

OPERATION ZENITH - REDUCING MOTORCYCLE CASUALTIES IN NORTH EAST SCOTLAND USING A MULTI-AGENCY APPROACH

Richie Fraser
AECOM

1. INTRODUCTION

Launched in April 2010, the Operation Zenith motorcycle safety campaign was developed to reduce the number of motorcyclists involved in collisions on Grampian's roads.

In its two full operational years, the campaign has successfully reduced casualty levels amongst this vulnerable road user group using a combination of measures taken from the Four E's of Road Safety: Education, Engagement, Engineering and Enforcement, with Evaluation (the fifth E!) being used to monitor progress.

Based on this approach, the following paper outlines the specific, often innovative, measures that have been introduced and delivered as part of Operation Zenith. In particular, reference is made to the importance of partnership working in delivering the objectives of this holistic, multi-agency campaign.

2. BACKGROUND

During 2009, motorcyclists accounted for only 2% of road users in Grampian and yet 26% of those killed on the area's roads were motorcyclists, indicating the disproportionate vulnerability of this road user group.



Figure 1: The Operation Zenith Partners

Led by Road Safety Grampian (the police and fire and rescue service), Operation Zenith sees the North East's Road Authorities (Aberdeenshire, Aberdeen City and The Moray Councils, as well as Bear Scotland) working in partnership with the Scottish Ambulance Service, local motorcycle groups, Community Safety Partnerships and the North East Safety Camera

Partnership (NESCAMP) in recognition that there is a shared responsibility to reduce the number of Killed and Seriously Injured (KSI) collisions involving motorcyclists. AECOM's involvement in this project stemmed from secondment support to Aberdeenshire Council's Strategy Unit, with staff involved in the delivery of road safety campaigns.

Prior to its launch, the partners reviewed best practice in this field before collectively developing the content of the strategy, with each partner bringing their own strengths to the table and proposing measures covering the full spectrum of the Four E's - Education, Engagement, Engineering, Enforcement, and using Evaluation to monitor progress.

Similar initiatives exist, such as Lothian and Borders Police's "Around the Corner" initiative¹ and the Staffordshire Safer Roads Partnership's motorcycle safety campaign². Inspiration was drawn from these to develop a North East Scotland centred campaign based on the good practice set by predecessors and building on this with the introduction of numerous additional innovative approaches to improve the safety of motorcyclists in the region through direct engagement with bikers themselves and by increasing awareness of bikers amongst other road user groups.

The work initiated by Operation Zenith resulted in a framework being put in place which allows all agencies to work together towards the joint target of a 15% reduction in casualties in this group by 2015.

3. CAMPAIGN DELIVERY

In the following sections, detail is provided on the main areas of work that have been introduced to deliver Operation Zenith, categorised according to the Four E's referred to earlier.

3.1 Education

With statistics indicating that rider error is the most common factor in road casualties that involve injury to motorcyclists, improving rider skills has been a priority for Operation Zenith. Common issues include:

- loss of control;
- failing to look properly;
- failing to judge the path or speed of others;
- careless, reckless ('in a hurry') riding; and
- poor turning or manoeuvring.

To address this, in 2010 the national police-led 'Bikesafe' training course, which provides motorcyclists with road safety, first aid, basic machine maintenance and riding skills, was successfully reinvigorated with attendance increasing by 65% compared with the previous year. During 2011, the Bikesafe course was attended by approximately 140 bikers.

It was recognised that many of those that should be targeted were unlikely ever to attend. Funding was subsequently secured from the Aberdeenshire Community Safety Partnership to offer 100 offending riders and those involved

in serious collisions the opportunity to undertake a free independent skills assessment under the Enhanced Rider Scheme (ERS).

The ERS is an advanced training course undertaken with an expert from the Driver Standards Agency (DSA) who, based on an assessment ride, will develop a personalised training plan to identify areas where the biker can sharpen their skills and get more out of their riding typically focusing on:

- cornering;
- filtering;
- negotiating bends;
- positioning; and
- riding smoothly.

