



ORGANISATION  
FOR ECONOMIC  
CO-OPERATION AND  
DEVELOPMENT



Postal address 2 rue André Pascal, F-75775 Paris Cedex 16

Tel. 33 (0)1 45 24 97 10 Fax 33 (0)1 45 24 13 22

Mr Ban Ki-moon  
Secretary General  
United Nations  
New York, NY 10017  
United States

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### Key Messages for the UN General Assembly Debate on Road Safety

Dear Secretary General,

We are writing to you in preparation for the forthcoming debate on road safety at the General Assembly of the United Nations. Inclusion of the *global road safety crisis* in the agenda for the meeting of the General Assembly on March 31 is welcome as we believe this is an issue that deserves attention at the very highest political level.

We would therefore like to give our strong support for global efforts to improve road safety over the longer term and make available our substantial body of analytical and policy work to the UN in any way that you would find helpful. Conclusions on effective road safety policies are summarised in the *key messages* enclosed. The work is based on the experience of those of our Member countries that have succeeded in dramatically reducing the toll of road deaths over the years.

We are ready to cooperate in all possible ways to ensure that best practices and policies can be shared and learned from around the world. Specifically, if the proposed UN Ministerial meeting on road safety is convened as planned in 2009 we would like to offer to contribute to it.

In the immediate term, we hope the key messages will be of assistance in preparing for the debate at the General Assembly and help focus discussions on most critical current issues for policy makers. To this end we would be grateful if you would make the key messages available to the General Assembly delegates.

Yours sincerely,

Angel Gurría  
Secretary-General of the OECD

Jack Short  
Secretary General of the International Transport Forum

Enclosure: Key Messages

## KEY MESSAGES ON ROAD SAFETY

These key messages are based on recent research work<sup>1</sup> at the OECD and the International Transport Forum in co-operation with the World Bank and the World Health Organization, building on five decades of road safety work at the European Conference of Ministers of Transport<sup>2</sup>. Their purpose is to set out the package of measures available to make substantial and sustained cuts in the number of people killed and injured on the road, centred on a safe system approach. They are designed to support debate on road safety at the UN General Assembly in March 2008 and at the inter-Ministerial conference on road safety proposed for 2009.

### BACKGROUND

Road crashes kill over 1.2 million people and injure 50 million each year<sup>3</sup>.

They are the leading cause of death among young people between 10 and 24 years old and an estimated 500 children under the age of 15 die every day in road crashes, one every 3 minutes.

Many OECD countries and some middle income countries have seen sustained decreases in the number of fatalities over the past 30 years. The best performing countries have reduced deaths by more than 60% despite strong increases in motorisation. This demonstrates the potential for progress but even in these countries the burden of road crashes is unacceptable, with a cost estimated at 2.5% of GDP.

90% of road deaths occur in low and middle income countries<sup>3</sup>. Thus the international community needs to redouble its efforts to build the capacity to manage road safety to the highest standards and ensure a long term commitment to adequate investment in safe road systems worldwide.

### THE NEED TO ACT

There is an urgent need for governments worldwide to consider road safety as a major public health and development issue and develop effective road safety policies as outlined in this paper. If governments do act, the reductions in deaths and injuries that can be expected could amount to one of the most successful and cost effective of all public health programmes.

Crashes can be prevented and significant reductions in casualties are possible in all countries. Without urgent Government action, however, global road deaths are expected to increase by 65% between 2000 and 2020<sup>3</sup>.

### THE SAFE SYSTEM APPROACH: A STRATEGY FOR ALL COUNTRIES

The safe system approach represents a fundamental shift in road safety policy as its ultimate goal is to prevent any road user being subject to impacts sufficient to cause fatal or serious injury when inevitable errors of judgement result in crashes. Clearly this is a very long term objective but it transforms the level of ambition and opens up new potential for improving performance by addressing all elements of the road transport system together.

In developing economies, the starting points for a safer system are protecting vulnerable road users from other traffic; infrastructure and land use planning that takes full account of accident risks; and investment in safer road infrastructure that is less likely to provoke crashes and is more forgiving when they occur. In countries with the highest levels of performance, the emphasis is also on improvements to infrastructure including installation of barriers to prevent head on collisions and running off roads, roundabouts to replace intersections and cut the risks of high speed side-impact collisions, and standard designs and speed limits for roads, which guide users to adopt appropriate speeds.

The essential elements of the safe system approach can be incorporated in the road safety policies of countries at all levels of development. The approach offers the potential to significantly accelerate rates of improvement in countries with poor levels of road safety.

#### ***Building on Tried and Tested Policies***

In all countries, the safe system approach builds on the basics of seatbelt and helmet wearing, tackling drunk driving and excessive speeds, enhancing vehicle safety and improving the medical management of people involved in crashes.

### **Results Focussed Management and Coordination**

Road safety management must focus on results, clearly setting out the goals to be achieved and the responsibilities of organisations and individuals for achieving them.

Successful implementation of road safety programs requires co-ordination under a lead agency of the multiple government departments with responsibilities in transport, infrastructure, urban planning, education, health and law enforcement policies. Institutional capacity and discipline is required to sustain major improvements in performance.

### **Ambitious Targets**

Targets and targeted programs of interventions are essential to improving road safety. Ambitious targets are a powerful stimulus to developing new approaches to preventing loss of life and serious injury on the roads. They also drive more intensive deployment of proven strategies for improving road safety.

To be effective targets must be clearly linked to measures designed to achieve them.

### **Evidence Based Interventions**

Results-focussed strategies require monitoring of the impact of road safety interventions as the basis for developing evidence based intervention strategies. This requires reliable data reporting and the maintenance of a database, with adequate resources committed to establishing the causes of crashes and accurate reporting of deaths and injuries.

Careful data analysis is required to understand crash and injury risks. This is important in revealing success rates for targeted policies and for identifying where the largest risks are, where persistent failures to improve lie and where the greatest potential improvements can be achieved.

### **Costs and Opportunities**

Assessment of costs and benefits of crash and injury prevention strategies is valuable both for prioritising interventions and demonstrating the social value of investments in improved road safety. This evidence is central to developing the business case for investments and securing the required funding from finance ministries in competition with other pressing demands on public finance.

## **COMMITMENT**

Sustained government commitment at the highest level is essential for improving road safety. It is particularly important for securing funding, for implementing measures that may not be popular in the short term, for building institutional capacity and for developing strong partnerships between the ministries and agencies involved in road safety.

In much of the world a step change is required in the resources invested in road safety management and in safer transport infrastructure in order to achieve ambitious safety targets. In the allocation of budgets the emphasis needs to shift to investing in prevention rather than simply dealing with the consequences of road crashes.

The Joint Transport Research Centre of the OECD and the International Transport Forum offers the expertise available in its member countries to assist in the reduction of road trauma in all countries. It will cooperate with key international initiatives to this end, including the UN Road Safety Collaboration, the World Bank Global Road Safety Facility and the Commission for Global Safety, and pursue opportunities for partnerships (for example, twinning arrangements with the IRTAD group of road safety data and analysis experts) to share expertise on achieving ambitious road safety targets.

## **REFERENCES**

1. *Towards Zero Road Deaths: Ambitious Targets and a Safe System Approach*, OECD/ITF 2008, forthcoming; *Speed Management*, OECD/ECMT 2006; *Young Drivers: The Road to Safety*, OECD/ECMT 2006.
2. *ECMT Acquis. 1953-2003*. CD ROM
3. *The World Report on Road Traffic Injury Prevention*, WHO, 2004.