



Consultation Response

Introducing mandatory eyesight testing for older drivers

Department for Transport

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About this consultation

This consultation from the Department for Transport explores options for introducing compulsory eye testing for drivers aged 70+. Currently, older drivers have to renew their licence every three years starting at age 70, however there is no need to prove fitness to drive, including for eyesight. If implemented, these proposals would mean that people need to evidence a certain standard of eyesight in order to be able to continue driving. It is part of the wider measures under the Road Safety Strategy, published in January 2026.

Key points and recommendations

- Age UK supports the proposals to implement eye tests for older drivers as the evidence suggests this is a proportionate measure to improve road safety, especially for older drivers themselves who are more likely to be injured should they be involved in a road accident.
- The polling commissioned by Age UK shows a high level of public support across all older age groups for introducing eyesight testing.
- However, we believe the age for renewal should be raised to 75. The data on people killed and seriously injured shows rates don't increase notably until people are aged 80+, while the current age of 70 is a historical accident with seemingly no rationale behind it.
- It is absolutely imperative that the UK and devolved governments invest in public and community transport, particularly in rural areas. As more people stop driving they will rely on buses and other services, therefore the Government needs to make the connection between policy decisions affecting older drivers and these wider factors that enable people to maintain a good standard of living.
- Stopping driving can be a serious issue, that can leave people at risk of social isolation and increase difficulties with carrying out essential tasks, such as attending medical appointments or going shopping. Many people will need help to make the transition, including from community groups who can support people who face difficulties as a result.
- The UK Government, along with the devolved administrations in Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland, must commit to helping older drivers with any additional support they may need as a result of the changes.

About Age UK

Age UK believes every older person should be included and valued. We're working locally, nationally and internationally to change the way we age. Together with our partners, we're changing the day-to-day experience of getting older through essential services and local support. In the UK, the charity helps more than seven million older people each year by providing advice and support, including through our national advice line and our friendship services. It also researches and campaigns on the issues that matter most to older people, aiming to put older people at the heart of public policy and shift the way ageing is treated and represented.

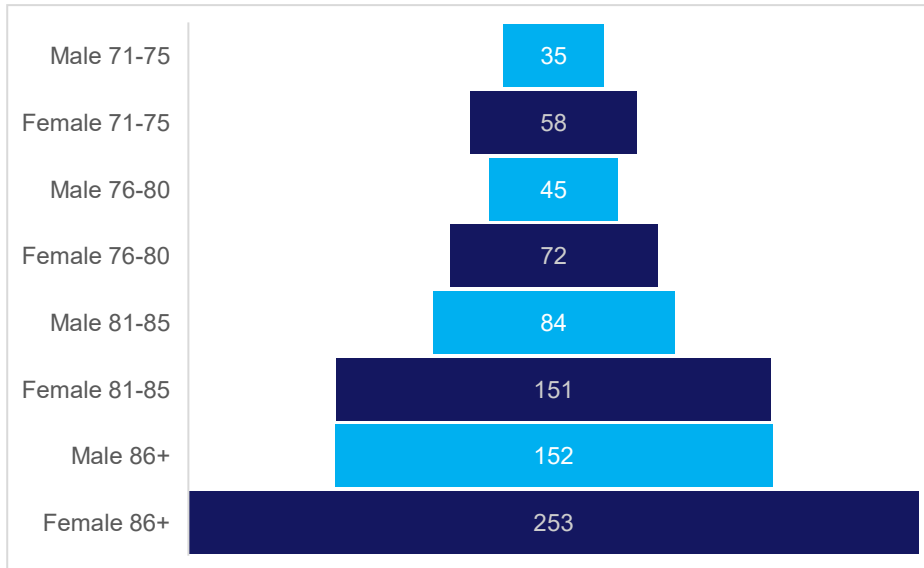
Introduction

Driving is extremely important for many older people, helping retain independence, allowing people to socialise, attend medical appointments, do the grocery shopping, and countless other benefits besides. Encouraging or forcing people to stop driving should not be taken lightly, and should only be attempted when there is a clear rationale to doing so – improving public safety is one such example – and alternative means to support people getting out and about are in place.

