Editorial statement

The *Transport and Communications Bulletin for Asia and the Pacific* is a peer-reviewed journal published once a year by the Transport and Tourism Division (TTD) of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP). The main objectives of the *Bulletin* are to provide a medium for the sharing of knowledge, experience, ideas, policy options and information on the development of transport infrastructure and services in the Asian and Pacific region; to stimulate policy-oriented research; and to increase awareness of transport policy issues and responses. It is hoped that the *Bulletin* will help to widen and deepen debate on issues of interest and concern in the transport sector.

Road safety in countries of the Asian and Pacific region has become an issue of great concern considering its magnitude and gravity and consequent negative impacts on the economy, public health and general welfare of the people, particularly the low-income group. Although many countries in the region have taken commendable initiatives and are implementing various road safety improvement programmes, the overall situation as revealed by recent data continues to remain a matter of serious concern. Considering the magnitude and gravity of the problem, the United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Anan has identified road safety as priority issue for the United Nations. The General Assembly, having considered the report of the Secretary-General on the global road safety crisis, adopted resolution 58/289 on improving global road safety, on 14 April 2004, in which it “underlines the need for the further strengthening of international cooperation, taking into account the needs of developing countries, to deal with issues of road safety”.

In 2003, an estimated 430,000 persons were killed and more than 2 millions were injured in accidents on the roads of Asia and the Pacific. More than half of the world’s traffic fatalities are in the ESCAP region, even though only one in five motorized vehicles is registered in the region. The number of road users killed in accidents has increased rapidly in Asia in recent decades. The ESCAP secretariat estimates that, by 2020, about two thirds of the world’s road traffic fatalities might be in the ESCAP region.

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1 Available at: <http://daccessdds.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N03/511/86/PDF/N0351186.pdf?OpenElement>

2 These are conservative estimates; for example, other estimates by the World Health Organization indicate that these numbers might be twice as high.

3 The calculations use the same assumptions and methodology as the dynamics-as-usual scenario published in the 2004 World Bank/WHO report on road traffic injury prevention.
The number of road users killed in accidents per population has been particularly high in emerging economies and newly industrialized economies. Higher fatality rates per population are also linked to higher vehicle densities (i.e., vehicles per kilometre of road), regardless of motorization level, which shows an important link between road safety and infrastructure development in general.

(Based on the methodology and GDP projections from the World Bank/WHO study, the “World report on road traffic injury prevention”)

**Figure. Number of road traffic fatalities in the past and expected under a dynamics-as-usual scenario**

The economic cost of road accidents is estimated to be in the range of 1-3 per cent of GDP.\(^4\) The nature of road safety issues in developing countries and transition economies of the region differs significantly from that in developed countries. In Asia, most of those injured in road accidents are vulnerable road users such as motorcyclists and pedestrians, which is not merely due to a different vehicle mix, but appears to be a systemic issue. Road accidents in Asia disproportionately have an impact on lower income groups, thus contributing to the persistence of poverty. It should also be noted that most road accidents in the region are in cities or their vicinity.

\(^4\) Accident costing is not an exact science. The estimated cost for a country may vary greatly for a number of reasons. The main factors that influence such estimation include volume and quality of accident data, cost elements considered and, perhaps most important of all, the costing methodology used.
Large-scale road development has been considered crucial for the sustained growth of many economies of the region and for closer regional integration in general. As such, many national Governments in the region are now implementing impressive road development programmes. Consequently, road transport has become the dominant mode of national transportation in most of the countries.

The negative impacts of road developments owing to their environmental, social and economic costs have become matters of increasing concern in the region. In response to this concern, ESCAP has been addressing road safety issues since 1992. Its activities include regional studies and reviews, expert group meetings and workshops, publications, regional sharing of best practices and resources (such as media content), the development of the first Asia-Pacific Road Safety Database (APRAD), and capacity-building projects addressing accident reporting, and monitoring, planning and database implementation.

As a regional organization, ESCAP also supported the creation of the Global Road Safety Partnership (GRSP). It promotes a multilateral approach in the area of road safety and has been working in partnership with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), GRSP, International Road Federation, World Road Association and International Road Transport Union, other United Nations regional commissions and the World Health Organization. The view is that the regional and international organizations working together can do more to help the countries in improving road safety by bringing the wealth of information on good practices from countries both within and outside the region and providing support to their capacity-building initiatives.

In consideration of the importance and wide interest in the subject, road safety was chosen as the theme for the current issue of the Bulletin. The first article reviews the preliminary findings and achievements of a regional approach which has recently been applied within an ADB project in the 10 ASEAN member countries. The approach outlined in this article appears to show considerable promise and there is already evidence that the institutional capacity and willingness of the countries concerned to coordinate activities and collaborate in addressing their road safety problems has been significantly enhanced. The project has already resulted in some significant achievements. The full implementation of country-specific action plans and regional initiatives developed under the project will substantially reduce road traffic related accidents in ASEAN member countries over the next five years.

Motorcycle casualties constitute more than two thirds of all accident casualties in Malaysia and as high as 90 per cent in some Asian countries. The
second article presents the impressive success achieved in improving road safety through the mandatory use of motorcycle headlights during the daytime as a low-cost safety policy intervention on conspicuity related accidents involving motorcycles in Malaysia. The evaluation in two study areas found that daytime conspicuity related accidents dropped significantly by about 29 per cent following the intervention while no significant change was noticed for non-conspicuity related cases.

The third article presents the findings of a major rehabilitation initiative on a national highway in Bangladesh with safety improvement as one of the major objectives. Various measures were implemented in three black spot areas and on two stretches of the highway. The findings of the evaluation study suggest that the safety improvement measures were very effective in reducing the frequency as well as the severity of accidents. In economic terms, the estimated benefits from accident savings far outweighed the investment costs of safety improvements.

The fourth article is on slight motorcycle injury costs in Surabaya, Indonesia. It compares the difference in costs of such accidents by two methods. It concludes that the cost estimated by the generally suggested method of gross output for developing countries was as much as five times lower than the predicted cost by the casualties themselves and thus calls for revisiting the costing methodology in future research on the subject.

The fifth and last article is on accident prediction in Kolkata, India. The road safety level in Kolkata is assessed considering four indices: accident severity index, accident fatality rate, accident fatality risk and accident risk. Models for the prediction of future accidents in terms of total accidents and fatality and injury types of accidents have also been developed. These models can be used as tools to measure the effectiveness of future safety improvement measures implemented in the city.

The articles discuss important policy issues related to the improvement of road safety. It is expected that they will generate further debate on the issues that have been discussed and increase awareness of their policy implications and responses. It is also expected that the articles will increase awareness of the benefits of improving road safety in countries of the region and encourage policy makers to take action as well as motivate them to learn from good practices in other countries.

The Bulletin welcomes analytical articles on topics that are currently at the forefront of transport infrastructure development and services in the region and on policy analysis and best practices. Articles should be based on original
research and should have analytical depth. Empirically-based articles should emphasize policy implications emerging from the analysis. Book reviews are also welcome. See the inside back cover for guidelines on contributing articles.

**Manuscripts should be addressed to:**

The Editor  
*Transport and Communications Bulletin for Asia and the Pacific*  
Transport and Tourism Division, ESCAP  
United Nations Building  
Rajadamnern Nok Avenue  
Bangkok 10200, Thailand  
Fax: (662) 288 1000; (662) 280 6042, (662) 288 3050  
E-mail: cable.unescap@un.org