the annual toll of fatalities and serious injury says the leading rural insurer, the Department for Transport and vulnerable road user groups**

- From 2018 to 2020 there were two-thirds (66%) more fatalities on Britain's rural roads than urban roads. In Scotland it was 120%, or more than twice as many rural road fatalities than on urban roads
- 2020 lockdown year saw a 48% increase in the number of cyclists killed and 25% more seriously injured on Britain's rural roads compared to 2019, despite a significant drop in the volume of traffic
- In Scotland the number of fatalities and seriously injured cyclists in 2020 rose by 45% (6 fatalities and 64 serious injuries) compared to 2019 (6 fatalities and 42 serious injuries) and 2018 93 fatalities and 45 serious injuries
- Vulnerable roads users in Britain such as motorcyclists and pedestrians are more likely to be killed or seriously injured on rural roads per miles travelled than drivers and their passengers
- Independent research found 85% (Scotland also 85%) of motorists living in rural areas are concerned about the safety on their local roads.

After analysis of official figures which showed the number of people killed on Britain's rural roads is two-thirds higher than on urban roads (Scotland has more than twice the number of rural road deaths than on urban roads) the UK's leading rural insurer, NFU Mutual, is today (1st December) launching a campaign designed to make rural roads safer for everyone.

The Respect Rural Roads campaign is supported by the Department for Transport (DfT), British Cycling and the British Horse Society and follows NFU Mutual's analysis which found that in Britain between 2018-2020, more people lost their lives on rural roads (Britain 3,115 fatalities / Scotland 322 fatalities) than on urban roads (Britain 1,880 fatalities / Scotland 146 fatalities). This is despite there being 36% fewer vehicles (9,833) on a stretch of Britain's rural road than on an urban road (15,400) in a 24-hour period. During the same period, 29,371 were seriously injured on Britain's rural roads (Scotland 2,588) compared to 41,359 on urban roads (Scotland 2,513).

The pandemic lockdowns in 2020 markedly reduced the number of vehicles on Britain's roads. There were 280.5bn vehicle miles travelled in 2020, compared to 356.5bn in 2019. There may have been less vehicles on the roads, but cycling trips increased in Britain to record levels according to the Department for Transport's (DfT) data – up 26% compared to 2019. The average number of miles cycled was also up – 88 miles per person in 2020 from 54 miles in 2019.

Sadly, the cycling boom came at a cost. The number of rural road cycling fatalities in Britain in 2020 was up 48% (89 fatalities) compared to 2019 (60 fatalities) and 855 higher than 2018 (48 fatalities).



The number of cyclists seriously injured on Britain’s rural roads in 2020 (1,141) was up 25% on 2019 (911) and 22% on 2018 (934).

In Scotland, the number of rural cyclist fatalities in 2020 was the same as in 2019 (6) but higher than in 2018 (3). The number of serious injuries to cyclists on rural roads was 64 in 2020, 42 in 2019 and 45 in 2018.

On urban roads in Scotland, the number of cyclist fatalities in 2020 (5) was higher than in 2019 (2) and 2018 (3). Serious injuries to cyclists on urban roads in 2020 was 180, in 2019 the number reached 137 and in 2018 the number was 111.

Independent research commissioned by NFU Mutual found that 15% of Britain’s motorists living in rural areas (Scotland 15% or more than 1 in 10) had been involved in a collision on a rural road and they had strong opinions on the subject of road safety. The survey found:

- 90% believe road users need to understand how to behave and what to expect on rural roads (Scotland 89%)
- 60% felt the main cause of collisions on rural roads was motorists going too fast (Scotland 59%) and 14% blamed narrow roads (Scotland 6%).

Motorists living in urban areas in Britain were also asked for their views and experiences of using rural roads. The survey found:

- nearly 30% felt less confident about driving on rural roads (Scotland 26%) and nearly 10% felt much less confident (Scotland 5%)
- 35% found negotiating narrow roads was the most challenging aspect of driving on rural roads (Scotland 25%) followed by drivers going too fast at 31% (Scotland 25%)
- 18% had been involved in a collision on a rural road (Scotland 9%).

Information designed to help rural roads users stay safe on rural roads can be found at: [www.nfumutual.co.uk/ruralroadsafety](http://www.nfumutual.co.uk/ruralroadsafety)

In Britain, the most vulnerable users of rural roads are motorcyclists, cyclists and pedestrians because they are more likely to be killed or seriously injured per mile travelled than car drivers and passengers.

Road User	% of overall traffic	Number of rural miles travelled (bn)	% of rural collisions	% of serious injuries of own group	% fatal of own group	Miles per casualty	Miles per fatality
Motorcyclist	0.8%	1.2bn	9.0%	46.0%	4.0%	235k	5.0m
Cyclist	1.0%	1.0bn	5.0%	32.0%	2.0%	345k	17.0m
Pedestrian	0.8%	3.0bn	5.0%	32.0%	5.0%	121k	22.0m
Car and Taxi	78.0%	119.0bn	74.0%	15.0%	1.0%	2.9m	209m

The figures are taken from DfT Road Traffic Estimates 2019 and the Road Accident Report 2019. Pedestrian figures come from Statistical digest of Rural England 2019 and Defra Statistical Analysis of Rural Affairs.



Horse Riders are also vulnerable road users with more than 1 in 10 motorists who live in an Britain's urban areas saying they find them the most challenging aspect of driving on rural roads. The DfT's casualty statistics for horse riders in Britain from 2018 to 2020 reveals how vulnerable they can be on rural roads:

<b>Horse rider</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>
Deaths	3 (S 0)	0	1 (S 0)
Serious Injuries	22 (S 1)	15 (S 1)	16 (S 0)

Proposals to amend The Highway Code to improve the safety of vulnerable road users are currently going through Parliament and are expected to come into effect in January 2022. It places greater responsibility on drivers for the safety of vulnerable road users, although as the DfT has explained, safety on the roads is a responsibility shared by all.

