

# **The Safe System Approach in Action**

Improving pedestrian safety in  
województwo małopolskie,  
Poland

Case study

This case study is part of a package of materials accompanying the final report of a joint International Transport Forum–World Bank Working Group, entitled *The Safe System Approach in Action*.

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# Introduction

This case study was prepared by a joint International Transport Forum–World Bank Working Group convened in 2020–2021. The case study forms part of a package of materials accompanying the Working Group’s final report, *The Safe System Approach in Action* (ITF, 2022a).

The Safe System approach to road safety takes as its starting point the ethical position that there is no acceptable level of road deaths and serious injuries. The report proposes a framework for designing, implementing and assessing projects with a Safe System focus. It draws on lessons from real-world case studies to offer guidance on implementing Safe System interventions.

The Working Group analysed 17 case studies in total, paying special attention to their Safe System content. While not every case study was a perfect example of the Safe System approach, all contained valuable lessons. In addition, several common themes emerged. A separate ITF Working Paper (2022b) sets out the thematic analysis.

This case study contains four parts. First, it provides context for the specific intervention and the road-safety problems it aimed to solve. Second, it outlines the interventions implemented to solve these problems and the results. The analysis is structured according to the five key components of the Safe System framework outlined in the main report (ITF, 2022a), namely:

1. **Establish robust institutional governance.** Permanent institutions are required to organise government intervention covering research, funding, legislation, regulation and licencing and to maintain a focus on delivering improved road safety as a matter of national priority.
2. **Share responsibility.** Those who design, build, manage and use roads and vehicles and provide post-crash care have a shared responsibility to prevent crashes resulting in serious injury or death.
3. **Strengthen all pillars.** When all road-safety pillars are stronger, their effects are multiplied; if one part of the system fails, road users are still protected.
4. **Prevent exposure to large forces.** The human body has a limited physical ability to tolerate crash forces before harm occurs; the system should prevent those limits from being exceeded.
5. **Support safe road-user behaviour.** While road-user errors can lead to serious harm, the Safe System focuses on roads and vehicles designed for safe interaction with road users. It supports humans not to make mistakes and tune their tasks as much as possible to their competencies.

Third, the case study identifies lessons from the project, again structured according to the five key components of the Safe System framework. Fourth, it offers conclusions.

Access the full set of case studies on the ITF website: <https://www.itf-oecd.org/safe-system-in-action>.

# Context

Recognising that pedestrians are at most risk at pedestrian crossings, the Polish region of Małopolska illuminated crossings and improved road markings. In addition, speed limits were reduced to 50km/h at pedestrian crossings across the regions on regional and national roads. The transformation of the Małopolska Voivodship Road Safety Council from an advisory body to an active unit with a dedicated budget was crucial to the project's success.

*Road-safety themes: Speed management, Infrastructure interventions, Pedestrian and child safety*

In 2018, an analysis of the causes of road crashes involving pedestrians in *województwo małopolskie* [Małopolska Voivodship, or region] in Poland found that 68% of such crashes occurred in the vicinity of pedestrian crossings. The Małopolska Voivodship Police Headquarters in Cracow undertook a detailed assessment of the illumination of and road markings at pedestrian crossings for the whole region. The study identified a large number of deficiencies, especially related to illumination.

However, the question of funding for the required improvements presented a real obstacle. While the road administrator and the local government were supposed to cover this financing, neither wanted to cover the costs, even with police recommendations for urgent improvements. The road administrator assumed that the local government was responsible for illumination improvements, while the local government assumed that the road administrator was responsible, given that pedestrian crossings are road-safety facilities.

At the end of 2018, the Deputy Marshal of Małopolska made a significant decision: to transform the Małopolska Voivodship Road Safety Council from an advisory body into an active unit that would react to important problems and implement road safety programmes. The Council is composed of 30 organisations and institutions (including government institutions, non-profit organisations, media representatives, emergency services and road-management institutions at various local levels). The intention was to give to the Council a greater role in the road safety decision-making process.

