

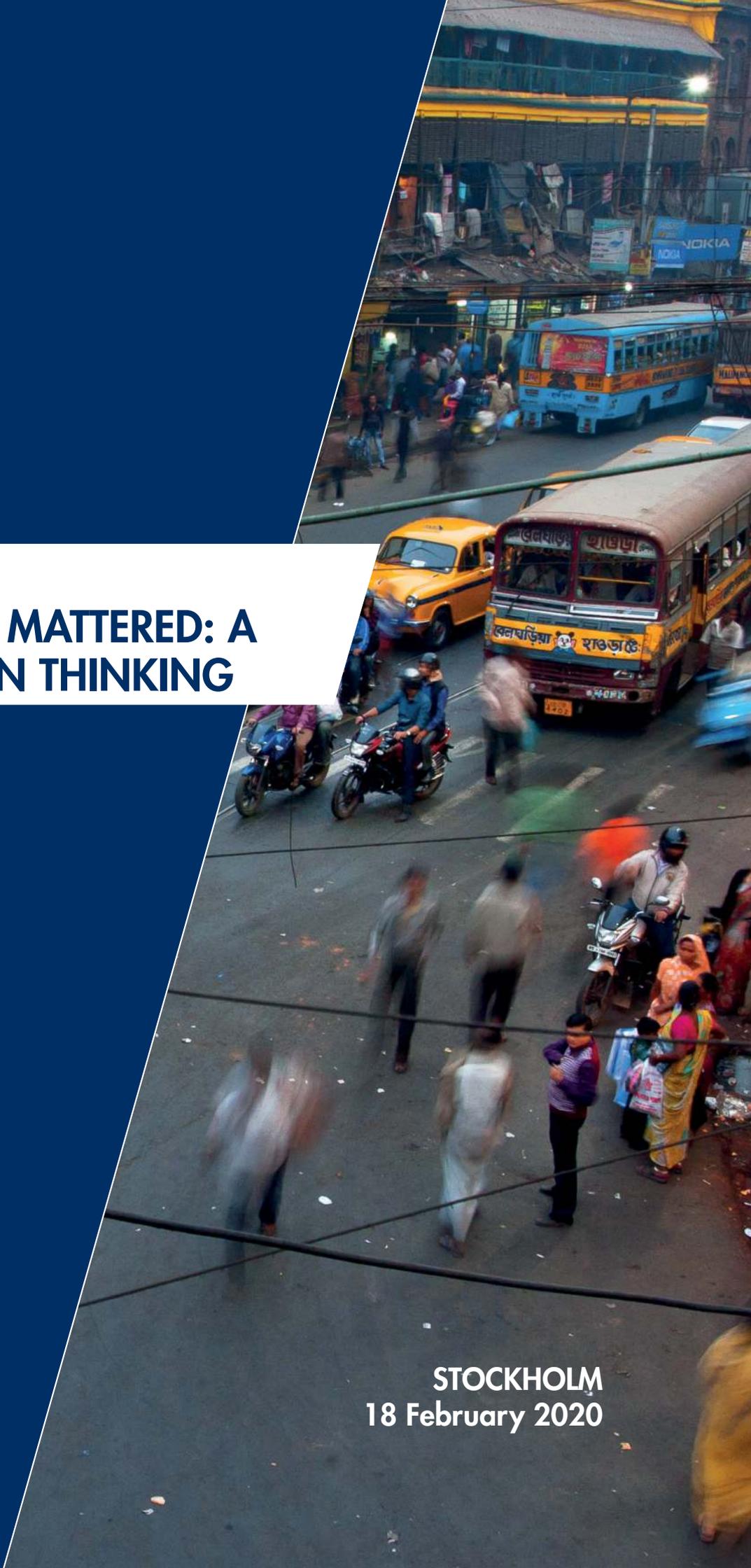
ROAD SAFETY 2030

HIGH LEVEL ACTION FOR ROAD SAFETY



ROAD SAFETY AS IF IT REALLY MATTERED: A SEA-CHANGE IN THINKING

STOCKHOLM
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This document calls for a new approach to safe mobility to be achieved by 2030: one rooted in safety as a core value, and not one in which safety may come second to factors such as cost, speed, aesthetics, or profits. It draws on work done in the past few years by the Federation International de l'Automobile (FIA) High Level Panel (HLP) and its Group of Experts and Advisors. It is intended to be an open document to help structure the discussion of the FIA HLP meeting on February 18 2020 in Stockholm, and so the contents of the document follow closely the main points of the meeting's agenda. In addition to having an enriching exchange of views and agreeing a narrative on safe mobility globally, the goal of the meeting is to identify key milestones for the work programme of the FIA HLP 2020–2022, and to pencil in the potential involvement of HLP members in support of this programme.

