

India's Road Safety Strategy

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India's Road Safety Strategy: From Policy to Pavement

Context:

India is currently experiencing a **major mobility transformation**, driven by **rapid urbanisation** and **economic growth**. However, this transformation has come with a steep cost—a **crisis in road safety**. With one of the **largest road networks in the world**, India recorded **1.68 lakh road accident deaths in 2022**, which translates to **approximately 12.2 deaths per 1 lakh population**. In contrast, **Japan records 2.57** and the **UK 2.61 per 1 lakh population**.

This stark reality calls for a **shift in urban mobility planning**—where **safety and inclusivity** are prioritised over mere speed and convenience.

Economic and Developmental Impact of Road Accidents

- **Road crashes cost India nearly 3% of its GDP every year**, resulting in massive economic losses.
- These crashes **undermine national development**, cause **loss of productive human capital**, increase the **burden on public health infrastructure**, and disrupt families and communities.
- The issue is not just of safety but also of **economic productivity and human development**.

Right to Safe Travel: A Constitutional Perspective

- Under **Article 21 of the Indian Constitution**, the **Right to Life** includes the **right to safe road travel**.
- This confers a **moral and legal obligation** on the **State and society** to protect citizens from avoidable road hazards.

- Road safety, thus, becomes a **human right** and a **public good**, not just a matter of regulation.
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Urbanisation and the Need for People-Centric Streets

- By **2047, 50% of India's population** is expected to live in **urban areas**.
 - This shift will be accompanied by **increased vehicle ownership** and **urban congestion**.
 - Streets must be redesigned to protect **vulnerable road users: pedestrians, cyclists, children, elderly, and public transport commuters**.
 - Urban planning must be **people-centric**, not vehicle-centric.
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The Safe System Approach: A Human-Centric Design Philosophy

- This approach acknowledges that **human error is inevitable**.
- The system must be built to **reduce the severity of crashes**, not merely enforce compliance.

Key principles include:

- **Pedestrian-first** design.
- Infrastructure interventions like:
 - **Wider footpaths**
 - **Dedicated cycle tracks**
 - **Well-marked zebra crossings**
 - **Refuge islands**

- **Traffic calming measures** like **raised intersections** and **reduced speed limits**
 - A **paradigm shift** is needed—from **blaming road users** to **designing forgiving road environments**.
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Government Initiatives and Policy Interventions by MoRTH

The **Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH)** has launched several targeted safety interventions:

- **Rectification of over 5,000 black spots** across national highways.
 - **Mandatory road safety audits** on all new highway projects.
 - Enforcement of **vehicle safety standards**, including **airbags** and **ABS (Anti-lock Braking Systems)**.
 - Deployment of **speed cameras** and **CCTV surveillance** for better enforcement.
 - Announcement of **driving training centres** and **vehicle fitness centres** in every district by **Union Minister Nitin Gadkari**.
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Innovative Funding: CSR for Road Safety

A bold proposal recommends that **automobile companies allocate 100% of their CSR funds for the next 20-25 years** toward road safety initiatives.

Target areas:

- **Black spot removal**
- **Public awareness campaigns**
- **Emergency trauma care facilities**
- **Road safety research and development**

- **Driver training and certification**

This is aligned with **Vision Zero**, which targets:

- **50% reduction in road deaths by 2030**
 - **Zero fatalities by 2050**
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The Four Es of Road Safety: A Comprehensive Framework

A successful road safety strategy must include all four dimensions:

1. **Engineering** - Design of safe and user-friendly road infrastructure.
 2. **Enforcement** - Both technological and on-ground law enforcement.
 3. **Education** - Road safety awareness and behavioural change.
 4. **Emergency Care** - Robust trauma and post-crash response systems.
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Strategic Investment: Road Safety as a High-Yield Development Investment

- According to the **World Bank (2020)**, India needs to invest an **additional \$109 billion over the next decade** to reduce road crash deaths by **50%**.
 - The **iRAP report (Four States)** shows that for **every ₹1 spent on road safety**, India gains **₹4 in economic and social benefits** (lives saved, injuries avoided, productivity preserved).
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Towards Inclusive and Sustainable Urban Mobility

Urban roads must be re-envisioned as **shared public spaces**, not just transport corridors.

Core principles:

- **Safety over speed**

- **Equity over convenience**
- **Sustainability over short-term efficiency**

Priority must be given to:

- **Children**
- **Pedestrians**
- **Cyclists**
- **Public transport users**

This shift reflects a deeper value change—**mobility as a human right and a developmental necessity**.

Conclusion:

Road safety is integral to achieving **Viksit Bharat by 2047**. It demands:

- **Data-driven policymaking**
- **Institutional accountability**
- A **societal mindset shift** from speed and convenience to **safety and inclusivity**

Road safety is not a luxury—it is a foundational requirement for sustainable, equitable, and human-centred development.