

Press Release

Paris, 3 October 2008

Eliminating Deaths and Serious Injuries in Road Transport

Release of Report *Towards Zero: Ambitious Road Safety Targets and the Safe System Approach* at OECD/ITF High Level Road Safety Seminar in Paris

Road crashes account for around 180 000 deaths every year in OECD and International Transport Forum countries, i.e. on average one fatality every 3 minutes. Worldwide, the WHO estimates the annual road death toll at 1.2 million.

With the release of its new publication "*Towards zero: ambitious road safety targets and the safe system approach*", the Joint Transport Research Centre of the OECD and the ITF, with support from the FIA Foundation, hosted a high level seminar on road safety at the OECD headquarters in Paris this week to promote cutting edge policies for achieving major reductions in deaths and serious injuries on the roads.

The Seminar, which gathered 150 participants from 39 countries, was the occasion to brief high level policy makers on recent work of the Centre on road safety and to hold a policy debate on implementation, political feasibility and public acceptance of the measures recommended by researchers and by road safety managers in the best performing countries.

Jack Short, Secretary General of the ITF, acknowledged the positive trends in a number of member countries and highlighted the need to pursue determined safety policies in all countries. While, overall there has been a significant reduction in the number of fatalities over the past three decades (more than 50% in many ITF countries), success has not been shared equally. **Mr Short** underlined that "*there remains in all countries a large potential for improvement and significant reduction in road deaths*". The key road safety problems of speeding, drink driving and insufficient use of seatbelts remain common issues in all countries. Approaches to address these issues are evolving and all countries should adopt a comprehensive approach to road safety to maximise their capacity to reduce casualties.

Importance of target setting

The seminar focused on the value of quantitative targets and the benefits of a *Safe System* approach to achieve major reductions in the number of fatalities and injuries.

Ambitious targets are a powerful stimulus to developing new approaches to preventing loss of life and serious injury on the roads. **Claes Tingvall, Safety Director of the Swedish Road Administration**, stressed "*the value of targets in driving road safety strategies*." The new JTRC report also stresses the need to link ambitious targets to the measures designed to achieve them.

US Associate Policy Administrator, Rose Mc Murray noted that "*In the United States, we are encouraged by the steady reduction in road fatalities and injuries over the past few years. The global road safety community values the power of setting national road safety targets. Setting aggressive national goals has allowed for greater problem-solving and identification of innovative road safety programs aimed at saving lives and mitigating injuries*".

Towards zero road deaths and serious injuries

Zero deaths and serious injuries represent the ultimate level of ambition, reflecting a belief that any level of serious trauma arising from the road transport system is unacceptable. This is the formal objective of the road safety policies of the Netherlands and Sweden known as Sustainable Safety and Vision Zero respectively, and of several of Australia's States.

This is an aspirational vision in that it may be impossible to specify all the interventions required to achieve it and road safety managers are required to go beyond the limits of projected good practice. It therefore requires a strong commitment to innovation and challenges road safety professionals and government to form new partnerships and develop more effective approaches to improving performance. According to **Eric Howard, formerly General Manager of Road Safety for Victoria** in Australia and Chairman of the group of government experts that prepared the new report, *“all countries should aspire to the long term elimination of death and serious injuries on their roads and adopt a safe system approach – many of the means of achievement are available and will be energised by adopting that ambition.”*

Interim targets to move systematically towards the vision

The long term vision of eliminating deaths and serious injuries needs to be complemented with robust interim targets for specific terms of a decade or so. A relatively small number of countries already use targets based on quantitative modelling of policy options. Targets derived in this way are recommended by ITF experts reflecting the outcome of dialogue about strategy within government. *“Strategies drive targets. Have the dialogue about strategy choices and adopt an option. Then, calculate your estimated targets. Otherwise, targets are simply good intentions, not solidly based commitments”* said **Eric Howard**.

Jack Short noted that *“exceptional efforts will be required in most ITF countries to achieve the road safety targets¹ set by Transport Ministers in 2002”* - 50% reduction in deaths between 2000 and 2012. Targets based on expected outcomes from specified interventions should now be established, as a means to move more systematically towards the level of ambition established by the targets set in 2002.

The Safe System approach

The adoption of a *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. The safe system approach opens up new potential for improving performance by addressing all elements of the road transport system together, finding synergies for trauma reduction when safer road and vehicle design, speed limits and compliance with road rules are pursued in concert.