After forming a local team dedicated to road safety, a common budget was created to cover the basic needs of the Council. This included prevention activities on the part of the members and common joint activities controlled and organised by one of the leaders of the Council. This gave members the possibility to lead prevention, but also to unite projects under one voice and leadership, giving them more strength and influence during implementation.

## Funding

The programme of improvements to illumination and pedestrian crossings in 2018 was part-funded by the Marshal's Office (which covered 60% of the costs), with the remaining 40% provided by local government.

## Actors and leadership

The main actors in this initiative were the members of the Małopolska Voivodship Road Safety Council, composed of 30 organisations responding directly to the Deputy Marshal of Małopolska. Other actors involved in different parts of the project included the commune self-governments of Małopolska; the

Traffic Department of Małopolska Voivodship Police Headquarters in Cracow and the Cities and District headquarters; the Voivodship Road Authority in Cracow; the Board of Education in Cracow; Radio Krakow, Inspection of Road Transport in Cracow; the General Directorate for National Roads and Motorways in Cracow; the Małopolska Road Traffic Centers; the Center of Initiatives for Road Safety Improvement (CIBRD); Association Przejście; and the European Federation of Road Traffic Victims (FEVR).

## **Interventions and results**

### **Establish robust institutional governance**

All interventions within the pedestrian project were based on four main pillars:

- Illumination of the pedestrian crossings in the region on all kinds of roads;
- reduction of speed limits before all pedestrian crossings on regional and national roads;
- prevention programmes aimed at pedestrians; and
- post-crash response and psychological help for road-crash victims and their families.

A reduction of speed limits to a maximum of 50 km/h before all pedestrian crossings on regional and national regional roads was implemented in the whole region of Małopolska. The aim was to minimise the risks and consequences of crashes around pedestrian crossings. However, no other speed zones nor additional regulations have been applied.

A set of prevention programmes (described hereafter) was implemented in the region for all types of road users. New, additional programmes and training sessions were developed with a special focus on pedestrian crossings and the safety of pedestrians.

In 2019, more than 200 pedestrian crossings on national, provincial, county and municipal roads were illuminated in the region. In this respect, Małopolska plays a leading role in the country, and the total amount allocated to this aim in 2019 was approximately PLN 7 million. In 2020, another 122 pedestrian crossings on national and provincial roads were illuminated in Małopolska Voivodship.

The Council also strengthened support for victims and families, providing additional post-crash care. This included strengthening and implementing a national commemoration of World Day of Remembrance; and financial support to broaden the workshops and psychological help for the victims and families; and the establishment of a professional system of post-crash response through the National Center for Trauma Recovery for victims and families in Zabawa, Małopolska.

### **Share responsibility**

The Małopolska Voivodship Road Safety Council has a good understanding of Safe System principles. All partners agreed that road safety requires visible speed limits that should continue to be lowered. The speed limits were lowered, and additional police effort was implemented to enforce these limits.

## **Strengthen all parts**

The project required co-ordinated interventions and continuous transfer of knowledge. In order to implement it, the Council had regular contact with all partners and held up to three official meetings each month. It was also recognised that individual interventions (e.g. illumination of pedestrian crossings) required co-operation between all institutions, and safety culture required the integration of all partners.

## **Prevent exposure to large forces**

As mentioned above, speed limits were reduced to a maximum of 50 km/h before all pedestrian crossings. There is an ambition to continue lowering speed limits, especially in urban areas. The limits are adapted to different types of vehicles. Many of these crossings need additional safety interventions but this requires additional funding.

Continuous promotional campaigns are being implemented on the negative consequences of speeding and the need to adjust speed to weather conditions, with a special focus on pedestrian crossings. These can aid support for government actions to more strongly address the problem.

