ROAD SAFETY 2030
HIGH LEVEL ACTION FOR ROAD SAFETY

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THE FIA HIGH LEVEL PANEL FOR ROAD SAFETY

SAFE MOBILITY BY DESIGN: RESTORING ACCOUNTABILITY AND STRENGTHENING SAFETY CULTURE

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A follow-up to the **Road safety as if it really mattered: a sea-change in thinking** report

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This note is a follow up to the High-Level Panel (HLP) meeting on February 18 2020 at which participants discussed the report: *Road safety as if it really mattered: a sea change in thinking*. While the report advocated for a substantive change in the way we approach road safety, guidance on how this could be effectively implemented was beyond its remit.

Consequently, the HLP Secretariat and the HLP Experts and Advisors Group have been working on identifying ways to strengthen road safety culture and to improve the governance of global road safety so that safety is placed at the center of the road mobility system.

This note outlines discussions held in the context of this joint work. It proposes a definition of road safety culture and it identifies some initiatives that can help strengthen it. Some of these initiatives are already part of the work programme of the HLP. Others could eventually be incorporated to it, following the discussion among HLP members.

The note has been written in a straightforward style, avoiding technical issues and discussions that could blur its main message. Some questions have been included along the text to help structure the debate.

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INTRODUCTION

More than ever, in the midst of COVID-19, road crashes are one of the hidden pandemics of our times. Since at least 2000, each and every year, approximately 1.3 million people die and 50 million more suffer life-changing injuries on the world roads. Today, road crashes rank above HIV-AIDS and malaria as a cause of death or disability globally. And while it's true that the COVID19 crisis and the limitations it has imposed on mobility will temporarily dampen these figures, the elephant remains in the room.

If there is one single lesson that we can extract from the COVID-19 crisis, it is that faced with extreme situations societies and governments alike –almost without exception- value life above any other consideration. Why are we then accepting the never ending drip of victims occurring on our roads and streets every day? Why do we tolerate that road crashes be by far the first cause of deaths for children and adolescents? Why, in sum, is this perhaps the only public health crisis for which the world has been prepared to adopt a fatalistic attitude down the decades or the simplistic attitude of solely blaming the end user?

In the **Road safety as if it really mattered: a sea-change in thinking** report that the FIA HLP presented and discussed in February in Stockholm we put forward a very blunt response to these very fundamental questions. The report:

"… [argued 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….[and it asked] 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."

The report went a step farther and ended pointing out the root causes that lie behind this *unwillingness* to put safety at the core of the road mobility 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 responsibility.

How can we restore this diluted accountability and ensure that *each stick holds its candle?* **How can we** *embed* **in the system a** *respect for safety* **so that it effectively precedes speed, comfort or aesthetics, for example, as the core value of the road mobility system?**

WHY THE ROAD MOBILITY SYSTEM IS NOT WORKING AS SAFELY AS IT SHOULD: VALUES, INCENTIVES AND NORMS

To address the fallouts of the mobility system we need to understand its workings and then search for the remedies. *Vision 0* and the *safe systems approach* have gone a long way in providing an overarching view and strategy to deal with the road safety crisis. They have provided a strong narrative and a robust course of action, identifying core pillars and key interventions to be implemented. In addition to this, it is important to understand the underlying causes of the malfunctioning of the system, as this can offer new insights and venues for action.

Implicitly or explicitly, systems are based on values. These values, then, shape incentives and norms that determine the workings of the system and the scope for action and constraints that each stakeholder faces in the development of its functions or activities. Norms and incentives influence behaviors and, eventually, as these behaviors are normalized they become part of the set of social values. So, values on one hand and norms and incentives on the other mutually shape each other.

Historically, the road mobility system has been shaped by very diverse values, some related to the industry, some to the consumers, some public authorities. Freedom of movement, speed, comfort, aesthetics, economic profit or a (mis)conception of economic development are all values that have predominated at some point or another, often simultaneously, and that explain how the mobility system is shaped today. What is interesting, though, is that, contrary to what has happened in the case of aviation or rail, safety has been historically absent as a core value in the design of the road mobility system. Safety has been more an add-on than a core value at the center of the system.