The rural road users that make up the highest number killed or seriously injured are car drivers and their passengers. In Britain between 2018 and 2020, there were 1,649 fatalities (Scotland 193) and 16,055 (Scotland 1,604) serious injuries nationally on rural roads, compared to 469 (Scotland 32) and 9,929 (Scotland 627) on urban roads.

Between 2018 and 2020, NFU Mutual dealt with more than 44,000 vehicle collisions across Britain involving customers living in rural and farming areas. The claims experts dealing with these incidents have shared the contributory factors they see when it comes to collisions in rural areas:

- vehicles are often travelling at high speed and collisions are head-on
- a loss of control at tight bends due to excessive speed
- are weather related such as icy roads and low glare from the sun

Nick Turner, CEO of NFU Mutual said:

“People’s safety is our main priority and we want to make rural roads as risk free as possible for everyone to use. A safety-first approach will help reduce the number of fatalities and serious injuries and we hope our campaign to respect rural roads will help people stay safe and enjoy rural roads.”

The Department for Transport is also supporting the Respect Rural Roads campaign. Roads Minister Baroness Vere said:

“Campaigns like this are vital to ensuring people take extra care when travelling on rural roads, where collisions are more likely to happen than in urban areas.

“Safety is a top priority for the government and we will continue taking action to reduce the risk of collisions across the road network, including through our award-winning THINK! campaign, which challenges the behaviours and habits of high-risk drivers.”

NFU Mutual’s campaign is also supported by vulnerable road user groups. Nick Chamberlin, Policy Manager, British Cycling said:

“The UK’s rural roads are one of our greatest assets. Thousands of miles of often ancient rights of way that criss-cross our country. Roads that connect rural communities to work



and life, roads that enable millions of people to access the outdoors for their health and wellbeing. These precious rights of way have to be shared but it is vitally important that people cycling, walking or riding can enjoy them without fear. We welcome this campaign and look forward to working towards making rural roads safer for everyone who uses them.”

Alan Hiscox, Director of Safety at The British Horse Society said:

“The BHS is dedicated to improving road safety for horse riders and other vulnerable road users. Through statistics we collated as part of our Dead Slow campaign, we know that equestrians experience high numbers of serious road incidents involving horses and vehicles. As the vast majority of these incidents occur on rural roads, we are pleased to support the NFU Mutual campaign to make rural roads safer for everyone and create awareness for all road users on this important issue.”

NFU Mutual believes the number of fatalities and serious injuries can be reduced on rural roads if everyone:

1. Respects and understands the needs of all rural road users and makes safety their top priority
2. Respects the hazards from the design and conditions on rural roads and behaves with caution
3. Respects and follows the rules and advice on how to use rural roads safely to help reduce fatalities and injuries

NFU Mutual has the following guidance to help make everyone safer when they use rural roads:

- Rural roads are often narrow, have tight bends and the national speed limit applies over many stretches. Drivers should slow down and approach travelling on rural roads with great caution, particularly if they do most of their motoring in urban environments
- Pedestrians, cyclists, and horse riders are vulnerable road users. Drivers and motorcyclists should slow down and give them plenty of space and only overtake when it is absolutely safe to do so. Impatience can kill so if you are uncertain if it's safe to overtake, don't risk it, just wait
- Motorcyclists and drivers should reduce their speed, often significantly, to safely negotiate tight bends and show considerable caution at junctions before pulling out
- Cyclists should show caution and slow down at tight bends and watch out for poor road conditions including potholes and other problems caused by rain and ice which can make cycling more hazardous
- Pedestrians, runners and recreational walkers should try and use the pavement whenever possible, but if being in the road is the only option, make sure you are facing oncoming traffic and it may be safer to cross well before a sharp right-hand bend so you can be seen more easily

- Some safety challenges are more likely on rural roads than urban such as the presence of wild animals, a low setting sun and mud on the road which can freeze in the winter, so staying alert for unexpected risks is important
- All rural road users should follow the legal requirements and rules of the Highway Code and understand how they apply to you and other rural road users.

Jade Devlin, Rural Roads Specialist for NFU Mutual said:

“Independent research commissioned by NFU Mutual reported that for 85% of people living in the countryside of Scotland, rural road safety is an important issue for them. By raising awareness of the issue, we hope everyone using country roads will respect their unique hazards and dangers, and that our guidance will help people to put safety first.”

**-ends-**

#### **Notes to Editors:**

1. The fatality and serious injury data comes from the Department for Transport (DfT) Road Accident Statistics 2018, 19 and 20.

2. The research data comes an online survey conducted by Atomik Research among 2000 employed adult motorists living in rural and urban areas (sample size split 50/50 rural and urban). 168 motorists in Scotland took part in the survey.

The research fieldwork took place between 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> November. Atomik Research is an independent creative market research agency that employs MRS-certified researchers and abides to MRS code.

3. Traffic Density Information comes from the DfT Road Traffic Estimate reports 2018, 19 and 20.

4. The vulnerable user table of data comes from the DfT reports referred to above with the exception of the pedestrian rural miles data which comes from Defra’s Statistical Digest of Rural England 2019 and their Statistical Analysis of Rural Affairs 2019.

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NFU Mutual is proud to deliver more than simply insurance. Making farming safer, supporting rural initiatives across the UK and helping to look after the environment are just some of the ways we do that. To find out more about everything we do to support our communities, visit <https://www.nfumutual.co.uk/about-us/responsible-business>