



On the move

for safer roads in Europe



Third European Road Safety Days held in Brussels

The third edition of the European Road Safety Days took place in Brussels on 13-14 October 2010, organised by the European Commission in collaboration with the Belgian EU Presidency and the European Parliament. The aim of the Road Safety Days is to raise awareness among decision makers and the public of road safety challenges and help to change road users' behaviour, thus ensuring safe and accessible mobility for all.

A key element of the event was the presentation and discussion of strategic topics for the near future so as to facilitate exchange of best practice between experts from throughout the EU. In parallel, a road safety village was set up outside the European Parliament enabling police services and associations from all over Europe to showcase stands and exhibitions to the public.

Proceedings began with an introduction from Siim Kallas, European Commission Vice-President in charge of transport, Etienne Schoupe, Belgian Federal Minister for Mobility, and Brian Simpson, Chair of the European Parliament Transport and Tourism Committee. An overview was then given of the Commission's road safety policy orientations for 2011-2020 and its strategic guidelines.

The first day consisted of three panel discussions, focusing on the strategic priorities set for 2011: the challenge of dealing with injuries on Europe's roads, vulnerable road users including motorcyclists and cyclists and how to better fight against drink driving, and finally the safety performance of road infrastructure.

The second day of the event was mainly dedicated to an initiative of the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council. The centrepiece of this was a conference on ways of improving cross-border coordination between police and judicial authorities in order to combat the most serious traffic offences.

Sharper focus on traffic injuries

The Commission has set the target of halving the number of road deaths in the EU by 2020, but while tens of thousands of people die on the EU's roads each year, a much higher number are injured. For every death it is reckoned that four people are permanently disabled, 10 are seriously injured and 40 suffer minor injuries. The resulting annual economic burden for Europe is estimated at EUR130 billion.



However, while traffic fatalities are well recorded, the same cannot be said for injuries and as a result, little is known about their long-term consequences. In the case of Belgium, while 93% of road fatalities are reported directly, this drops to 60% for serious injuries and 15% for slight injuries.

This being the case, it is difficult to give an accurate estimation of the extent of the problem and establish priorities for preventing and reducing injuries. The subject was thus the focus of the Road Safety Days' first panel discussion, with the initial part of the session examining the importance of accurate data collection for traffic injuries.

Statistics aside, injuries need quick and efficient response. Effective use of information technology is key to this.

One example is the EU eCall system which aims to shorten accident response times from emergency services. Vehicles should be equipped with eCall wireless hardware which, in the event of accidents, will be activated by airbag deployment and impact sensors and send GPS coordinates to local emergency services. Installation of GPS systems and crash pulse recorders on all cars will enable the location and severity of incidents to be determined quickly and accurately.

Systematic recording of injuries at hospitals and outpatient clinics will contribute to the compilation of precise injury data. Furthermore, victims could be asked to indicate the location of their accident on computerised maps in order to better pinpoint blackspots.

The current situation on injury response and costs was described via two examples: the French approach to organising first aid on the road and calculation of social costs of road accidents in Belgium.

Overcoming challenges facing vulnerable groups

In spite of the general decrease in deaths on Europe's roads in recent years, motorcyclists, cyclists and pedestrians remain vulnerable and accounted for 45% of road deaths in the EU in 2008. In addition, behaviour such as drink driving heightens the risk of accidents.

These issues were highlighted during the second Road Safety Days session, with presentations dedicated in particular to the safety of cyclists and motorcyclists and rehabilitation schemes for drink-driving offenders.

The benefits of cycling are well known, particularly in terms of health, the environment and reducing congestion. There is also evidence that it has become safer, with cycling fatalities dropping by 35% between 1996 and 2006.

National fatality levels are often inversely proportionate to cycling's modal share of transport for a given country, showing that more and safer cycling can go hand in hand. This may be due to a number of factors. Drivers in countries with large numbers of cyclists are used to their presence on the roads and cyclists are more aware of hazards due to their experience. More developed infrastructure may also play a part.

Innovations such as crash-friendly car fronts and blind spot mirrors on lorries, which have both been implemented could contribute to further reducing cycling fatalities. Traffic management authorities should also consider introducing cycle lanes separating bikes from motorised traffic and lower area-wide speed limits that can cut the risk of accidents and ensure less severe consequences from many collisions.