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KEY MESSAGES

- Much has been done to improve road safety over the decades, but road fatalities and injuries remain at a constant high; we therefore need to question if our response to this crisis is right.
- It's time for a sea-change in thinking on how we approach road safety – from one of “interventions” such as speed limits and seatbelts that treat the symptoms of unsafe road systems, to one in which “safety” is the core, foundational value.
- As a system created by humans with the ability to make choices, we can all choose to value safety in our mobility system and demand that manufacturers, policy makers, civil society and others base the design of our infrastructure, vehicles and transport policies upon that value.
- Mobility systems truly based on safety will have a holistically beneficial impact on our health; our environment; on reducing the social and economic toll taken by road safety tragedies; and on women's role in our mobility systems.
- Placing safety at the core of our road safety efforts will automatically make safe mobility a human right, push it up the global agenda and create a new impetus for increased commitment from governments, corporations and international organisations to implement measures that can significantly reduce road crashes.
- The “business as usual” alternative of intervention-based responses to fix our broken system is to accept the possibility that by 2030 a further 14 million fatalities and 500 million injuries will have taken place.
- The time to act is now: the intolerable death and injury toll, and the imminent start of the next Decade of Road Safety give the global road safety community the impetus to do things differently.
- The responsibility rests with each and every one of us to make safety the core value of our road transport systems.
- We need to ensure that safety as a core value is reflected in the way policies are designed and implemented, and the way the system is governed: we have done it in aviation – let's now do it on the road.

INTRODUCTION

It could be argued that since the first wheel rumbled down the first rudimentary road, safety has never figured much in the evolution of the world's transport network. Other things have always come first, such as expedience; the blood, sweat, tears (and gold coins) needed to construct a track or highway; and, in the case of the Romans, a desire to make the roads perfectly straight in order to get to far-flung places as quickly as possible (in other words, speed). And speed is still a popular value when it comes getting around, alongside other highly prized, modern-day values such as comfort, aesthetics, affordability, personal choice and freedom.

Many of these values hold great influence when it comes to the design, implementation, maintenance and funding of our road transport systems. How sleek our cars look and how fuel efficient they are; how cheap our bus fares are; how fast we can get to work; the freedom to drive instead of use public transport. But where is safety in all of this? Instead of being the prime value governing our road transport systems, safety is often treated as just one among many – and often ranks below those of efficiency, speed, cost, and personal preference.

This document argues that the unacceptable, decade-long stagnation in the number of road deaths and injuries is the result of society's unwillingness to prize safety highly enough as the core, founding, inalienable value of our road transport system. It asks why we focus on interventions to fix a system that is fundamentally flawed – and settle for treating the fallout of a persistent lack of safety – rather than working to embed respect for safety as the core value of the road transport system (as has been achieved in the aviation industry).

This document suggests we take a long, hard look at whether we are really honouring safety as the bedrock of our road safety efforts. Is this lack of a true value for safety as the primary force in our road transport systems at the root of our road safety crisis?

SAFETY IN OUR MOBILITY SYSTEMS: DO WE TRULY VALUE IT?

Road crashes – and the largescale death and disability they prepared to adopt a fatalistic attitude down the decades cause – are perhaps the only public health crisis for which the world has been.

Worldwide, road traffic crashes account for over 1.35 million preventable deaths and an estimated 50 million injuries each year – making it the world’s eighth biggest killer. These unacceptable numbers, both in absolute and relative terms, have remained largely unchanged for the past 20 years, despite the painstaking work of the UN and other road safety bodies.

As we reach the end of the first Decade of Action for Road Safety we need to ask ourselves some searching questions. Chief among them is this: **as the numbers of dead and injured on our roads stagnate, can we honestly say we hold safety as the core value of our mobility systems? What are we not doing right?**

ROAD TRAFFIC CRASHES: WHO IS WORST AFFECTED?

