Companion Briefing For LCR Councillors: Road Danger, Vision Zero, And Political Leadership

December 2025

Purpose of this briefing

This short briefing is intended to accompany the open letter from Liverpool's pedestrian and cycling community following the sentencing of Paul Doyle. It is written specifically for councillors and senior decision-makers, with the aim of translating the moral and cultural concerns raised in the letter into a policy and leadership context.

The central argument is simple: road danger is not an unfortunate by-product of economic activity, but a predictable outcome of political choices. Vision Zero (a strategy to eliminate all traffic fatalities and severe injuries) will only be taken seriously if those choices, and the hierarchy of priorities behind them, are openly addressed.

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1. This case is not an anomaly

The incident that prompted the sentencing was extreme, but it did not occur in isolation. Liverpool's streets already expose people walking, wheeling and cycling to:

- routine intimidation and close passing
- excessive and inappropriate speeds
- aggressive driving behaviours that are culturally normalised
- a high level of risk borne disproportionately by those not in cars

When severe harm occurs, it is often treated as a tragic exception. In reality, it is the sharp end of a system that prioritises vehicle throughput, speed, and convenience over human safety.

Framing incidents solely in terms of individual culpability obscures the role of governance, design, and political priority-setting.

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2. The hierarchy problem: growth, cars, speed

A recurring barrier to meaningful road safety action is an implicit hierarchy in decision-making:

1. Economic growth and jobs
2. Traffic flow and speed

3. Safety interventions (conditional and negotiable)

Within this framework:

- 20mph limits are seen as a cost rather than a protection
- pedestrianisation is framed as anti-business
- enforcement is portrayed as unpopular or anti-motorist
- Vision Zero becomes aspirational rather than binding

This hierarchy is not evidence-based; it is cultural and political.

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3. Safety and economic vitality are not in conflict

There is a persistent but false assumption that reducing vehicle dominance harms economic outcomes. In practice:

- Safer streets increase footfall and local spending
- Walking and cycling friendly areas support high street resilience
- Reduced road danger improves public health and workforce participation
- Lower collision rates reduce public sector costs (NHS, policing, social care)

Cities that have prioritised safety and liveability have not sacrificed prosperity; they have redefined it.

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4. Vision Zero is a leadership test

Vision Zero is not primarily a technical programme; it is a statement of values.

To be credible, it requires:

- acceptance that deaths and serious injuries are preventable, not inevitable
- willingness to reduce speed where people mix with traffic
- street design that prioritises the most vulnerable users
- consistent political backing, even when measures are contested

Crucially, Vision Zero fails when it is treated as one objective among many, rather than the organising principle for transport and street policy.

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5. The opportunity of a single settlement

A single settlement presents an opportunity to reset priorities, but only if it is used to:

- embed safety and mode shift as core outcomes, not optional add-ons
- align transport, public health, and economic policy around shared goals

- support long-term behaviour change led from the top

Without clear political direction, additional funding risks reinforcing existing car-dominated patterns rather than transforming them.

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6. What leadership looks like now

In the wake of this case, leadership does not mean waiting for consensus or perfect evidence. It means:

- publicly affirming that no level of road violence is acceptable
- challenging the assumption that speed equals success
- supporting measures that reduce danger, even when they are politically difficult
- placing human life and dignity at the top of the decision-making hierarchy

Liverpool has the chance to signal that its streets are spaces for people first and that economic success will no longer be pursued at the cost of fear, injury, and loss of life.

Closing note

This briefing is offered in the spirit of constructive engagement. The open letter speaks from lived experience; this document invites councillors to respond with moral clarity and political courage.

Vision Zero - eliminating all traffic fatalities and serious injuries - will only be real when it is led, not merely endorsed.