## **Support safe road-user behaviour**

The projects focused on pedestrians and their visibility. This included initiatives to illuminate pedestrian crossings. Other initiatives targeted students from the region (e.g. providing reflective materials for children, local events and initiatives such as debates, press interviews on safety, painting, knowledge contests and meeting with seniors to join common road safety goals), education via radio and television (showing practical examples from roads of positive and negative behaviours both drivers and pedestrians), and peer-to-peer education.

In 2021 the Polish Government started to apply the programme to the whole country, based on the experience gained in Małopolska, with a separate budget for county roads and municipal roads. By that time Małopolska had illuminated 322 pedestrian crossings in the region on different kinds of roads.

At the same time, the Polish Government introduced a set of changes to the Traffic Code relevant to pedestrian safety. These included priority of pedestrians when approaching pedestrian crossings, a ban on pedestrians' phone use while crossing the road, speed limits of 50 km/h at all times in built-up areas, regulations regarding e-scooter traffic and safe distance between vehicles, as well as very strict penalties in the Penal Code for any offences or crime on the roads.

# Lessons

## **Establish robust institutional governance**

The decision to transform the Małopolska Voivodship Road Safety Council into an active organisation was an ideal solution, creating a consensus for improvements in road safety. It was very well received by local governments. The programme was initially aimed at provincial roads but given its success the Deputy Marshal broadened it to county roads as well.

The Council gained a greater role in decision-making on road safety in Małopolska with a local team dedicated to road safety, and a budget to cover the basic needs of the Council. This was made possible through strong political will and an understanding of the principle of shared responsibility.

As mentioned above, funding was a significant problem. However, the joint-funding solution between the Marshal's Office and local government provided a consensus for improvements in road safety and received a great response from local authorities. Other problems related to funding included a shortage of funds for electricity to illuminate crossings (due to pressures from the Covid-19 pandemic) and a lack of constant financing of the Center of Trauma Recovery in Zabawa.

## **Prevent exposure to large forces**

Although the reduction in speed limits when approaching pedestrian crossings was implemented across the whole region, no additional speed zones or regulations have been applied. Many of these crossings still require additional safety interventions but this depends on additional funding. At the time of the programme's implementation, Poland still lacked laws regarding protective equipment and clothing for users of powered two-wheelers. In 2021, as part of a set of changes to the Traffic Code, the Polish Government introduced regulations to address road safety issues.

## **Support safe road-user behaviour**

From the beginning it was clear that any road-safety action should be based on facts, statistics, scientific data and a solid base of identification of real problem. Speed limits are clear and unified. The introduction of a set of legal changes in 2021 in the whole country strengthened the system.

# Conclusions

A refusal on the part of public agencies to fund vital pedestrian safety work was the starting point for this project. The creation of an active and funded road safety council solved this problem and helped bring key stakeholders to meetings to achieve consensus on actions.

The programme of safety interventions at 322 crossings in the region, especially including lower speeds and illumination of crossings, acted as an effective pilot creating change in all of Poland. However, even the reduced speed limit of 50km/h is still too high for strong pedestrian safety. Change is occurring gradually but much more needs to be done for road safety in Poland.

## References

ITF (2022a), *The Safe System Approach in Action*, Research Report, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://www.itf-oecd.org/safe-system-in-action>.

ITF (2022b), “Safe System Implementation in Practice”, ITF Working Paper, available on request.



# The Safe System Approach in Action

## Improving pedestrian safety in województwo małopolskie, Poland

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This case study details a project carried out in województwo małopolskie [Małopolskie region] in Poland to improve pedestrian safety by illuminating crossings and introducing speed limits.

The case study is part of a package of materials accompanying the final report of a joint International Transport Forum–World Bank Working Group, entitled The Safe System Approach in Action.

The Safe System approach to road safety takes as its starting point the ethical position that there is no acceptable level of road deaths and serious injuries. The report proposes a framework for designing, implementing and assessing projects with a Safe System focus.

The report also draws on lessons from real-world case studies to offer guidance on implementing Safe System interventions. While not every case study was a perfect example of the Safe System approach, all contain valuable lessons for policy makers and road-safety actors.