Those who complete the scheme are given a 'DSA certificate of competence' and will be eligible for an insurance discount.

To promote the training, information was distributed via email and through the circulation of 1,000 information packs to local motorcycle dealers and trainers, who forwarded it to their customers. This information self-populated onto motorcycle websites and forums helping to stimulate debate and greater awareness. As a result, feedback from local trainers has identified a significant increase in those undertaking advanced training.

Operation Zenith has also actively sought to promote track days at Knockhill Racing Circuit. While this may seem perverse and to some a trigger for speeding amongst bikers, track days with experienced professionals, such as former British Superbike Champion Niall MacKenzie - who himself has put his weight behind Operation Zenith by filming a road safety message to North East bikers³ - are designed to improve rider skills. It has been reported, for example, that a number of biker casualties occur as they are cornering, realise they are travelling too fast and “pull out” of their movement in an unsafe, reactive way that results in them losing control and coming off their bikes. Track days allow the bikers to experience the full capabilities of their bikes in a learned, controlled environment so that, should they find themselves in that position again, they have the confidence and skills to ride out the corner in a more controlled manner.

3.2 Engagement

In its first two years of operation, various communication channels have been used to engage with motorcyclists and other road users to promote the campaign's messages, including:

- advice leaflets;
- road safety presentations to groups and businesses;
- face-to-face biker engagement;
- press releases;
- web content;
- promotional films on YouTube;
- a series of 'tough-talking' radio adverts; and
- bike safety events and roadshows.

In both years of the campaign, information packs including maps showing popular biking routes, rider advice leaflets and a wide range of branded promotional 'goodies' relevant for bikers (e.g. lens cloths, neck-scarves, ear plugs, lanyards and tyre pressure gauges) have been prepared and distributed throughout the region.

With local motorcycle dealers reporting that North East Scotland is the area with the highest number of sales of the most powerful, most expensive performance bikes in the UK, partners have focused engagement exercises and the distribution of the rider information packs at local bike shops, as well as with trainers in the region.

Road Safety Officers from Grampian Police's Biking Unit also promote advanced training and provide road safety advice to bikers through presentations at local companies. Many of the companies targeted are oil firms as it is considered that there is a direct link between the performance sports bike sales referred to earlier and the high disposable incomes of staff employed in the oil industry in North East Scotland, many of whom own bikes in addition to their cars, seeing it as their "weekend toy".

Key to the success of Operation Zenith is its credibility with bikers - a notoriously difficult group to engage. In addition to the fact that many of the partners who promote safe riding messages are motorcyclists themselves, in both years of the campaign, support has been given by local bike dealers who have sponsored the loan of sports motorcycles used as an icebreaker to help engage with bikers on a one-to-one basis at popular motorcycle venues, open days and events. Indeed, key arenas for engagement activities are the popular stop-off points on local biking routes, such as cafes and tea rooms. Local Road Safety Officers are frequently seen having informal one-to-one chats with bikers at these locations promoting Operation Zenith and distributing information packs.



Figure 2: Operation Zenith Sponsored Motorcycle

In addition to direct face-to-face engagement, Operation Zenith partners issue regular, co-ordinated news releases to the traditional media highlighting key events, messages and statistical updates throughout the campaign.

The campaign has also made use of the 'Around The Corner'⁴ website which uses maps to detail the hazards associated with popular motorcycle routes in the Grampian area with a breakdown of the hazards on these routes and other 'stopping-point' information for visiting bikers. In total, since the introduction of the campaign, 10,000 maps have been provided to encourage use of the website and the safety messages and advice contained therein. The Internet

and Intranet sites of the various partners and major employers in the region have also been used to promote the 'Look Twice...Think Bike... Think Biker' message to staff.



Figure 3: 'Around The Corner' Website

A number of hard hitting radio adverts have also been developed and broadcast throughout the region promoting safe riding messages focusing on dangers 'around the corner' and encouraging increased biker awareness amongst motorists more generally.