- Road traffic injuries are the biggest killer of the world’s 5-29-year-olds.
- Half of all road traffic accident victims are vulnerable road users, such as cyclists, motorcyclists and pedestrians.
- 93% of deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries – countries that account for only 60% of the world’s registered vehicles



SWAPPING INTERVENTIONS FOR VALUES: A NEW WAY OF THINKING

We all claim we care about road safety, but there's a big shortfall between what we say and what we do. The current way we "apply" safety on our road transport systems – to surround ourselves with visible crash barriers, airbags, speed bumps, speed limit signs, speed cameras and other trappings – fails to fully capture the essence of the safe systems approach. To tame the real culprit – the absence of safety as the true value underpinning every single aspect of our systems – maybe we need to accept that these approaches are wrong.

So we need to do things differently: evolving, and moving on from the highly visible, and one could say reactive interventions to which we have become accustomed, towards a change in the invisible (societal) values that currently drive systems. Clearly this won't be an easy, cheap or quick fix – partly because we are so used to decisions made implicitly (almost unquestioningly) on the grounds of cost, speed, efficiency etc. that we are almost blind to any other choice; and partly because we'll be leaving the realm of the highly visible for that of the invisible – never a popular choice.

If we can do this – if we can change the values at the core of our road transport systems (from cost-efficiency, speed, personal choice, expediency etc. to one of safety) – as these systems evolve they will automatically have safety inbuilt, and this will manifest itself in a desperately needed fall in deaths and injuries. And, aside from the ethical argument that this is the right thing to do, if we don't adopt safety as our core value our business-as-usual interventions will in any case never keep pace with our transport systems' evolution.

The cost of business as usual: what is at stake?

Let's fast forward 10 years. We are in 2030. Our headline statistic is that despite ongoing road safety interventions, road traffic deaths and injuries are still at a plateau. Nothing has changed – except that another 14 million people are now dead and 500 million more have sustained injuries. Some of these people are yet to be born.

If current rates persist, this is the future.

This doesn't have to happen. But it's the price that may be paid if we as individuals, businesses, banks, governments and society at large fail to build safety into the DNA of our mobility systems, starting now. Everyone can play a role in making this happen. Systems are created by us, and we can influence the values they embody – be it valuing safety, equity, gender equality or respect for our air. The next decade offers us the chance to do things differently: to demand safety as a core value, and to avert a further 14 million deaths and 500 million injuries. Accepting that we need to make this transition is a first key step, and one we can take as we plan the next decade.

CHAMPIONING SAFETY: A CORE VALUE – NOT A COMMODITY

The rationale for adopting a value-based approach is that values – unlike priorities – do not change (i.e., while priorities and road safety programmes can be influenced and affected by external factors, values are deeply held beliefs and are beyond compromise). Values shape individual attitudes and opinions, which in turn direct behaviours and shape the systems in which we live. In the context of current road transport, mobility systems reflect a value for efficiency, personal freedom/choice, and even comfort, but they do not reflect a value for safety. In current road transport systems, safety is treated as a commodity.

Seeing safety as the core value of road transport ensures that safety is embedded along the entire value chain of the mobility system, from the design and production of vehicles and road infrastructure to the delivery of mobility services and everything in between. Inevitably this means that values such as efficiency, speed, freedom of choice, even comfort etc., must come second. This is necessary, because if we continue to allow these values to be the driving force in our road safety efforts in the future, we run the risk of seeing systems created that perpetuate unsafe behaviour, injury and death.

To replicate the value placed on safety in the aviation industry (see Box 1) in the road transport industry we need to ask ourselves:

- How would our infrastructure and vehicles be designed if safety were as important as efficiency? Or comfort? Or aesthetics?
- If a company valued (road) safety, how would it manage its value chain – from the way that it sources raw materials to the delivery of its products to consumers? (See Box 2 on benchmarking companies' value for safety.)
- If all financing institutions valued safety as the core value of road safety, how would they manage their loans for infrastructure – what safeguards would they put in place?
- If safety is to be the core value of our mobility system, what institutional architecture – i.e. governance – is needed at a domestic and international level to ensure that the system is designed and managed accordingly?

BOX 1: SAFETY AS A VALUE, NOT A COMMODITY – LESSONS FROM AVIATION

When it comes to valuing safety, there is much to learn from the aviation industry. Everyone agrees it is not acceptable to have aircraft of different safety standards, or seats in an aircraft with different safety standards. Consumers would not be willing to pay less or more to be more safe or less safe when they fly – because safety in the aviation industry is a value and not a commodity. This is true throughout the aviation sector – even when passengers complain about delays or cancellations, we tacitly all accept that safety comes first and if there is even small problem that could impact safety of the trip, we accept the consequences.

