Council of Ministers

ROAD TRANSPORT
ROAD SAFETY

RECENT TRENDS IN ROAD ACCIDENTS AND POLICY ISSUES

This document drafted by the Secretariat is submitted for discussion under item 4 "Road Transport" of the draft agenda of the Bucharest session of the Council of Ministers.

Ministers are asked to:
- comment on the present situation in road safety and on new initiatives,
- confirm their support for strengthening ECMT work in this field and their willingness to set up concrete targets, and
- agree to contribute to an exchange of best practices and review openly their experiences and lessons learned.
RECENT TRENDS IN ROAD ACCIDENTS AND POLICY ISSUES

Trends

Road accidents are the most serious negative consequence of transport in ECMT member Countries. About 100 000 people are killed and over 2 million injured each year in Europe. Road accidents are a serious public health problem, the greatest killer of young men, and impose enormous economic costs on society.

There have been steady reductions in the number of deaths and serious injuries across Western European countries in recent years (see Figure 1). Following a very steep increase in the early 1990s in the Central and Eastern Europe Countries (see Figure 2) many countries have significantly reduced the toll of deaths and serious injuries in recent years. But the total number of accidents remains more or less constant showing that the traffic system is not becoming significantly safer.

There is wide variation in accident rates within ECMT member and Associate countries (see Figures 3 and 4). Public health risk (defined as deaths per million population) varies by a factor of 4 from the best to the worst. Exposure (deaths per million vehicles) by even more. It is an easy calculation to see that if all countries had the performance of the best, then more than 50 000 fewer lives would be lost annually, that is we would more than halve the death toll on European roads.
Figure 3

Total number of deaths per million population
2000 (estimated data)

Source: ECMT
Figure 4

Total number of deaths per million road motor vehicles
2000 (estimated data)

Source: ECMT
Policy issues

There is intensive activity in many ECMT countries to combat road accidents. There are new broader approaches and strategies, innovative concepts, specific initiatives and implementation experience at national level. These include Sweden’s zero vision concept, the very demanding numerical targets set in other Countries, new efforts to communicate and educate road users, innovative approaches by transport firms to improve safety among employees, gradual licensing programmes and more targeted and effective enforcement programmes. These are showing concrete results and are providing ideas for ways forward in other countries.

ECMT has over many years contributed to the effort to reduce accidents by publishing comparative data, by sharing good practice between governments and by agreeing forward looking recommendations that can serve as a good basis for progress in all countries. The summary of relevant ECMT recommendations is a kind of check list [CEMT/CM(2002)16], which if properly implemented, would bring large reductions in accidents. The addition to this checklist of the recommendations on rural roads covers an important and often neglected area.

Given the size of the problem, and the addition to ECMT’s membership in the last decade of many new countries at different stages of development, it was thought useful to conduct an in-depth review of past and present ECMT work on road safety and examine how we might contribute more effectively to efforts to reduce the scale of this problem. ECMT commissioned Professor Kare Rumar of Sweden, to do this and his analysis is contained in paper [CEMT/CM(2002)14]. This paper summarises many years of experience in dealing with road safety at national and international level and is an analysis, not just of ECMT’s work, but also of national successes and failures. The paper contains lessons and ideas for all ECMT members as well as for the organisation itself.

As regards the experience of countries that have been most successful in reducing the number of crashes, the main factors seem to include:

- A political commitment, across all Ministries concerned, to deal with road accidents;
- A broad strategy, involving education, engineering and enforcement to deal with accidents;
- A clear vision and numerical targets for reductions in the different categories of accidents;
- A concrete plan with specific measures for implementation and enforcement;
- Institutional co-ordination within and between different levels of government and with private actors;
- Careful and critical evaluation of measures and their effectiveness.

Many Countries still have much to do on several of these topics.

It is also clear that the main responsibility to reduce accidents lies within each country. ECMT’s possibilities to influence and accelerate implementation are limited. But it can help to support national efforts in the following ways:

- Working to improve data and its comparability. Statistics, at international level, are limited and there are virtually none on factors of risk.

- Following up with countries on implementing of recommendations. There are a number of ways to do this and the ECMT Working Group on Road Safety will look at them in more detail. One is the detailed peer review and it is an encouraging sign that the Baltic States (which have comparatively poor road safety records) have invited ECMT to do such reviews. The review of
Lithuania is beginning in the near future. Another possibility, less resource intensive, is a form of self-review recently used in the work on urban transport.

- **By developing a vision.** It is clear that countries with targets for fatality reduction have done generally better than those without. So it would be beneficial if all countries had specific targets. And it might be useful if there was a vision for the ECMT as a whole. This could serve as a benchmark for countries, for example, to halve the number of fatalities over 10 years. There could also be more specific targets, for example, to get within five years those 13 countries with rates of over 500 deaths per million vehicles below that figure or within ten years the 27 countries with rates of over 100 deaths per million population down below that figure (see figures 3 and 4 above). Concepts (like Sweden’s vision zero) encourage new ways of thinking about road safety -- including questions like why do we accept different standards of safety on the roads than in other modes -- that can provide inspiration to all countries.

- **By helping countries develop strategies and set priorities.** ECMT has many detailed recommendations but countries perhaps need more help on cost-effective measures, on priorities and on institutional arrangements. The effective spread of good practice and lessons learned in these areas could be strengthened.

- **By disseminating a checklist of measures.** Document CEMT/CM(2002)16, which summarises ECMT’s key resolutions is the basis for such a check list. An important addition to that check list concerns the report and draft recommendations on rural roads [CEMT/CM(2002)11 and 17]. This has been a neglected topic and one which is important as a very high proportion of fatalities occur there.

- **By giving more resources to the issue internally and by strengthening the work of the Road Safety Working group.** All Countries are invited to participate. While some Countries say that it is not a Ministry of Transport responsibility, experience shows that transport Ministers often take the political responsibility for accidents and they, therefore, need to be involved. ECMT needs to continue the high level of its output but to strengthen it with a sharper edge of analysis and review.

- **By implicating other actors, the private sector, regional and local authorities as well as the other international bodies and NGO’s in the work.**

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**Ministers are asked:**

- To note the situation in relation to road accidents in ECMT Member and Associate countries;
- To comment on new initiatives or particularly effective measures or experiences;
- To confirm their support for strengthening ECMT work on road safety and their willingness to set up concrete targets;
- To agree to contribute, as far as possible, expertise and information on developments in their countries;
- To agree to review openly their experiences and lessons learned.