Specific biker engagement events, such as the Safer September Roadshow and Biker Film Night, have also been developed and are further evidence of Operation Zenith's authentic willingness to engage with bikers and move beyond historical 'us and them' barriers.

Safer September Open Days

Analysis of accident data revealed that motorcycle collisions typically peaked during September and in both August 2010 and 2011, 'Safer September' Open Days were organised by partners to engage directly with motorcyclists on safety.

The well attended events offered manoeuvrability courses, bike simulators, drag test demonstrations, advice highlighting the importance of appropriate clothing, trial bike shows, bike clinics and assessed rides from the Institute of Advanced Motoring. These were supported by exhibitors from motorcycle and safety organisations.

The careful preparation of the event made possible by pooling resources, contacts and experience of the Operation Zenith partners is credited with the successful uptake of, and response to, the event. Short videos of activities on the days, which have attracted in the region of 400-500 bikers on both occasions, have also been posted onto YouTube and can be viewed via www.youtube.com/aberdeenshiretp.



Biker Film Night

To mark the end of the 2011 Campaign, Motorcyclists were invited to a free cinema screening of *Closer to the Edge*. The film focuses on the lives of motorcyclists taking part in the Isle of Man TT. Approximately 200 bikers attended the event which was introduced by a talk from Grampian Police. A short video message from the star of the film, TT racer Guy Martin, who outlined his support for Operation Zenith, was also screened adding to the campaign's credibility.



Operation Zenith, was also screened



While the broadcast of a film which in many ways glamourises speeding and the adrenaline rush that comes with biking could again be seen as controversial given Operation Zenith's safety objectives, it was considered that only by showing such a film could the partners get access to our key target biking group. The film also tells the story of about those who have died in their pursuit of glory and the impacts that this has on the lives of their loved ones. Feedback to the event, which generated significant media attention, was extremely positive from all who attended.

In addition to engagement with bikers, at the outset of the campaign police partners identified the importance of engagement with frontline police officers, who undertook a short computer based learning package developed to improve the understanding of particularly common offences associated with motorcycles. This has resulted in a more informed, educated police force with the knowledge required to give appropriate advice, and where necessary use enforcement, to improve riding and motorcycle standards.

3.3 Engineering

Prior to the campaign launch, riders from the police's motorcycle unit audited three routes popular with bikers in Grampian recommending signage, maintenance and engineering improvements. This work has subsequently been taken on by the local authority partners, who adopted the promoted routes and carried out focused works which compliment the aims of the Operation.

In much of the promotional literature distributed on Operation Zenith, and on the website, contact information for directing roads



Figure 4: Police and Roads Authority Partners Working Together

maintenance issues is provided, with bikers encouraged to report specific network defects for action by the Roads Authorities.

Feedback was also encouraged from the biking community on specific locations where 'worn' manhole covers posed slip dangers. Based on this, in a number of locations, Aberdeenshire Council has launched trials of new anti-skid manhole covers to examine their potential in further improving motorcyclist safety.

In addition, the local Roads Authorities have worked jointly with the police to develop new, temporary, high visibility motorcycle safety signage on routes with high casualty rates promoting safe rider messages to bikers. The signage not only acts to warn bikers that they are on police monitored routes but also informs motorists that they are driving along routes popular with motorcyclists and they should therefore be aware of the potential for meeting bikers at any point.



Figure 5: Roadside Warning Signs

3.4 Enforcement

Increased targeted enforcement across North East Scotland has also formed a major part of the campaign. In both years of the campaign, a phased enforcement operation has been established with initial phases focusing on intelligence gathering and later phases providing a combination of enforcement and education.

Of the 4,000 motorcyclists spoken to and provided with advice on safer motorcycling during first year of the campaign in 2010, only 160 were reported for their riding behaviour, serving to highlight that Operation Zenith was not a 'pick on motorcyclists' exercise.

4. EVIDENCE OF PROGRESS

Operation Zenith did not set out to change attitudes overnight, but set out on a five year journey to reduce serious and fatal road traffic collisions within this group by 15%.