One only has to look at the current cost to Boeing – US\$18.6 billion to date – resulting from the two tragic air crashes involving safety flaws in the 737 Max airliner. While no price can be put on tragedies such as these, the ongoing penalties being paid by the company reflect the strength of feeling that the world has in relation to passengers' inalienable right to safety at any cost when it comes to flying.

On the basis of this, it can be argued that the lack of a culture of safety in road transport is the result of not valuing safety. In road transport, most of the responsibility for preventing deaths (even in situations when infrastructure and vehicles are poorly designed) rests with individual road users. The emphasis is on personal responsibility and choice. Consumers are given a choice of vehicles of different standards and it is left up to market forces in what is ultimately a reflection of personal freedom and preference. In aviation, safety is clearly a core value that is not only emphasised and routinely reinforced, it is reflected in industry standards and in the (domestic and international) governance of the system. In a nutshell, safety is fully internalised in air transport as a critical and mandatory component of the system.

An holistic approach to safe mobility: what it could bring

Making safety a core value of all mobility systems will not only transform mobility systems, but may also be transformational for industry, the environment, and health. Taking advantage of the synergies that exist between these sectors offers us the chance to take a truly productive, integrated, multisectoral and holistic approach to the design of vehicles, infrastructure and transport policy itself – breaking down the silos in which our road safety experts sometimes work.

BOX 2: BENCHMARKING HOW COMPANIES VALUE SAFETY: THE ROAD SAFETY INDEX

During 2019, the FIA HLP – with support of its Experts and Advisors Group and of Julius Baer – worked to establish a road safety benchmarking index. Benchmarking indices are widely used in the financial industry to assess the performance of private companies in certain fields – one of the best known and most widely used benchmarking indices is the Dow Jones Sustainability Index, which ranks companies according to key environmental indicators.

The FIA is now undertaking a feasibility study, with the support of Professor Clæs Tingvall, to develop a road safety benchmarking index and to analyze how it could be disseminated. The first results of this feasibility study are expected in June 2020. The establishment of such an index would mark an important step towards assessing the extent to which private companies effectively value (road) safety.

Safer mobility systems

Making safety a core value of all mobility systems means reducing the very high risk that vulnerable users (especially pedestrians, cyclists and motorcyclists) bear at present, particularly in low- and middle-income countries. Increasing the number of pedestrian zones and walkways, building more dedicated lanes for bikes and motorcycles or introducing more stringent speed-control interventions are among the measures that are likely to be popular policy choices, as well as very efficient decisions.

It also involves addressing the safety risks posed by new micromobility modes – especially in urban areas – alongside “shared mobility” solutions, which are becoming increasingly popular worldwide.

Environmental perspective

Truly safe mobility offers a huge window of opportunity at a time when environmental challenges are capturing the global policy debate as the trend in new mobility systems brings together safety and lower emissions. Safe mobility worldwide is first and foremost about reasonably sharing, and importantly preserving, the space available for us to move around. So advancing safe mobility and fighting climate change go hand-in-hand.

Interestingly, this shift will probably lead to a change in the composition of mobility in terms of transport modes, prioritising non-motorised modes (walking, cycling, etc.) over traditionally dominant modes such as cars. This can ultimately result in a very significant reduction in the impact that land mobility has on air quality and on climate change, and an improvement in public health. The link between improved safety, reduced environmental impact and better health outcomes is probably one of the best examples of complementarity between SDGs, and this should be used to the benefit of all three causes.

Health perspective

The same is true for the synergies between improved safety and improved health, which offer huge scope for collaboration. This is particularly the case when it comes to the health of children and adolescents, as road crashes are the major cause of death and injury for 15–29-year-olds in countries of all income levels. Public opinion is especially sensitive to the challenges faced by young people, so the natural synergies in improving road safety and health for the sake of young people are a good starting point for awareness raising, advocacy, fundraising, policy design and implementation of safe mobility systems.

Safe mobility systems and industry

Finally, the adoption of an holistic approach towards safe mobility can help strengthen synergies with some very well structured industries; among them the components industry (tires, etc), energy industry, insurance industry and tech companies (see Box 3 on how the insurance industry, for example, can strengthen road safety). These industries appear therefore as natural allies in pushing for a new safety paradigm.