The consequences of this flagrant absence have been dire, as this has resulted in a fundamental misalignment of economic incentives: today, the road transport system can be viewed as a game in which the different stakeholders pass negative externalities to each other in an attempt to avoid the huge costs in terms of fatalities and injuries that the system ends up generating. As Professor Tingvall says: "in the end, every single road fatality is in someone (else's) *Profit&Loss* account". And ultimately, all this happens of course at the expense of road users.

So, if we want a system that works, if we want to restore this lost balance of incentives and be able to hold each stakeholder accountable, it is essential to put safety at the centre of the road mobility system. Only then will it be possible to ensure that each stakeholder behaves responsibly to the benefit of all; only then will it be possible to have a safe mobility system by design and to ensure that crashes and victims are reduced to the bare minimum.

STRENGTHENING SAFETY CULTURE IN ROAD MOBILITY

The combination of values, incentives and norms around safety in the mobility system is what conforms we can define as safety culture. Of course, this should be seen as a dynamic concept that evolves over time and space (among countries) along a continuum. Safety culture can be weak or strong and it can embrace more or lesser aspects; for example, today we can say that in many countries there is a strong culture around drink driving and less so around speeding. More generally, a strong safety culture helps all stakeholders understand the value of safety as a public good and pushes them to exercise their rights and responsibilities in the achievement of that goal.

Interestingly, as we pointed out before, values, incentives and norms can mutually reinforce each other. Take the case of drink driving in many European countries. Surveys from the 1980's show that at the time around 40% of citizens reported driving after drinking as something acceptable. Awareness campaigns and stricter norms and stricter enforcement have brought this figure down to 2% today. An initial awareness on the risks of drink driving translated into norms and incentives that changed behaviours and ultimately influenced values because drink driving is seen today in many places as something socially unacceptable. Somehow a virtuous circle has been completed.

Care should be taken, however, when trying to "export" successful experiences in the promotion of safer culture from one country or region to another, especially if the levels of development differ. As many experts warn, when considering development policies it is essential to understand the prevailing internal conditions (political, social, cultural, etc) in low- and middle-income countries. Not doing so often results in (albeit well-intentioned) initiatives having profound distorting effects.

This points to the desirability of favouring a limited number of simple and "horizontal" measures over an array of more complex, "vertical" interventions that are extremely difficult to implement. These "horizontal" measures are to help realign the incentives that currently exist; once safety is allowed to occupy the center of the mobility stage, concrete (and diverse) solutions will emerge. Michel de Montaigne, the

great French renaissance thinker, once said (referring to educating children) that "this is not about filling a glass of water, but rather about lighting a fire". This is a key idea that should probably permeate any strategy to improve road safety culture in low- and middle-income countries.

Often the literature on safety culture expresses concerns about individual behaviour modification practices based on "surveillance" and sanctioning individual behaviours (the only exception to this generalized concern is when the link between legitimate laws and regulations and fewer deaths and injuries is well demonstrated). Because of this concern, the suggestion is that positive, collaborative, and constructive attitudes are preferred to sustain belief modification.

In the next sections, we discuss some proposals to help strengthen safety culture in road mobility. These proposals revolve more around the notion of values and incentives than around norms. Norms can in principle have a strong influence on behaviour, but they can also be difficult to enact and enforce; on the contrary, values and incentives are softer mechanisms but can often be developed at a much lower cost and their effect can be long lasting. The proposals we make are apparently simple, but if duly implemented they can result in sea-changing improvements in the road towards safer mobility.

EMPOWERING USERS

Road users are the weak link of the mobility chain. When governments fail to regulate adequately, when manufacturers put in the market vehicles that do not meet the agreed UN minimum safety standards – even if they comply with existing regulations- or when construction companies agree to build roads that are subpar they are all passing the cost of their misbehavior (?) to drivers, other vehicle occupants and pedestrians alike.

