World-first data project to reduce road crash deaths

Groundbreaking initiative aims to inform better strategies to bring down the number of fatalities and serious injuries.

TRL is partnering with University Hospital Southampton to reduce road deaths by linking health records and road traffic collision data for the first time.

The partners have been awarded £500,000 in funding by the Department for Transport and the Road Safety Trust to launch a world-first initiative: the Data Sustains Life project.

Over the next two years, this important project aims to anonymously integrate wide-ranging data insights, providing a holistic view of the causes and consequences of road crashes in Great Britain.

Road traffic collisions cause a troubling 30,000 deaths and serious injuries annually. It is estimated to cost Great Britain's economy around £42 billion each year. The Data Sustains Life project aims to significantly reduce the tragic loss of life and serious harm.

Despite significant investments in road safety technologies and interventions, the toll of road crashes on British roads has shown little change in recent years. The project aims to tackle this persistent issue by exploring the relationship between road crashes and the resulting health outcomes, offering an unprecedented approach to improving road safety and coordinating the efforts of both the healthcare and transport sectors.

TRL's Head of Transport Safety Dr Phil Martin said: "This project is a global first. By anonymously linking health data with road safety data, we can unlock new insights that will enable us to approach road safety with a fresh perspective. Our goal is to ensure that no more lives are unnecessarily lost on Britain's roads."

Data Sustains Life is a core part of a growing Pre-hospital Research and Audit Network (PRANA), led by Principal Investigator Dr Phil Hyde. It is linking data from ambulances, air ambulances, police, the Department for Transport, and coroners, as well as the many interactions flowing through hospitals. This includes emergency care, intensive care, trauma care and rehabilitation registries. PRANA is one of the first projects to use the Wessex Secure Data Environment (SDE), a new NHS platform, which aims to unlock the power of patient data to develop new treatments and improve NHS efficiency, effectiveness, and safety.

Dr Hyde is a paediatric intensive care consultant at University Hospital Southampton (UHS) and a pre-hospital critical care consultant with Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance.

He said: "The concept of linking these different data sources was thought to be impossible, but every idea has its time. Enabled by the Wessex Secure Data Environment, this project will allow UK researchers to identify patterns, risk factors, and critical points for intervention. The ultimate goal is to use these new data to inform better policies and strategies to bring down the number of fatalities and serious injuries."

The Data Sustains Life project is set to run over the next two years and focus on the Dorset, Hampshire, and Thames Valley region. The process will be capable of being brought to scale in other regions and nationally with investment from statutory authorities. Findings are expected to inform both national road safety policies and global best practices. This could save countless lives and unlock substantial healthcare economic benefits in the future.

"The Data Sustains Life project represents a pivotal moment for road safety in the UK," says DfT Chief Scientific Advisor, Professor Sarah Sharples. "By integrating healthcare and road safety data in ways never before achieved, this initiative provides a critical opportunity to unlock insights that could fundamentally change how we address road crashes and their devastating consequences. This innovative work is essential to driving the progress needed to save lives and create safer, future roads for everyone."

Data Sustains Life is one of 11 pioneering projects to be awarded a share of £2.4 million by the Road Safety Trust.

Ruth Purdie OBE, Chief Executive of The Road Safety Trust, said: "These projects reflect our commitment to making UK roads safer for everyone. We are proud to support such a strong portfolio of work and are excited to see the life-changing impact the projects will have on road users across the UK."

The PRANA programme has been supported by the UHS Research Leaders Programme, the University of Southampton Clinical Informatics Research Unit, Southampton Emerging Therapies and Technologies Centre, Dorset and Somerset Air Ambulance, Dorset Police, Dorset Council, Dorset Police and Crime Commissioner and has benefitted from seed funding from Wessex Health Partners, the National Institute for Health and Care Research (NIHR) Southampton Biomedical Research Centre (BRC) and the NIHR Wessex Experimental Medicine Network.

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About University Hospital Southampton

University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust (UHS) is one of the largest acute teaching trusts in England with a turnover of more than £1 billion in 2022/23. UHS provides hospital services for 1.9 million people living in southern Hampshire and specialist services – including neurosciences, respiratory medicine, cancer, cardiovascular, obstetrics and specialist children's services – to more than 3.7 million people in central southern England and the Channel Islands. Southampton General Hospital is a designated major trauma centre serving the Wessex Region and Channel Islands and is one of only two places in the south of England to offer adults and children full onsite major trauma care provision.

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The TRL group of companies is owned by the Transport Research Foundation: a non-profit-distributing social purpose company that enables our experts to give independent advice without influence from shareholders or finance companies. We work to make transport safer, cleaner and more accessible for everyone.

- Publishes software that helps the world's largest cities, and many smaller towns too, reduce pollution, carbon footprint and congestion with advanced traffic management, better road design and asset management and safety data analysis.
- Offers consultancy and advisory services based on our leading-edge research into infrastructure, vehicles and human behaviours which enables safer, cleaner, more efficient transport
- Delivers detailed incident investigation, structural survey and other high value field services to help clients to improve the service they give their customers
- Works with universities and other partners to invest in basic and applied research that will underpin future needs
- Has built, with its partners in government and industry, the Smart Mobility Living Lab: the world's first physical and virtual testbed in a global megacity (London) that lets companies test new mobility products and services safely on live public roads.

Established in 1933 as the UK government's Road Research Laboratory, the renamed TRL was privatised in 1996 and today has more than 1000 clients in many countries. Our headquarters are in Crowthorne House, near Bracknell, and we have offices in London and India.