

Press release: Van driver's sentence is extended after cyclist is killed

A man who killed a cyclist after colliding with him in his transit van will spend longer in prison after Solicitor General Robert Buckland QC MP referred his original sentence to the Court of Appeal as unduly lenient.

Joseph Bills, 22, was under the influence of drugs and alcohol when he crashed into David Thorman, 35. Bills then left the scene, despite the victim being alive at that point, before returning an hour later and turning himself into the police.

In a prepared statement the morning after the crime, Bills admitted to having consumed beer and Sambuca before driving, as well as cocaine the night before. Police then confirmed that Bills was one and a half times over the alcohol limit.

Bills originally received a sentence of 3 years and 4 months in prison at Canterbury Crown Court, reduced from 5 years for an early guilty plea. The Court of Appeal agreed that this was too lenient and increased his sentence to 4 years and 4 months.

Speaking after the hearing, the Solicitor General said:

A man's life was ended abruptly because of Joseph Bills' totally avoidable recklessness. The original sentence neglected to take into account the severity of the crime as well as the offender's actions directly after he committed it. I'm pleased that the Court of Appeal has extended his sentence. I hope that this brings some solace to the victim's family.

Press release: Intelligent cat's eyes to improve road safety

Highways England is installing around 170 of the innovative LED road studs at one of England's busiest motorway junctions – used by over 90,000 vehicles every day.

The intelligent cat's eyes are being introduced as part of a £3 million project to improve journeys and safety at Switch Island in Merseyside, where the M57, M58 and 3 A roads all join together.

The LED road studs light up when traffic lights turn green so drivers can clearly see which lane they should follow. Cables under the road surface connect them to traffic lights through a nearby automatic controller unit.

The studs can be visible up to 1,000 metres away – far greater than traditional reflective cat's eyes – and have been proven to help stop drivers drifting between lanes, reducing the risk of collisions.

Highways England has already installed the LED studs at Hindhead Tunnel in Surrey to guide drivers through the tunnel but the Switch Island scheme will be the first time they have been linked to traffic lights at a motorway junction.

Phil Tyrrell, Project Manager at Highways England, said:

We're always looking for new ways to further improve journeys and safety for drivers, and I hope the new intelligent cat's eyes will help better guide drivers around Switch Island.

The innovative light-up road studs along with the other improvements we're introducing will make it much easier to navigate the junction, benefitting the tens of thousands of drivers who travel through it every day.

Construction work on the Switch Island scheme, which is being funded by the government's £220 million congestion relief programme, is due to start on Monday 5 February and is expected to take around a year to complete.

The scheme is designed to improve the flow of traffic and enhance safety, following 49 collisions at the junction in the past two years – an average of one every fortnight. New traffic lights will be installed at a height of over 5 metres – higher than HGVs and double-decker buses – so that drivers approaching the junction can clearly see when the lights are changing.

Other improvements will include changes to the road layout and lane markings, new barriers between carriageways, coloured high friction surfaces and better signs. And a new 400 metre shared cycle path will be created through the junction, which will link up with the existing cycle path alongside the A5036 Dunning's Bridge Road.

Jerry McConkey, Sefton Council's Transportation and Highway Infrastructure Service Manager, said:

We have worked closely with Highways England and Merseyside Police to look at the issues at Switch Island and develop improvement proposals.

As a result, we are delighted that these important safety measures are about to be introduced with Highways England implementing the latest technology solutions. This will further improve safety and

give drivers a much higher level of confidence when negotiating this busy junction.

The new intelligent cat's eyes which are being installed at Switch Island were designed by Oxfordshire-based company Clearview Intelligence.

Managing Director Nick Lanigan said:

The introduction of intelligent road studs, reacting to traffic light changes on a busy roundabout is a continuation of the traditional cat's eye legacy but takes advantage of new technology available. The new studs have been proven to reduce lane transgression by over 50% in certain conditions so it's a great way to help improve the safety for all road users.

Cat's eyes were invented by Percy Shaw in 1933 after he was driving down a steep winding road in West Yorkshire and noticed his headlights reflect in the eyes of a cat. He realised the potential of improving road safety if he could create a reflecting device that could be fitted to road surfaces and came up with his cat's eye invention.

General enquiries

Members of the public should contact the Highways England customer contact centre on 0300 123 5000.

Media enquiries

Journalists should contact the Highways England press office on 0844 693 1448 and use the menu to speak to the most appropriate press officer.

Press release: PM meeting with Prime Minister Ratas: 30 January 2018

She congratulated the Prime Minister on the centenary of Estonia's independence and Estonia's recent EU presidency, and they spoke about shared interests, including defence, the digital economy and Brexit.

The Prime Minister began by congratulating Prime Minister Ratas on the centenary of Estonia's independence, and noted the role of Royal Navy ships in supporting Estonia's fight for independence a century ago.

Both leaders expressed their commitment to the strong defence relationship

between the UK and Estonia, and noted their shared interest in areas such as artificial intelligence and the digital economy. They agreed to look into how we might be able to collaborate further in these shared areas of interest.

The Prime Minister said that whilst the British public decided to leave the EU, they did not decide to leave Europe. She said there are many areas in which the UK and EU can continue to work together for the benefit of both parties, including counterterrorism and law enforcement.