BOX 3: ROAD SAFETY AND THE INSURANCE INDUSTRY

Since 2017, the FIA HLP and the Inter-American Development Bank have been working on a project called *Movernos Seguros* which aims to improve road safety in Ibero America through the development of automotive insurance markets.

Well-functioning insurance markets can have a preventive effect on road crashes (by incentivising responsible driving, for example) and also ensure adequate health coverage and, eventually, financial compensation to victims. *Movernos Seguros* has published a report of on the situation of automotive insurance markets in the region and on the basis of its conclusions it has launched three pilot projects in El Salvador, Paraguay, Dominican Republic and Bolivia. In the case of El Salvador and Paraguay it is expected that the pilot project will result in the approval by national parliaments of a compulsory insurance scheme to cover victims of road crashes.

Gender and road safety: achieving a balanced perspective

Global fatality statistics show that, historically, more males die on the roads than females – in part a result of the fact that men are much more exposed to motorised traffic both in terms of total kilometres travelled and the conditions for such travel (i.e., type of roads, light conditions, tiredness). Importantly, men tend to commit more road traffic violations than women (e.g., illegal drug and alcohol consumption, speeding), although proper, controlled research for total exposure is sparse. While men are more likely than women to die in traffic crashes, it is also true that up to now, women have shouldered most of the socioeconomic burden of those premature deaths and disabling injuries. Road fatalities and non-fatal victims lead their families into huge upheaval, with which surviving women have to cope.

Population-representative surveys in many countries confirm that women are more prudent than men when they move around; are more concerned about road safety than men; and are more willing to accept stricter road safety requirements that would reduce fatalities. Moreover, consumer data show that women choosing a new car rate vehicle safety higher than men. Thus, if female voices were heard more loudly in appropriate decision-making environments – or if more of them held high-level positions in transport-related matters nationally and internationally – safety would likely be much more in evidence than it is.

If women had more influence in the design and implementation of our transport systems, it is likely there would be more women enrolling in the transport sector, and in other sectors, e.g. as driving instructors and this would benefit safety. It's also possible that the design features of vehicles (e.g., buses, trucks or other collective transport means) would accommodate female anthropometrics to make such vehicles easier to operate.

Safe mobility: making it a human rights issue

Road safety is a human rights issue. The people most at risk of death or injury on the roads are those who are already vulnerable in other ways – such as children, people with reduced mobility or disabilities, and older people. Whether people live in poor or wealthy neighbourhoods can also make the difference between life and death. And women and girls are often subjected to abuse or violence on public transportation and in public spaces.

These are not minor, technical questions. We clearly need to transform many systems and policies so that they place a central focus on people's needs. We know this can save the lives of millions of people around the world – and empower everyone to move around freely, without fear of accidents or harassment. The potential benefit to both individuals and society as a whole is immense: simply eliminating the loss of lives and healthcare costs generated by preventable road accidents will free up budgets for more productive investments. Enabling all girls and women to use roads and public transportation without impediment will be a major step to ensure the full participation of every individual in economies and societies.

And this should not be viewed as optional. States are obligated to take all reasonable steps to protect people's human rights to life, personal security, health, freedom from discrimination and more. We need to make all roadways safe for every woman, man and child.

Michelle Bachelet – UN High Commissioner for Human Rights

Road safety has traditionally been approached as a development issue by the international community and its visibility in the global development agenda has been relatively low, despite the huge economic and social implications of road crashes worldwide. Safe mobility only gained due global recognition in 2015 when it was included in the SDGs and still remains a diffuse challenge with limited capacity to attract the attention and the resources it needs.

Given the importance of mobility in today's globalised world, and in the daily life of each individual, it seems natural to claim that the right to move safely should be seen as a human rights issue. This would push it up the global agenda and create a new impetus for governments, corporations and international organisations to implement measures that can reduce very significantly road crashes and their terrible consequences. And the link between safe mobility (or road safety) and some fundamental human rights is strong:

- The 1.35 million fatalities per year from road crashes put in question the right to life which is inherent to all human beings. Road fatalities are one of the biggest (non-health epidemic) man-made causes of death in the world that is largely preventable through policy interventions.
- The estimated 50 million injuries per year (many of them ending in severe physical or mental disability) undermine directly the human right to the highest level of physical and mental health.
- The current global situation in relation to road safety demonstrates a flagrant lack of equity among citizens in the world today. Up to 93% of all road victims are in low- and middle-income countries, while these countries account for only 60% of the global road vehicle fleet. This means that the chances of dying from a road crash are up to nine times higher in low- and middle-income countries than in high-income countries.

