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Proposed Road Safety Reforms Could Bring Mandatory Eye Tests for Older Drivers and Stricter Drink-Drive Limits

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Older motorists in the United Kingdom could soon be required to undergo regular eye tests, while the legal drink-drive limit may be reduced, under proposals aimed at improving road safety. The measures, part of a forthcoming government strategy, are designed to cut the number of fatalities and serious injuries on British roads.

The plans, expected to be published in the autumn as part of a comprehensive road safety strategy, follow concerns over the latest casualty figures. According to the Department for Transport (DfT), 1,633 people were killed and almost 28,000 were seriously injured in road incidents last year. Although overall fatalities fell sharply between 2000 and 2010, numbers have since plateaued, prompting calls for fresh action.

One significant proposal under consideration is lowering the drink-drive limit in England and Wales from 35 micrograms of alcohol per 100 millilitres of breath to 22 micrograms. This would match the limit currently in force in Scotland, which introduced the change in 2014, and bring England and Wales into line with most European countries, where thresholds are generally lower.

Another area of focus is driver eyesight. The UK is currently one of only three countries in Europe where drivers are not required to take periodic vision tests. At present, motorists self-report eyesight issues that may impair their ability to drive. Under the new proposals, compulsory eye examinations every three years for drivers aged over 70 would be introduced, with the possibility of licence removal for those who fail.

In addition to these measures, the strategy is likely to address the rising number of drug-driving cases. Police may be given expanded powers to prosecute based on roadside saliva tests alone, without the need for confirmatory blood tests, to speed up enforcement.

Tougher penalties for driving without insurance and for failing to wear a seatbelt are also under review. These potential changes aim to strengthen compliance and deter behaviour that increases the risk of serious injury.

Concerns over drink-driving are particularly pressing. Government data shows that the number of people killed in drink-driving incidents reached a 13-year high in 2022, suggesting that existing deterrents are losing effectiveness. Road safety campaigners have long argued for a combination of education, enforcement, and stricter legal limits to address the problem.

While the proposed reforms have not yet been finalised, the Department for Transport has confirmed that all measures will be subject to public consultation before implementation. Officials are expected to balance safety objectives with practical considerations for motorists, particularly older drivers who may be affected by the new vision test requirements.

The forthcoming road safety strategy is anticipated to be the most significant overhaul in more than a decade. If adopted, these measures could bring the UK's standards closer to those of other European nations and address areas where enforcement and prevention have lagged.

Police, motoring organisations, and medical professionals are likely to play a key role in shaping the final framework, ensuring that changes are both enforceable and effective in reducing the human and economic cost of road traffic incidents.