The leaders agreed on the need for an implementation period to give businesses confidence and time to adjust to just one set of changes, and the importance of negotiating an agreement on our future relationship, which reflects the interest of both the UK and the EU.

News story: New industry group chairman appointed to help improve how large private companies are run

The government today (30 January 2018) announced that James Wates CBE has been appointed as the chair of a new industry group to lead a step change in the way large private companies are run.

As part of the government's world-leading package of corporate governance reforms, he will work with the Financial Reporting Council, the Institute of Directors, the Trades Union Congress and others to draw up the UK's first-ever set of guiding principles for large private companies.

These voluntary principles will help to ensure that our large private companies are transparent and accountable, addressing concerns that a minority of companies are falling short of the high standards that we expect.

James Wates CBE has extensive experience in the private sector, including as chairman of one of the UK's largest family-owned construction firms, the Wates Group. He also holds leading roles advising Infrastructure Exports: UK and at think-tank Tomorrow's Company which helps businesses be a force for good in society.

Business Secretary Greg Clark said:

The UK is rightly recognised as having a world-leading business environment and responsible business practices – a key part of our Industrial Strategy.

But concerns that some companies are stepping out of line by

ignoring employees' concerns need to be addressed and that is why I am delighted to appoint a chair to lead this important step change in the way large private companies are run.

James has a wealth of relevant experience and I wish him every success in his new role.

Chair of the group, James Wates CBE said:

I am delighted to have been asked to chair this very important piece of work. I feel passionately that good business, well done, can be a force for good in society.

I hope that the standards produced through this effort will help promote and enable ever-stronger and more consistent corporate governance amongst large private companies, which generate significant value for the UK economy and society.

As the part of our corporate governance reforms, the government has already:

- supported the Investment Association's world-first public register of FTSE-listed companies where more than one fifth of shareholders have opposed resolutions on executive pay packages and other issues
- asked the Financial Reporting Council to find new ways for companies to engage with their employees as part of the revised UK corporate governance code
- announced research into whether companies repurchase their own shares to artificially inflate executive pay

Yesterday, James Wates CBE chaired the first meeting of the group to develop new corporate governance principles for large private companies. The group includes the:

- Financial Reporting Council
- Institute of Directors
- Confederation of British Industry
- Institute for Family Businesses
- British Private Equity & Venture Capital Association
- Investment Association
- Institute of Business Ethics
- Trades Union Congress (TUC)
- ICSA, The Governance Institute

The government will also introduce new laws this year requiring all large companies to show their responsible business arrangements, helping to build the public's trust in big business.

These laws will apply to companies with either:

- 2,000 employees

- turnover above £200 million and a balance sheet over £2 billion
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News story: The Chief Inspector's report on Country of Origin Information has been published

Mr Bolt said:

"The Home Office produces Country of Origin Information (COI) primarily to assist asylum decision makers in determining whether a person qualifies for protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention. COI enables them to evaluate statements made by asylum applicants and to assess their credibility. It follows that COI must be reliable and kept up-to-date.

"This inspection, which was sent to the Home Secretary on 23 October 2017, examined the efficiency and effectiveness of the Home Office functions that produce and use COI, specifically how COI products are commissioned, developed and disseminated, and how they are used within the asylum process. It did not look at the content and quality of individual products as this is the role of the [Independent Advisory Group on Country Information \(IAGCI\)](#), a panel of experts and practitioners created in 2009 to assist the Independent Chief Inspector with a rolling programme of COI reviews.

"The inspection found that the team responsible for producing COI had made efforts to engage the main users of COI, and COI products had been made shorter and topic-specific as a result. However, more needed to be done to create effective feedback loops, to understand and satisfy demand for specific COI, and to train asylum decision makers how to use COI.

"But, the inspection identified a more fundamental and urgent problem with COI. Guidance published by the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and recognised in the UK's Immigration Rules requires COI to be presented in a way that permits decision makers to reach their own objective judgements and decisions on individual applications. The Home Office's COI products do not do this.

"Country Policy and Information Notes (CPINs) combine country information and "Policy". This is wrong in principle. It has the effect of directing decision makers towards a predetermined outcome, particularly where a significant body of asylum decision makers are inexperienced (as a parallel inspection of [Asylum Intake and Casework](#) found), unfamiliar with COI, have insufficient time to master every detail, and are likely to interpret "Policy" as something they are required to follow.

"My report made 7 recommendations. While the Home Office has accepted the

majority, it has rejected the key recommendation regarding use of the term “policy”, suggesting in its formal response that it sees this as interchangeable with “analysis”, “guidance” or “country position”. I do not agree. The Home Office does however recognise that the term may be misinterpreted and commits to making it clear that that part of the CPIN “provides an analysis of the COI”. I look forward to seeing this clarification.

“In the meantime, I will continue to work with IAGCI to ensure that the information contained in particular COI products is as reliable, up-to-date and complete as possible, and will also ensure that any future inspections of asylum casework examine how decision makers are using COI.”

[An inspection of the Home Office’s production and use of Country of Origin Information](#)

[Home Office’s response to the Chief Inspector’s reports.](#)