In addition to this, it is important to note that the consequences of road crashes (death and disability) impede the full realisation of some other fundamental human rights. For example:

- The right to a standard of living for oneself or for one's family, as road crashes often hit the family breadwinner and can lead to a cycle of poverty, exacerbated by income loss.
- The right to education and schooling, as a large proportion of young people in many low- and middle-income countries face all sorts of traffic-related risks and perils in their daily journey to school. Road crashes are the first cause of death for children and young adults aged 5–29 years in low- and middle-income countries.
- The right to safety at work, as it is estimated that work-related motor vehicle crashes are linked to up to one third of all road deaths and injuries.

Making the most of the link between fundamental human rights and road safety involves raising people's awareness that road crashes and their consequences can be avoided if the right policies are put in place; that people have the right to safe mobility; and that governments and corporations cannot compromise on safety when they build roads, sell vehicles, subcontract haulage operators, or provide mobility services.

Accountability and responsibility: they are shared by us all

Systems of all kinds – transport included – are much more than just components: they evolve as a result of spoken and unspoken human values and preferences. While the spoken values and preferences around transport today may be about cleaner, less-congested roads, cutting our carbon footprint and walking and cycling more, our unspoken values and preferences may be a little more selfish.

We all have them – whether we are mothers with young children opting to drive to the shops because trying to squeeze on a crowded bus with our pushchair is impossible; or men who prefer a more powerful car as a smaller one wouldn't look so good; or a retailer sourcing goods worldwide who settles for local hauliers verifying their own standards, with no additional checks because it's expensive and not feasible; or a local government planner opting for speed bumps rather than closing off a road near a school because of fear of political fallout.

These examples show how societal values are a huge part of how our transport system runs and evolves – from mothers out shopping to council leaders trying to get re-elected – and therefore how we all must play a part in the values that underpin and drive that system.

The decades-long focus on interventions rather than safety as a value has absolved everyone of accountability for road traffic deaths, because, in accepting systems of mobility without inherent safety, the primary responsibility has been put on individual users of the system. If our proposed vision for safer mobility is to work properly, it is essential to ensure that all relevant stakeholders accept their responsibility, and that there are mechanisms in place to enforce this accountability.

To do this we need to channel our resources and efforts into holding institutions and industries accountable for not embracing safety as their core value, and into ensuring corporations and governments value safety – and demonstrate that value – in all that they do. At the moment, industries, financial institutions and urban planners may feel driven to place profits or efficiency ahead of safety, or contribute to road-safety campaigns and other corporate social responsibility work while fundamentally not having to change the way they operate. The same is true for governments – rather than seeking dedicated funding for individual road safety programmes and interventions, safety should be a core consideration of everything that is done – to this end, policy integration to address road safety is a more productive goal than prioritising road safety interventions.

Individual accountability

Individually, we all have a responsibility to help make mobility safe (and sustainable) – and we can only credibly claim the right to safe mobility if we accept this responsibility. This includes the individual responsibility of professionals who design, implement and maintain our road transport systems, and whose professionalism needs to incorporate system safety as a core value. It also means demanding and choosing to buy transport modes and services that are inherently safe (e.g., selecting vehicles based on the fact that they are safe above all else, or using public transport, or walking/cycling wherever possible to reduce emissions and road congestion). And when we are on the roads, we need to respect the rules to the benefit of all.

Government and corporate accountability

Governments and corporations (made up of individuals) also need to be accountable and responsible for embedding safety in our road transport activities. Their commitment to safe mobility cannot depend on the short-term preferences of ever-changing government administrations, or of individual companies, but rather on ensuring that safety is the fundamental value of the system and that institutions and policies are designed around it. This in turn requires clearly defining a set of standards, developing indicators that measure performance, establishing an efficient monitoring system and, ultimately, creating a road transport system in which safety is so deeply embedded that it acts as a deterrent to potential violations (alongside appropriate penalties).

Civil society accountability

In the run up to this much more robust system, it is essential that civil society, through nongovernmental organisations and philanthropic bodies, continues to pressure governments and corporations and hold them accountable for their share in legislating for and funding improved levels of safety. This can be done through advocacy campaigns, but also, in the case of companies, increasingly through market means: for example, the true levels of safety of mobility products and services on offer must be transparent so that consumers can take well-informed buying decisions. This is what New Car Assessment Programmes (NCAPs) are doing very successfully for cars. In as much as consumers value safety, companies often respond by upgrading the safety features of their products and services. Making shareholders aware of the importance of safety for the image and reputation of the company could further reinforce this trend.