Adding insult to injury, road users are not only the victims of all this, but they have to bear the blame also. This double affront needs to be urgently reversed as road users vindicate their right to a safe mobility. And this means in practice not just raising awareness about the risks that mobility entails –as has been done in the past, maybe abusively-, but especially empowering them to make their right to safe vehicles and roads visible and effective.

Empowering mobility consumers with true information on the costs associated with using a less safe vehicle, a less safe road or behaving themselves unsafely can be fundamental step towards empowering them into individuals demanding their employers and governments safer mobility policies. It can be also an interesting step towards improving their own behaviour.

This process of empowerment has to be a bottom up movement engaging all relevant stakeholders. NGO's, user organizations (especially, but not only, automobile clubs) and civil society organizations should be able to find a common –positive –language that unites them and pushes the cost of the lack of road safety back to where it originates, be it governments or corporations. Given the global dimension of this empowering movement, the search for this positive language could eventually be linked to approaching the right to safe mobility as a human rights issue. **How can this be done? What role can MOVISM play here?**

Of course, empowering users should go hand in hand –and is perfectly compatible- with calling for their responsibility, especially that of drivers. When drivers behave recklessly, they impose a cost on other users that they do not end up bearing. This cost needs to be internalized, ideally through compulsory insurance schemes (which can and should be modulated to discourage excessive risk taking) and also through enforcement and sanctions. **How can we strengthen the collaboration with the insurance industry?**

IMPROVING GOVERNANCE

Current governance structures of road transport have failed to create a fundamental change in safety worldwide. Global governance of road mobility worldwide is very diffuse, with an array of institutions that have very diverse sectoral (vehicles, infrastructure, training,..) and geographical competences and, despite their high numbers, they are not comprehensive (e.g., global governance does not exist for infrastructure). Further, there is not an integrated approach that could facilitate the internalisation of externalities mentioned above.

Such an approach could be achieved ideally through the establishment of some kind of road mobility agency acting at a global level, thus replicating similar existing bodies for aviation or railway, but this looks like an illusion at this stage. Maybe the advent of the autonomous vehicle, where there will be probably a stronger need of technological standardisation and where liability issues will be much more centralised in the hands of the industry, such a centralised agency may be possible.

In the meantime, there is ample scope for increased coordination among existing bodies. Exploring this path seems especially interesting considering the growing number of road safety initiatives that have been launched in recent years (the UNSG Special Envoy, the network of Regional Observatories, the FIA HLP etc) which have come to complement other long standing platforms (like UNRSC). **But, how can this effectively be done?**

In addition to increased coordination, there is scope also probably to improve governance and increase the accountability of governments through a more imaginative use of benchmarking indices. There exists a wide range of quantitative and qualitative indicators at national level (in WHO *Global status report on road safety*, in the ESRA reports, etc) that could eventually be used to measure road safety culture within countries and by way of comparison introduce some healthy competition among governments. **How could this be done in practice?**

Lastly, from a governance point of view, it is important to realize that often the mechanisms that push people towards safer behaviours are not related to specific road safety efforts, but rather to synergies derived from other areas that impact on safety outcomes. This is why emphasizing the links with other agendas seems a *key factor of success* for reinforcing safety culture within the mobility system, particularly considering that the SDG agenda comes to legitimate these partnerships even further. **Ideas on this?**

INCREASING THE COMMITMENT FROM THE INDUSTRY

While it is widely recognized that addressing road safety demands multi-stakeholder collaboration among the public and private sectors, and while there is no doubt that the industry has made huge strides in improving safety, it is true also that there is ample scope for an increased commitment in this regard.