The basic strategy of a Safe System approach is to ensure that in the event of a crash, the impact energies remain below the threshold likely to produce either death or serious injury. It sees the road user as the weakest link in the transport chain, unpredictable and capable of error, education and information efforts notwithstanding. **Mr Howard** noted that *“a key feature is a radical extension of responsibility and accountability for road safety, beyond “blame the road users” to those who have responsibility for operating the road transport system including road authorities, vehicle suppliers, legislators, police, courts and employers of those using the road system in their work”*.

¹ Conclusions of a debate on road safety at the European Conference of Ministers of Transport in May 2002 <http://internationaltransportforum.org/europe/ecmt/roadsafety/pdf/CM200606Fe.pdf>.

Safety management

Road safety management capacity is crucial but is usually inadequate and its importance not well understood. There is a need to review the road safety management capacity in all countries. It is an essential component of a safe system approach. Targets will be most readily met if a robust management system can be established. The OECD/ITF expert group recommends in particular a clear identification of a lead agency, the core group of government ministries and agencies to be involved, their roles and responsibilities, and effective decision-making hierarchy and a strong safety performance framework to measure and support accountability for progress. In Spain, noted **Pere Navarro, Director of Traffic**, *“reform of the Penal Code, introduction of a Penalty Point Driving licence system, creation of the figure of the Public Prosecutor for Road Safety and more enforcement have been the key factors in achieving a 40% reduction in fatalities between 2003 and 2008”*.

Community support

For any ambitious road safety strategy to be effective it is vital to build community and political support to create demand for the measures that evidence tells us will be most effective. **Iain Cameron, Executive Director for Road Safety, Western Australia** reported on the experience of Western Australia *“In Western Australia we used the development of a new road safety strategy as the agenda for a 12 month dialogue to engage the community, opinion leaders and political leaders on the nature of the road safety problem, the safe system approach, a possible long term vision and the range of effective countermeasures available. As a result the community not only understands but supports our ‘Towards Zero’ policy, shifting the whole level of ambition for road safety”*.

David Ward, Director General of the FIA Foundation, underlined that *“road users and the general public are an increasingly powerful force in pushing road safety up the political agenda. ‘Consumer demand’ has resulted in programmes such as EuroNCAP car safety testing that have radically improved safety levels”*. The IRAP road infrastructure assessment programme is now beginning to promote a similar revolution in the design and maintenance of roads.

Political commitment

Sustained government commitment at the highest level is essential for improving road safety. To secure this, road safety managers need to advocate strategies that reflect an understanding of political constraints such as the electoral cycle and to influence the political process of policy assessment through competent advocacy of evidence based road safety interventions.

Mme Merli, Interministerial Commissioner for Road Safety in France, stressed that *“fatalities and serious injuries are not inevitable; we must save lives, especially those of young people. All of society must be mobilised and in France, we have witnessed the importance of effective leadership at the very highest level”*.

International Cooperation and Knowledge transfer

Initiatives are urgently needed in low and middle income countries for investment in adequate programmes and projects which seek to overcome institutional capacity weaknesses through sustainable learning programmes.

The Seminar was the occasion for the ITF/OECD Joint Transport Research Centre to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with the World Bank Global Road Safety Facility to formalise co-operation between the Bank and the International Road Traffic Safety Data and Analysis Group (IRTAD), a centre of expertise for monitoring and evaluating road safety policies. The agreement formalises arrangements for making experts in ITF countries available to work with low and middle income countries to develop effective data collection and analysis systems that **Bjorn Stafbom of the World Bank** described as *“essential to support the design of stronger road safety policies”*. **Fred Wegman, IRTAD Chairman**, welcomed the agreement as *“an important step in the development of IRTAD, reflecting its ambition to be the world’s focal point for road safety data.”*

Next steps

It is important that road safety be kept high in the political agenda. To this end the United Nations is organising next year in Moscow an Inter Ministerial Conference on Road Safety. *“This will be the first time ever that road safety is addressed globally at the highest political level”* noted **Mr Kirianov, Chief State Inspector of Road Transport Safety of the Russian Federation**, in closing the seminar. The UN conference will provide an invaluable opportunity to promote best practices from ITF countries and foster recognition that a *Safe System* approach is the key to major improvements in road safety performance everywhere.

“Towards Zero: Ambitious Road Safety Targets and the Safe System Approach” was published today by the OECD and is available for purchase from www.oecdbookshop.org.

Contact: Michael Zirpel
Director of Communications
International Transport Forum
Tel. +(33-1) 45 24 95 96
michael.zirpel@oecd.org