A review of progress made following two years of the Operation reveals that the joint campaign has been extremely positive, not only in raising awareness

but contributing to the following reductions in motorcycle injury collisions in the year up to October 2011:

Period	No. of Fatalities	No. of Serious and Slight Collisions
March to October 2009 (Before OpZen)	6	134
OpZen Year 1 - March to October 2010	5 (-17%)	115 (-14%)
OpZen Year 2 - March to October 2011	2 (-66%)	97 (-30%)

*%age change against base year shown in ()

As shown in the table, the number of casualties has decreased considerably since the introduction of Operation Zenith. While one is always reluctant to claim success based on early results, the reduction in casualty numbers, and particularly the decrease observed in the number of serious and slight collisions, is extremely encouraging and undoubtedly signals a step in the right direction.

In addition to casualty analysis, online qualitative evaluations have been undertaken at the end of Operation Zenith both in 2010 and 2011. The online survey of the campaign conducted in December 2011 revealed that 96% of respondents stated that they felt the campaign had a positive impact in terms of increasing awareness levels of motorcyclists and their safety. In 2010, the equitable figure was 80%, highlighting that awareness has been heightened even further during the campaign's second year of operation.

Positive feedback has also been observed from the motorcycling fraternity via media and internet 'chat rooms', while communities across the region have also commented on the benefits of the positive action carried out by all of the partners in tackling an issue of long standing community concern.

5. KEY LESSONS LEARNED

The following sections are used to highlight a number of factors that are considered central to the success of the campaign to date.

5.1 Partnership Working

Without doubt, a key strength of Operation Zenith is the partnership working between the partners who have each brought their own strengths and skill sets to the table. With a diverse range of issues associated with road safety, tackling the problem individually would be resource intensive, potentially developed from a limited viewpoint and with limited scope in terms of deliverable interventions.

The partners acknowledge that the joint approach has increased the overall impact and success of the campaign which would have been difficult to achieve individually. In addition, the Operation has generated a 'can do'

attitude amongst the partners towards this and given motivation to achieving the casualty reduction objective.

A working group including representatives from each of the main project partners was established prior to the introduction of the campaign, and to this date meets on a monthly basis to review performance and plan future campaigns. Regular meetings allow for the quick resolution of issues, which is essential in a campaign which predominantly takes place over a seven month period (i.e. the main biking season, April to October).

In challenging financial times, coming together to share workload and resources has also been important. Promotion of the campaign's success, not only in casualty reduction terms but also through the peer recognition and accolades that Operation Zenith has received at awards ceremonies, has also assisted in securing high level engagement and support from Local Members and senior officers of the different partners. This undoubtedly assists in making the case for future funding.

Promotion of bike safety is also in the interests of local bike dealers and Operation Zenith has been successful in building partnerships with local dealers and companies. Through this, the campaign has been successful in levering in private sponsorship and funding, without which it would have been impossible to deliver as wide a range of initiatives and promotions as achieved to date as part of Operation Zenith.

Moving forward the partners recognise that there is a need to take the partnership even further and approaches are being sought for Year Three (2012) which seek to foster an Operation Zenith 'community'. Approaching Year Three, the Operation Zenith message has been relatively well established with awareness raised on the campaign's key messages. Accordingly the approaches developed for the campaign (expanded upon in 5.3 below) aim to encourage bikers to take responsibility for each other and promote safe riding messages to one another.

5.2 The Importance of Credibility

As alluded to earlier in the paper, key to the success of the campaign is its credibility with bikers - a notoriously difficult group to engage. Evidence of our approaches is set out throughout this paper and range from the deployment of Road Safety Officers who are motorcyclists themselves and use sponsored sports motorcycles, to the launch of a biker film night and celebrity endorsement. All efforts are centred on 'thinking outside the box' to secure the engagement of our key target audience, who are typically 'switched-off' to conventional engagement channels that simply focus on standard road safety messages. Through the dedication of officers and the allocation of significant resources by partners to engage on a personal level with North East Scotland's biking community, local bikers have been able to see for themselves that Operation Zenith is in their interests and is not simply an enforcement campaign.