Funding: how do we pay for all this?

An important element of this shared responsibility relates to the financing of safe mobility policies, especially in relation to low- and middle-income countries. While national governments should bear the brunt of the costs (for infrastructure), there is room for international funding to play a catalytic role, helping unlock domestic resources and thus have a multiplier effect. We also need to redirect the resources currently being used to treat the symptoms of our malfunctioning road transport systems towards embedding safety as the core value.

Up to now, the international community has allocated a ridiculously low amount of resources to fund road safety policies in low- and middle-income countries compared to other development challenges of similar magnitude (in terms of fatalities) like AIDS or malaria. Apart from very commendable private initiatives (notably from Bloomberg Philanthropies and the FIA Foundation), only the World Bank's Global Road Safety Facility (GRSF) and some regional MDB initiatives have provided (very limited) funding. This is encouraging and is having an important impact on the ground, owing to a strong leveraging effect.

The establishment of the United Nations Road Safety Fund (UNRST, see Box 4) offers an opportunity to fundamentally rethink the funding and decision-making architecture of road safety policies globally. This is an opportunity we cannot miss. We need to create a fundraising system that is recurrent, sustainable and truly catalytic. International funding should complement, not substitute, domestic funding. UNRSTF should act as a hub for other public and private initiatives, ensuring there is coordination among them. For this to happen it is essential that UNRSTF is capable of showing it can add value to the system and to all relevant stakeholders, i.e., that it is efficient and that it can deliver significant impact on the ground. This is not a minor challenge.

BOX 4: FUNDING FOR ROAD SAFETY

Since its launch, the FIA HLP has supported the idea of establishing a global fund for road safety. This was accomplished in April 2018 when the UN General Assembly welcomed the establishment of the first ever UN Road Safety Trust Fund. This new Fund aims to play a catalytic role, helping unlock domestic resources in low- and middle-income countries, and thus have a powerful multiplier effect. The FIA Foundation was the first contributor to the Fund with a US\$10 million donation. Now, FIA HLP is working to create an innovative fundraising mechanism to feed the Fund with a stable flow of resources, mainly from the private sector. Also, the FIA HLP is working closely with the World Bank, other MDBs and relevant stakeholders such as the European Commission to improve coordination and ensure an efficient and sustainable funding of global road safety initiatives.

Finally, we need to attract commercial (i.e. private) lending to road safety interventions. This may not be as far-fetched as it seems at first, because the starting point is that investing in safety results in significant positive net returns for the whole of society. We need thus to find ways to ensure that part of this social return goes to those private lenders that may be willing to invest in infrastructure improvements, which are typically large and long-term investments (and which may be therefore attractive for pension funds or insurance companies, for example). Development aid agencies, which devote huge amounts of resources to health and infrastructure investments, can facilitate this process in low- and middle-income countries. And now that so-called “environmental, social and corporate governance” (ESG) investments are on the rise, we need to ensure that the “social” element of this also encompasses safety.

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Technology: making it work for road safety

Technology is an increasingly important component of mobility systems. And if we really want to make safety the core value of these systems, it means we have to make sure that we take full advantage of the opportunity that technology offers to save lives. The potential for action is enormous.

At present, in many regions of the world, cars are sold that do not meet basic safety standards (so called UN priority safety standards, see Box 5). This means that a particular car or model will be equipped with full safety features if it is to be sold in say Europe, and with much lower standards (not even basic safety features like seat belts, ABS or minimum crash worthiness) if it is to be sold many countries in Latin America, Africa or South East Asia.

BOX 5: VEHICLE MINIMUM SAFETY STANDARDS

In 2017 and 2018 the HLP Secretariat and the UN Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) met representatives of car manufacturers and of the Organisation Internationale des Constructeurs d'Automobiles (OICA) to explore the possibility of a Manufacturers' Voluntary Agreement on Minimum Safety Standards. This would ensure that all vehicles incorporate UN priority safety standards, regardless of the market in which they are sold.

Even though initial discussions were promising, in the end car manufacturers led by OICA rejected the idea of signing such a Voluntary Agreement; instead, OICA issued a Manifesto (October 2019) asking governments to incorporate a list of Safety Standards into national legislation and offering technical support in the process. The HLP Secretariat intends to continue working to accelerate the uptake of minimum safety standards engaging in direct talks with individual manufacturers.