As the consultation paper states, as of 2025 there are 6.3 million drivers aged 70+, and around 2 million renewals per year. As people move from 69 to 70, typically 77% of drivers choose to renew and continue driving.ⁱ Of those that choose not to renew, many will do so because they are affected by health conditions or disability and no longer feel safe to drive, while others will stop because they no longer use a car at all – most people are responsible and aware that continuing to drive would place themselves and others in danger. It is likely that only a small minority are renewing their licence, aware that their health (especially their eyesight) has deteriorated and they should now lay down their car keys for good.

The rate of people killed and seriously injured in road accidents (KSI rate) increases as people age (and is also high among younger adults, in particular men).

The chart below shows the KSI rate per billion miles driven for men and women aged 70+.ⁱⁱ



Below age 70 this rate is broadly comparable to other adults, before starting to rise in particular among people aged 80+ (for comparison, the rate for 17-24 year old men is 147 KSI per billion miles driven, roughly equivalent to the rate for 86+ men).

As there is a clear public safety rationale for ensuring people are safe to drive, Age UK on balance supports moves to introduce compulsory eye tests for older drivers. This is backed by strong public support, including from older people – we commissioned polling of the public which found around 80% of older people agreed with the policy proposal. We also ran a workshop of older people to discuss the issue, which again found very strong support for introducing eye testing on renewal.

However, we argue that the age at which compulsory eye testing kicks in should be raised to 75, as there seems to be mixed evidence for the justification of starting the system at age 70 – this is currently the point at which triennial renewals start because of historical accident, rather than a firm logic.

As people stop driving it has wide implications for other aspects of their lives. It is absolutely imperative that people can continue to get out and about, and so greater investment in public transport is crucial, particularly in rural areas. Greater support must be given to people as they make the transition to non-drivers, including using community groups such as Age UK.

We relay some of the findings from our polling and workshop throughout the response.

Consultation questions

Question 1: Who do you think should be responsible for notifying the DVLA when a licence holder is diagnosed with a medical condition that may affect their ability to meet the vision standards for driving?

Under the current system the driver has legal responsibility for notifying the DVLA of any medical conditions, and we do not see any reason to change that. However, consideration should be given to a system that alerts the DVLA automatically once an eye test shows the driver has failed to meet the required vision standards.

We appreciate it is difficult for medical professionals and opticians as they have a confidential relationship with their clients, although best practice guidance will need to be updated. The system should avoid relying on discretionary reporting by professionals.

Question 2: Do you agree or disagree that mandatory eyesight testing should be introduced for older drivers?

Although this represents a significant change from the current regime, and will raise many cultural issues around continued driving into later life, we agree that in the interests of improving road safety it is reasonable to introduce compulsory eyesight testing for older drivers.

We do, however, believe that the age for introducing the testing should be raised to 75 (see response to Question 3).

To assess older people's views on the proposed change, Age UK commissioned Opinium to conduct UK-wide polling of 1,018 over 60s, which found a high level of support among older people of all ages.

Overall, among this age group 49% 'strongly support' the proposals while 28% 'somewhat support' them – a net figure of 78% agreeing with the introduction of compulsory eye testing. This rises to 79% of pensioners and 80% of those aged 75+. Only 7% of pensioners and 4% of 75+s were opposed to the change.

Among those who drive frequently, support is 77%; among those who used to drive but stopped because of health, age or vision, support is 91%.

The most notable group with a lower level of net support is those over 60s who are working full time (65%), likely because they rely on a car to get to work. With increasing employment rates among the 70+ age group, helping people keep working is an

important but oft-forgotten aspect to this issue, and we encourage the Department to speak to the Department for Work and Pensions about employment support and the Department for Business and Trade about flexible working.

The participants in our workshop were similarly supportive of the move, with some even arguing for tighter restrictions such as more regular testing:

“Anybody who is driving should have at least a three-yearly eye test if not an annual eye test.”

“I’m in favour of eye tests. Safety is very important.”

Question 3: Do you agree or disagree that 70 years is the appropriate age for mandatory eyesight testing to start?

The system has historically long been based on renewal at age 70, however on balance we disagree that this is the correct age for eyesight testing to start.