Take the case of the car industry, for example. Notwithstanding the huge safety improvements that have taken place over the last decades, today still many cars are sold (especially in Latin America and Africa) that do not even meet the agreed UN minimum safety standards. Wile 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 case of road infrastructure is even worse as there is not a UN body with capacity to set harmonized world standards and there is probably scope to make progress in this direction. **How could this be done?**

In general, road safety does not perform high among the priorities of the private sector, irrespective of which industry we are talking about. And this is true for large corporations, often multinationals, that have large scope to improve road safety all along their value chain (suppliers, production distribution, etc), as well as for smaller companies. The consequence, again, is that a -more or less- hidden cost that is ultimately passed on to the road user.

The industry is right to claim that it complies with existing regulation, but given the dire situation of road safety overall, can it do more? The answer is yes and there are mechanisms beyond legislation to push for an increased road safety commitment from the private sector. NCAPs are proving a very effective way to increase vehicle safety and the UN GA resolution (A/74/L.80) calls for the extension of sustainability reporting on road safety to private companies. This is a way to increase transparency and to strengthen road safety culture both within companies and among individuals.

Within the HLP, we are working on the elaboration of an *FIA Road Safety Index* whose goal is to assess the road safety performance of companies in the different operations they perform and to come up with a synthetic index that capture its commitment towards a safe mobility of their suppliers, employees and clients. Beyond this, such an index can play a useful role in financial markets, as private investors can use it as a guide when looking for companies that are socially responsible. This is especially important at present, when partly as a consequence of COVID-19 so called ESG investments (for environmental, social and governance) are increasing enormously.

The *FIA Road Safety Index* will be presented and discussed during the meeting.

Comments on the FIA Road Safety Index? Other initiatives that could be proposed?

SHARPENING COMMUNICATION

If the bleeding *elephant* of road deaths and injuries has managed to remain hidden in the room for so long, this is because there is an issue with the way the road safety challenge is communicated to the audience, ie, to public opinion at large. And this problem encompasses probably both the message (ie, the narrative) and the messenger.

Let's start with the message. For too long, road crashes have been viewed as the inevitable consequence of economic development, as the price to pay for increased mobility and wealth. And when we finally decided not to resign ourselves to fate, road safety promotion has often relied on a strategy of blame, focusing on the road users –ultimately the victims of the situation- rather than paying attention to the enormous dysfunctions of the mobility system at large.

Luckily, *the safe systems approach* has managed to introduce some rationality in the debate, but there is still a long road ahead, especially in low and middle income countries. Action is needed in at least two fronts:

First, we need to insist that the business case to invest in road safety is appallingly positive because the savings to be made outweigh by far the cost of most of interventions. This argument becomes especially relevant in times of COVID 19 when many health systems have been on the verge of collapse and reducing road crashes can liberate much needed beds in the ICUs of hospitals. But this requires shifting the focus of the message/narrative on the benefits of improved safety from deaths to injuries, because it is the latter that absorb huge health resources;

Second, we need to come up with a much more positive narrative for road safety that really serves as an umbrella under which all relevant stakeholders converge and that is easy to understand (and empathize with) for the public at large. The #Me too and the #Black lives matter movements are two cases in point from which probably much can be learnt. This all is linked to point above on how best to empower road users. The key is probably to insert safety as a core value in the narrative that pictures a brighter, greener, healthier, more active horizon for our populations. Not as a repressive movement, which is what it sounds like today.

As regards the messenger, the experience in those countries that have managed to make bigger progress in reducing road crashes and victims show that media has played a key role in making the *elephant* visible and, as a consequence, in putting governments and other stakeholders in the spotlight. This links with the empowerment of users described earlier. It is not easy to find a common pattern (ie, a recipe) to stimulate interest among the media on road safety issues, but, as is the case in any other policy area, providing good information is key. The successful case of NCAP that, through rigorous tests and by making available excellent materials (written, videos, etc) to the media, has managed to put pressure on manufacturers and governments alike to improve vehicle safety is very revealing in this respect.

Further engaging with the media remains a challenge for the road safety cause especially in times when social media is becoming increasingly relevant. Interestingly, social media offers a very decentralized network and this is probably an opportunity to promote safe mobility, which is also a very diffuse phenomenon. **Is there scope for some kind of systematic approach to promote safe mobility through social media?**