

Session: How can safer roads boost the economy?

25 May 2023, 16:45-18:00 | [Session outline](#)

This session highlighted effective strategies to make roads safe for people and analysed the associated economic and societal benefits. Every year, about 1.3 million people are killed in road crashes, and tens of millions more are injured. The socio-economic costs of road crashes are huge, representing up to 6% of gross domestic product (GDP) in individual countries. According to Said Dahdah (World Bank), “globally, the socio-economic costs of road crashes amount every year to USD 1.7 trillion”.

Road traffic injuries are the lead cause of deaths of young people. As Raquel Barrios (Youth for Road Safety) observed: “Every day, 1 000 young people aged between 5 and 29 die in a road crash”. The poorest households are the most impacted by road crashes, underlining the issue of inequality due to unsafe roads.

Road crashes put a heavy burden on the health system. But unlike malaria or HIV, this pandemic does not benefit from the same level of attention and funding. There is, however, a clear business case for investing in road safety. According to a recent report by the Global Road Safety Facility, reducing the number of road traffic fatalities and injuries by 50% could positively affect economic growth, with an estimated per-capita GDP increase of 7-22% over 24 years. At the same time, the world is witnessing a market failure, as those who need to invest in road safety are not those bearing the costs to the health system.

Countries should implement road safety measures in the context of a Safe System approach. This is a system which recognises that humans make mistakes and is based on the principle of shared responsibility. It is crucial to understand that road user behaviour is a function of system design. As Nhan Tran (WHO) pointed out: “You cannot solely rely on education to change the way people behave”. Infrastructure, vehicles and users should be considered in an holistic way to make the mobility system safer. A Safe System approach also calls for multisectoral co-operation between policy makers, the private sector, non-governmental organisations and especially young people, who must be consulted about decisions on the future shape of mobility.

It is also important to frame the issue of road safety as an enabler of sustainable development. Johanna Tzanidaki (ERTICO-ITS EUROPE) echoed this, stating: “Sustainability and road safety go hand in hand”. Road safety is clearly linked to several of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), including the SDGs related to health, education, poverty and climate change. There is a close link between road safety and transport decarbonisation, and policy makers must seize the opportunities of decarbonisation’s high policy priority to introduce road safety measures.

Decarbonisation calls for lower speeds and a shift to active mobility modes, which can have a positive impact on road safety. But adequate infrastructure is needed to ensure that this modal shift occurs in a safe environment. Jevgeni Kabanov (Bolt) called for more investment in cycling infrastructure, claiming that “cities with adequate bike infrastructure do not see an increase in injuries of micromobility users”. Digital monitoring and geofencing of shared micromobility devices have proven effective and there could be benefits in expanding these technologies to other vehicles.