This is a scandalous abdication of responsibility. While manufacturers claim they meet the basic requirements of national legislation (which they do), governments claim that manufacturers oppose the approval of tighter standards. What this situation shows is that for various different stakeholders, safety is an add-on, and absolutely not a fundamental value that should guide their actions. The price is paid in deaths and injuries.

The same is the case when it comes to more advanced life-saving technologies – for example advanced driver-assistance systems (ADAS) – that are applied only after much negotiation. For example, in the US, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration has reached a voluntary agreement with manufacturers to make equip all new passenger cars with autonomous emergency braking (AEB) by 2022. In the EU, a package of mandatory advanced safety features approved in 2019 is now to be implemented by 2022. These developments are very good news, but would it be possible to go one step further so that the assessment and the eventual approval and application of these proven, basic, life-preserving technologies would be more automatically embedded in the system?

And perhaps the most advanced road transport technology development to date – the evolution and deployment of autonomous vehicles – offers very interesting opportunities. By definition, AVs promise the ability to eliminate human error and thus, if technology works well, to reduce crashes almost to zero. They may also ultimately offer us a different perspective on shared transport – perhaps making shared transport more attractive and popular than owning our own car (or two). The actual deployment of AVs will ultimately depend on technological development, on consumer acceptance of that technology, and on regulation. The three factors go hand-in-hand, and again it is essential to ensure that policy design and mobility system governance (which will require a total overhaul, as AVs will demand close – if not total – integration of infrastructure, vehicles and services) puts safety at its core.

A system in which AVs work well can be very promising from a safety point of view. Today, AVs attract huge resources from manufacturers and much attention from policy makers. The transition to AVs, however, will not be quick, and in the meanwhile a more balanced approach is required, focusing attention – and resources – on making sure that mobility users worldwide benefit from technologies that are readily available, affordable, and that can save millions of lives.

CONCLUSION

This document floats the idea that to reduce road deaths and injuries – and not just fatalistically tolerate them – we need a sea-change in thinking. We need to evolve the achievements to date of the safe systems approach – a system understandably very much tied to how transport and mobility are configured today – into a “systems approach to road safety” which is genuinely, fundamentally and holistically grounded in safety. In other words, we need to look behind – or perhaps under – the core pillars and the lead agencies – and remake the foundations on which they stand. This means laying down safety as a value so fundamental and non-negotiable that – as in the aviation industry – it actually becomes a hallmark of the road transport system, an asset.

Because our road transport systems have evolved over centuries without safety as a core, this document argues that we need a radical rethink of the system. Where do we start? The most fundamental and primordial change that needs to happen is a small one – we each, every one of us, have to acknowledge that safety has not been valued enough when it comes to our road transport systems, and this has to change. This one small change will eventually lead to a greater systems change, and will have far greater impact than the potentially never-ending interventions we will otherwise be forced to keep making.

In this, the final year of the first Decade of Action, we will define what the 2021–2030 decade should do to improve global road safety – including extending the deadline for SDG Target 3.6 to say: “[b]y 2030, halve the number of global deaths and injuries from road traffic accidents”. This extended SDG target, together with SDG Target 11.2, will set the course for action, and hopefully a desperately needed fall in the burden of road traffic fatalities and injuries.

This sea-change means making a transition from understanding road safety as a set of (albeit crucial) interventions (e.g. speed bumps, speed limits, airbags, seatbelts etc.) aimed at mitigating the damage caused by road crashes in failing systems where safety was not a founding value, to seeing road safety as the product of road transport policies, infrastructure, vehicles and behaviours in which safety is the bedrock. This transition will take time, and we are certainly not starting from scratch: indeed we must continue to do the things we know have an impact on road safety using the resources we have. And once we accept that safety must come first, how do we do it? How do we embed this value in our system? How do we design policies accordingly? What changes do we need to introduce in the governance of the mobility system, both domestically and globally? How do we make an asset of safety as a core value – which is clearly the case in aviation?

Addressing these issues now will help ensure we are not reporting on a further 14 million road traffic deaths and 500 million injuries by 2030.

¹ By 2030, provide access to safe, affordable, accessible and sustainable transport systems for all, improving road safety, notably by expanding public transport, with special attention to the needs of those in vulnerable situations, women, children, persons with disabilities and older persons.