In addition to credibility with bikers, the success of the campaign in receiving awards, peer recognition and credibility is considered important in providing

the partners with validation of their work and confidence to take the campaign to new levels, inspiring even further innovation.

5.3 Innovation

Improving on the success of the 2010 campaign and sustaining Operation Zenith's effect in raising motorcycle rider standards and safety awareness was without doubt going to be a challenge. However by building on the experience and lessons learned from the previous year's efforts, engagement work has been more focused, promotions more targeted and the desired effect has been achieved whilst making more effective use of resources. Central to this success, as reflected in the reduced casualty reduction figures observed for a second consecutive year, was undoubtedly the partnership's ability to deliver a number of new initiatives to help sustain the awareness and impact of the campaign.

For Year Three, maintaining and enhancing engagement levels is going to be a greater challenge than in the two previous years. However, by introducing a range of innovative measures, partners are demonstrating that there is no resting on laurels as the campaign strives to make 2012 an even more successful year in terms of casualty reduction figures.

One of the key elements of the 2012 Operation is the use of Social Media and in particular the Operation Zenith Facebook page⁵. This is designed to keep bikers up to speed with information and events being organised as part of Operation Zenith throughout the year and more importantly provides the bikers themselves with a voice to provide their comments and stimulate debate and discussion on motorcycle safety. Through the interaction of bikers on the site, it is hoped that a safe biking community develops, with bikers taking responsibility for promoting safe riding amongst their peers.

A common issue raised by bikers in the post-campaign evaluations in both 2010 and 2011 was that awareness raising advice on the vulnerability of motorcyclists should also be targeted at motorists. Partners have sought to address this with the development of a local television advertising campaign which aims to draw attention to the issues of visibility, as notoriously road users fail to spot bikers. The campaign has a dual focus with the onus also being placed on bikers to make sure they are doing all they can to ensure that they are seen too. The campaign has also been developed such that the television commercial can be easily translated into print, allowing for the campaign's messages to be disseminated through bus back and other forms of roadside advertising if desired in the future. The campaign is being broadcast on STV throughout the biking year and is also promoted through online channels.

These approaches, new for 2012, are in addition to the existing Four E's measures described in section three of this paper, highlighting the partnership's ongoing commitment to improving the safety of motorcyclists in North East Scotland.

6. CONCLUSION

Operation Zenith represents an innovative collaborative approach, covering a wide range of measures developed to reduce motorcycle casualties. This has only been made possible by the improved communication, knowledge sharing and resource management of the partnership.

Creative approaches, not normally feasible when working individually, have been adopted and increased awareness has been raised, both within the group and externally, of the key issues surrounding motorcycle safety.

The campaign has been recognised for numerous awards such as the Scottish Accident Prevention Council's Road Safety Award, a COSLA bronze award, the Scottish Transport Awards 2011 Best Transport Team/Partnership of the Year, and was highly commended at the National Transport Awards 2011.

The campaign is evolving and developing as it responds to the continuing challenge of engaging and influencing the target group. The results to date are encouraging but the partnership remains focused on the need to maintain commitment. Through ongoing partnership working, innovation and creative approaches to applying the Four E's of road safety, Operation Zenith is well placed to build on the excellent progress to date and should continue to lead by example in the delivery of motorcycle safety initiatives across Scotland.

Further information on Operation Zenith is available by visiting <http://www.aroundthecorner.org.uk/regions/north/index.asp>.

Notes

¹ For further information visit www.aroundthecorner.org.uk. 'Around the Corner' was originally initiated as a Lothian and Borders Police Force campaign in 2007. In 2011, the campaign took on a national focus with the dedicated website covering all Forces across Scotland. Lothian and Borders Police were also successful winners of the Motorcycle Industry Award at the Prince Michael of Kent International Road Safety Awards in 2011.

² For further information visit <http://www.staffssaferroads.co.uk/i'm-a-motorcyclist>

³ To view the video message, visit www.facebook.com/operationzenith

⁴ www.aroundthecorner.org.uk

⁵ www.facebook.com/operationzenith