The first report of the Older Drivers’ Taskforce, published in 2017, is very clear on this:ⁱⁱⁱ

“Seventy is not a magic number. The age limit was set in 1971 for reasons which are unclear. Life expectancy for men was 68 and for women 72. Since then more people are living longer, enjoying better medical treatment and services, are healthier and driving safer vehicles. Life expectancy in 2015 was 79 for men and 83 for women.

There is some evidence in the DfT Road Safety Research Report 29 ‘The Ageing driver’ that on average serious difficulties with manoeuvring a car and driving safely occurs after age 75, but of course individuals are different and for some, difficulties can develop earlier. Results of assessments by a mobility centre also show a sharp increase in the percentage of drivers assessed as unsafe around the age of 80.

In these circumstances a higher age limit of 75 to start to self declare fitness to drive would be reasonable. It would reduce administrative costs and burdens and be welcomed by older drivers.”

Although in its second report the Taskforce instead argues this should be left under review, we continue to agree with the sentiment from its first report. Most hard evidence appears inconclusive and fails to clearly define the best age from which to begin eye

tests – there is therefore a compelling case for at the least having a further official review as to whether turning 70 or 75 should be the trigger.

In our polling, 32% of over 60s agree that they would be more likely to support the proposals if the age was raised to 75. 51% said it wouldn't make a difference, while 9% stated it would make them less likely to.

Raising the age to 75 would have the advantages of ensuring that lots of safe 70-75 year-old drivers are not caught up in the system, while also reducing the administrative burden on the DVLA and the medical profession.

Question 4: In your view, how often should older drivers be required to have a mandatory eyesight test?

Question 5: Why do you think this frequency is correct?

We do not have a strong view on the frequency of testing, but it should align with renewal of the licence. Maintaining it as a triennial event seems sufficient, although the DVLA could offer shorter renewal periods in some cases, for example where someone has seen a rapid decline in their vision in a short period of time.

Question 6: In your view, should the frequency of mandatory eyesight tests increase as drivers get older?

Question 7: At what age, in your view, should the frequency of mandatory eyesight testing be increased?

Question 8: Why do you think the frequency of mandatory eyesight testing should be increased at this age?

We do not agree that frequency needs to increase for everyone, but that it could be increased only in cases where a test reveals an increased chance of declining vision.

Question 9: What, in your view, should the mandatory eyesight test cover?

- **visual acuity (a measure of the eyes' ability to see sharpness of vision. This is usually measured by reading letters on a chart from a set distance, with glasses or contacts if needed)**
- **visual field (this is measured using machinery which tests your central and side vision and identifies if you have vision problems)**
- **identification of a visual condition**
- **confirmation that drivers meet the legal eyesight standards for driving**
- **another test**

We do not have a view on the content of the test. However as this might affect the numbers of over 70s who may have to stop driving, we believe that the outcomes should be proportionate to the problem i.e. whatever the test shows, people should only become ineligible to drive if they represent a genuine risk.

We are keen to avoid a situation where an overly sensitive test prevents large numbers of people who actually only represent a very low or low risk from driving, removing their independence and diminishing their quality of life while failing to deliver any benefits to public safety.

In the workshop we ran with older people, it was suggested that a more graduated approach should also be considered. For example, if people are struggling with driving at night, rather than prevent someone driving altogether restrictions could be placed on their licence so that they are only permitted to drive in daylight hours.

“Instead of revoking their licence, maybe a hybrid approach would be possible — where the area they can drive in gets restricted, or they're unable to drive at night.”

It appears quite common that people particularly struggle with night driving, compounded by the increasing brightness of oncoming vehicles' headlights, which drew a significant amount of concern from workshop participants.

“As you get older, for me it's not so much the day vision — although I've had my cataracts done — it's harder at night.”

“I don't like driving at night, so I tend to go a heck of a lot slower than I do in the day.”

“Headlights can be blinding, particularly in rural areas where there’s no street lighting.”

Headlight glare is a growing issue, particularly as LED headlights are brighter and more energy-efficient than halogen lights, producing more glare for oncoming drivers. This can affect certain older drivers more than others, for example people with eye conditions, a visual impairment, or those driving in rural areas.

There is also a question about the affordability of corrective eyewear, should people require it. For older people on low incomes, the cost may be prohibitive, and the Government should look at existing optical vouchers to assess whether this scheme is well-known and widely accessible to those in need.