Well-known vulnerability

The vulnerability of power two-wheeler riders is well documented. In 2008, they accounted for 2% of road users but 17% of fatalities. As the number of motorcycles on EU roads increased by 34% between 2001 and 2007, improving riders' safety will continue to be a challenge.

The EU is attempting to confront this by licensing scheme revision involving age-based progression to more powerful vehicles and requiring better initial training for riders. It is also funding projects under the Seventh Research and Development Framework Programme with the aim of developing specific intelligent safety applications for motorcycles.

If road users do not behave appropriately, further efforts will be in vain. Drinking and driving accounts for a high number of crashes and accidents involving alcohol tend to be severe in terms of number of fatalities per crash.

Penalties for driving while over the legal alcohol limit are the most common method of tackling the problem, with driving license suspension considered a particularly effective deterrent. Rehabilitation courses have been shown to cut recidivism. Deterrence and rehabilitation, combined with monitoring of offenders when their mobility is restored could form an integrated approach to keeping previous drink drivers on the straight and narrow.



Europe's first road safety village set up outside Parliament

This year's European Road Safety Days provided a good opportunity for the Belgian Presidency of the EU Council to work closely with the European Commission and Parliament in order to promote road safety priorities.

A key element in this was the organisation by the Belgian Presidency of the first ever European Road Safety Village. This was set up on the Esplanade of the European Parliament and comprised more than 1 000 m² of open air exhibitions and stands.

Exhibitors included all branches of the Belgian police, the Federal Public Services for Transport and Mobility and Belgian regional administrations in charge of road safety. Participation was not limited to Belgium as delegations from the police services of 11 EU Member States and 16 associations active in the field of road safety, both at Belgian and European level also presented their activities to the public.



All of these groups aimed to make road users aware of the importance of road safety in general and in particular of the need to improve information exchange between Member States on the four most dangerous traffic offences perpetrated in Europe. These 'Four Killers', as they are known are: speeding, failure to wear safety belts, driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs and failing to stop at red lights.

The event was a real success, both for the organisers and exhibitors who had been able to exchange good practices and experiences on accident prevention and deterrent of traffic offences. It was also very much appreciated by the numerous visitors from the European institutions, Belgian schools and the wider public from Belgium and across the EU.



Better infrastructure for safer roads

Quality of road infrastructure is a vital element in ensuring safety and adequate investment in this area in EU Member States over recent decades has contributed to cutting fatalities. The underlying aim of strengthening infrastructure is to ensure that as few accidents as possible happen and that when they do, they are as minor as possible. The third panel discussion during the Road Safety Days looked at the challenge of upgrading infrastructure so as to achieve this aim.

Infrastructure development should take account of both human and vehicular aspects. The former include visibility, legibility of signs, coherence of road features such as speed limits, signs and markings, and traffic management. The latter cover aspects such as dynamics, particularly related to road surfaces, hard shoulders and potential physical obstacles.

The EU has made road safety impact assessments and audits, management of network safety and safety inspections mandatory on the trans-European road network. Some Member States are looking to apply these requirements to whole of their road networks and the DG Move-funded **PILOT4SAFETY*** project also aims to apply the approach to selected secondary roads.

One factor in cutting road deaths and injuries has been the construction of motorways. The risk of casualties on two-lane roads outside of an urban zone is thought to be around 10 times higher than on a motorway. Safety on both motorways and other roads is enhanced by application of intelligent transport systems (ITS) which has been underway for over 20 years.

The EU's new ITS legal framework, adopted in July 2010, aims to speed up interoperable deployment of such systems across Europe. Initial road management priorities are traffic and travel information, the eCall emergency system and intelligent truck parking.

Improvements to infrastructure also have a role to play in protecting the environment and reducing congestion, not least in urban areas. Eliminating obstacles that hinder the flow of traffic is necessary in order to optimise road capacity in relation to traffic demand, thereby ensuring accessible mobility for all road users.

* http://ec.europa.eu/transport/road_safety/pdf/projects/pilot4safety.pdf

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