

Plenary 1
Paul Clark MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Transport
First Global Ministerial Conference on Road Safety

Delighted and honoured to address this important conference.

Congratulate the Russian Federation for hosting this event and for drawing international attention to a modern and often understated scourge of our times – the loss, pain and suffering from the rising toll of road traffic accidents.

In attending this conference, I am pleased to be representing both the UK's Department of Transport and the Department for International Development. That both these departments are represented here demonstrates the importance the UK attaches to the issues.

Firstly, what has Road Safety got to do with international development?

A reminder of the raw statistics will serve to tell us.

- The casualties are on a global pandemic scale – 1.3 million killed and 50 million injured every year. The number of deaths exceed those from malaria, which are currently about 1 million a year.
- On current trends, road crash death and injury figures may double by 2020, with increased traffic and vehicle use in developing countries
- Children are a significant part of the casualty figures – 260,000 are killed and 1 million left with a disabling injury each year
- 93% of child road deaths occur in low and middle income countries, two-thirds in South East Asia and Western Pacific
- Children aged 15 to 19 are at the greatest risk of road traffic injury
- More than 85% of those killed and injured are from low and middle income countries

Economic growth and rapid urbanisation in developing countries is invariably accompanied by the expansion of road networks and increased road traffic. Unless more attention is given to the human impacts, these horrific figures will continue to rise.

In many of the richest countries, road accident figures are falling, driven down by determined action on safety and enforcement of traffic laws. The gap between rich and poor countries is widening.

As reported by the World Health Organisation, the greatest burden of road deaths and injuries is carried by low income countries. For poor families, this can mean a catastrophic loss of income if the main wage earner is killed or permanently disabled. And of course the loss of a child leaves an indelible mark on any family.

The UK has a long history of supporting international road safety. We funded early research and in 1999 became a founding member of the Global Road Safety Partnership. We now support this through the Global Transport Knowledge Partnership, giving access to developing countries comprehensive road safety information. We recognise that road safety as one of the main health burdens amongst the range of non-communicable diseases.

There is a real cost to national economies from high rates of road accidents. Transport and trade is disrupted, vehicles and goods are lost and young drivers killed and injured, often when in the most productive age range. The global economic cost is staggeringly high – somewhere between US\$60 – US\$100 Billion (dollars).

Reducing the frequency and severity of accidents should be a high priority for all countries, especially in developing countries. The international community has a responsibility for helping countries tackle the problem in ways that are affordable and have the greatest results.

There is a bewildering array of causes, many of which relate to human behaviour - driving too fast, not wearing seat belts or crash helmets and driving after drinking or taking drugs. We can add to these unsafe or defective vehicles, poor road designs, inadequate signage and road markings and a lack of footpaths, lighting, barriers and crossings. Roads accommodating mixed traffic including light and heavy vehicles, motorcycles, bicycles, animals and pedestrians without segregation present particularly high risks, especially combined with human behaviour factors and the non-enforcement of traffic laws.

With such a list, where do we start? An understanding of local conditions and a long term political commitment to action will be a good start. There is no quick fix or single solution – each country has its own particular circumstances and lessons to share with others.

That's why I welcome a 10 year international commitment to this task - a Decade of Action to save 5 million lives.

DFID Minister of State Gareth Thomas and I recently discussed the issues with a group of experts in London. We concluded that five key areas are in need of the greatest attention;

1. Lack of capacity within international development organisations – there are few experts
2. Inadequate road designs that take account of safety
3. Unsafe vehicles – better technologies & higher standards are needed
4. The behaviour of road users, including on attitudes to drink-driving, wearing helmets and seatbelts
5. The response to accidents, including emergency services and care for casualties

My department has proposed an ambitious United Kingdom vision to have the safest roads in the world. At the moment, despite having reduced the number of road deaths and serious injuries significantly by 40% over the last decade, we still have 7 deaths a day on the roads – and this is not acceptable.

We are going to focus attention on three Es (Education, Engineering and Enforcement) – in an integrated and joined-up way:

Education – educating road users in how to use the roads more safely. This will include road safety education in schools, driver and rider training and testing and communication and marketing to encourage behaviour change. We will take measures to lead and support road safety as a profession.

Engineering - development of safer vehicles & building the best possible roads. But it is more than that. It includes measures such as introducing 20 mph zones (or other speed limit changes), providing more pedestrian crossings, improvements in junctions, motorcycle-friendly crash barriers, and repairing potholes promptly.

Enforcement – of the legislative and regulatory framework. This will include legislation across the field of road safety (road traffic laws, insurance and driver licensing requirements and vehicle standards) as well as police enforcement of legislation and regulations. This will include vehicle licensing tests, driver training and testing.

The UK is committed to playing an effective part in addressing these difficult challenges. I am therefore delighted to announce to you today a new pledge of £1.5 million over 3 years in International Development grant money for promotion of Global Road Safety.

We will become a core sponsor of the World Bank managed Global Road Safety Facility, through which most of this finance will be channelled. Through this commitment alongside other international donors, I am sure we can do much to reduce the toll of deaths and injuries in low and middle income countries in the coming years.

In the meantime, I look forward to learning from this conference more of the challenges and some of the solutions. By working together, much can be achieved.

Thank you.

(This speech represented existing departmental policy but the words may not have been the same as those used by the Minister.)