Question 13: Do you have any further comments?

Stopping driving is a major decision or event in the lives of many older people, which can have significant ramifications on people’s sense of independence, socialising with family and friends, or their ability to do basic day-to-day tasks like drive to the supermarket. It is not something for the Government to take lightly, and every effort should be made to ensure that when people do fail an eyesight test they are well supported. This includes resourcing community groups and transport providers.

In our polling, when asked ‘what would most concern you if you had to stop driving’ (respondents could select multiple options), 47% of respondents said ‘losing my independence’ or similarly 46% said ‘not being able to go where I want, when I want.’

39% flagged ‘difficulty shopping for groceries or other essentials’ while 36% stated ‘difficulty getting to medical appointments.’ Linking people to appropriate local support services or taxi companies (although 28% were concerned about the cost of using taxis), while also considering people’s needs to improve their digital skills (for example so they can shop online) will also be integral.

There is also a clear link with loneliness and isolation. 34% highlighted the difficulties visiting family and friends, while 32% were concerned about ‘feeling stuck at home and lonely or isolated’. Support maintaining social connectedness is also very important, and it is crucial that as people stop driving they are directed to appropriate age-friendly services within their local community or at a national level – the UK Government and the devolved administrations must recognise the role that such services play and ensure they are adequately funded. This will mean that as any new system is implemented, a comprehensive local connectedness plan, involving medical professionals, optometrists, community organisations, and the drivers themselves is essential.

“Losing your licence will exacerbate the loneliness you’d feel. Many single people are members of clubs and activities — these will lapse and people will be cut out.”

Finally, we would like to highlight the role of public transport in helping non-drivers get out and about. 32% of over 60s (33% of pensioners) were concerned about relying on this to get around. A related question tells us that although 71% of both the 60+ and pensioner age groups thought public transport was “good enough” in their local area, 43% said they could only use it with either ‘moderate’ or ‘significant’ difficulty. This represents a substantial minority who might struggle if they are left to rely on it – our polling was not detailed enough to break this down into an urban/rural split, but this division is likely and warrants further investigation.

Public transport is absolutely crucial, and the Department for Transport (DfT) must ensure that buses, community transport, and other providers are able to run good quality, frequent services to ensure that everyone can take part in essential activities such as shopping or visiting the GP/hospital – this is especially important in rural areas where bus services are often less frequent and less reliable.

This was well articulated by a workshop participant:

“Living in a rural area, although I agree there should be some form of testing, in areas with no public transport unless people have someone living in the same household who can still drive, they become isolated and can be cut off.”

One workshop participant somewhat ironically expressed concerns about getting to the optician to complete an eye test:

“When you’ve declared a problem, you have to go somewhere far away. My local optician doesn’t have the contract, so I have to go to Oxford — and that’s problematic if the buses aren’t good.”

Appendix

This Appendix lists the questions asked in the Opinion polling:

1. Do you drive?
2. From the age of 70, drivers currently have to renew their licence every three years, which includes self-declaration of any medical conditions, including those affecting eyesight. Evidence shows that eyesight typically declines with age and, based on this, the Government is considering introducing compulsory eye tests for all drivers aged 70+, which would bring the UK in line with most other countries. The proposals mean that on renewal every three years, people aged 70+ will have to provide evidence from an optician that their eyesight is good enough to drive. Do you support or oppose this change?
3. If the introduction of compulsory eye tests was introduced at the slightly older age of 75 rather than 70, how much more or less likely would you be to support the proposal?
4. Which of the following considerations should be the main priority for the Government as it implements its Road Safety Strategy?
5. What would most concern you if you had to stop driving? If you don't currently drive, please select 'N/A'.
6. Is public transport in your local area good enough for you to get out and about to conduct your day-to-day activities?

ⁱ Department for Transport (2026), Introducing mandatory eyesight testing for older drivers, Consultation paper

ⁱⁱ Department for Transport (2025), Reported road casualties in Great Britain: older driver factsheet, 2024, <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/reported-road-casualties-great-britain-older-and-younger-driver-factsheets-2024/reported-road-casualties-in-great-britain-older-driver-factsheet-2024>

ⁱⁱⁱ Road Safety Foundation (2017), Supporting Safe Driving into Older Age: A National Road Safety Strategy