

Editorial statement

The *Transport and Communications Bulletin for Asia and the Pacific* is a peer-reviewed journal published once a year by the Transport Division (TD) 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 Asia-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 many countries of the ESCAP region is a development issue of concern considering its magnitude and gravity and the consequent negative impacts on the economy, public health and the general welfare of the people, particularly those with low incomes. Although some countries in the region have undertaken commendable initiatives and are implementing various road safety improvement programmes, the overall situation as revealed by recent data is far from satisfactory.

Road traffic accidents kill an estimated 1.3 million people and injure 50 million people per year globally, and global road fatalities are forecast to reach 1.9 million by 2020.¹ It is estimated that the number of deaths from road accidents in Asia is about 700,000 per year, accounting for more than half of the world's road fatalities even though Asia accounted for only 43 per cent of the global vehicle population in 2007. These numbers are very high compared to other parts of the world. The ESCAP secretariat estimates that, by 2020, about two thirds of the world's road traffic fatalities might be in the ESCAP region.²

Decision makers of the region have recognized the urgency of the issue. The ESCAP Ministerial Declaration on Improving Road Safety in Asia and the Pacific, which was adopted in Busan, Republic of Korea, in 2006, includes the goal of saving 600,000 lives and preventing a commensurate number of serious injuries on the roads of Asia and the Pacific over the period 2007-2015. In order to assess and evaluate the achievement of the road safety goals contained in the Declaration, ESCAP has developed

¹ Commission for Global Road Safety, *Make Roads Safe: A Decade of Action for Road Safety* (London, Commission for Global Road Safety, 2009).

² The calculations use the same assumptions and methodology as the dynamics-as-usual scenario published in the 2004 World Health Organization report on road safety.

regional road safety goals, targets and indicators in consultation with member countries.

Among others, Commission resolution 63/9 on the implementation of the Busan Declaration on Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific and the Regional Action Programme for Transport Development in Asia and the Pacific, phase I (2007-2011), and General Assembly resolution 62/244 on improving global road safety have expressed a high level of political commitment to improving road safety in Asia. Significant efforts and resources will be needed to translate this political commitment into improved road safety.

As a regional organization, ESCAP promotes a multilateral approach in the area of road safety, and has been working in partnership with the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Global Road Safety Partnership (GRSP), the International Road Federation (IRF), the World Road Association (PIARC), the International Road Transport Union (IRU), the United Nations regional commissions and the World Health Organization (WHO).³ As part of its activities, ESCAP is encouraging the member countries to consider developing a set of national road safety goals and targets and a set of indicators for monitoring achievements.

In consideration of the importance of and wide interest in the subject, once again *road safety* was chosen as the theme for the current issue of the *Bulletin*. The first article looks at the characteristics of road accidents in India. It reviews the road safety initiatives taken in the country, considers their effectiveness in improving road safety and, finally, presents a road safety action plan and intervention measures.

In developing countries, travel risks and traffic exposure grow at a much faster rate than elsewhere, as the growth of registered vehicles always outnumbers population growth and new roads are constructed. The second article describes how the number of road deaths was estimated in Malaysia incorporating travel risk and traffic exposure factors into statistical models, which helped in setting more realistic national road safety targets. This article provides a framework that may be useful for other developing countries to set and evaluate their own road safety targets.

Speeding happens to be a key contributory factor to road traffic crashes in Thailand. Although speed enforcement has been included as an integral part of the speed management policy, its effectiveness has been limited for a number of reasons. The third article identifies some gaps in

³ See also General Assembly resolution 62/244 of 2008 on improving global road safety.

knowledge concerning the speeding problem and the current practices of enforcement. Issues related to more effective speed enforcement and potential alternative speed management strategies are discussed.

The fourth article presents the magnitude and trends of the road safety problems and accident characteristics in Bangladesh. It also reviews some major road safety initiatives to control and reduce road traffic accidents and injuries by state and non-state actors and their effectiveness.

Achieving universal helmet use is a critical step in reducing high fatality rates in many developing countries, where motorcycles represent a very high percentage of personal vehicles. In this respect, Viet Nam's experience in increasing motorcycle helmet use offers a model for countries in the region. The fifth article outlines the model which addressed: (1) market failures that made helmets unaffordable and unappealing; (2) weak legislation and enforcement; and (3) public ignorance of the safety benefits of helmets.

The sixth and last article explores the conceptual understanding of road crashes as a social issue among general road users and the behavioural determinants of motorcycle helmet use among young people. One of the conclusions is that the target population was aware of the benefits of wearing helmets, but their behavioural responses were linked to the perceived level of risks and were also influenced by the actions of others.

The articles discuss important policy issues related to 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 policymakers to take action, as well as motivating them to learn from good practices in other countries.

The *Bulletin* welcomes analytical articles on topics that are currently at the forefront of transport development 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.

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